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Cross-national comparison on family satisfaction: Super-specialization versus super-equality

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Abstract

Research has documented that women still assume the main burden of domestic tasks and childcare within the household, despite the recent changes towards a greater equality. This division of labor has clear implications in satisfaction with family life. However, little research has combined other domestic responsibilities, such as decision making and care of dependent relatives with housework to study satisfaction, from a comparative perspective. In this article, data from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) – 2012 are used to explore the effects of a proposed index on balance in the couple, for women and men separately, through different multilevel models. The results suggest that the empowerment that could be assumed from a leading role in decision making does not improve satisfaction and that super-equality is the option yielding the highest levels of satisfaction, regardless their hours of paid-work. Differences by countries persist after controlling for individual and contextual variables, with the Latin American countries being those with the most satisfied populations.

Key words

Decision making, housework, family relations, work-family balance, satisfaction.

1. Introduction

The division of labor in the household has changed in the last decades towards a greater equality. Research has documented that after controlling for partners' time availability, gender role ideology, relative resources, as well as institutional and contextual cultural differences, the higher burden still persists for females. The time spouses spend on household duties, including care of relatives, affects their degrees of satisfaction or conflict with their marital and family lives. In such a way, the more unfair the division, the weaker the level of happiness is, especially for women (Coltrane 2000; Greenstein 2009; Mederer 1993; Meil Landwerlin 2005; Oshio et al. 2013; Sutor 1991; Yogev and

Brett 1985). In general, for both partners, doing more at home penalizes the personal satisfaction with marital or family life (Barstad 2014).

Despite this general consensus, there are still some aspects on the topic which require further research. Some authors have noted the scarcity of works that study specifically the male population (Kornrich and Eger 2016), for whom explanatory factors may differ in intensity and direction from the ones literature has normally attributed to women. For instance, the presence of children was found to have different effect on mother's and father's satisfaction with family life (Vanassche et al. 2013), also the fact of working full-time or not (Kornrich and Eger 2016) or the extent of involvement in domestic tasks (Blom et al. 2017; Crompton et al. 2005; Forste and Fox 2012; Qian et al. 2016). Barstad (2014) found that breakup plans were more likely among women whose partners did little or no routine housework, but in the same situation men were less prone to think about breaking up.

Mixed evidence on the question can be also explained in terms of the divergences in the socio-institutional contexts (Yodanis, 2010). The majority of existing studies has been carried out in the United States (Kornrich and Eger 2016; Oshio et al. 2013; Strandh and Nordenmark 2006), while the limited amount of works for other countries has not always reached consensus on certain underlying explanations, such as the link between marital equity and marital quality. This lack of consensus could be derived from variations at the country level (Wilcox and Nock 2006). Social policies can facilitate reconciliation in work-household demands (García-Faroldi et al. 2017) and, consequently, reduce conflict and increase satisfaction with family life, but also cultural values and normative attitudes at a macro scale may condition the quality of family relations, like the time spent with the partner or the children (García-Román et al. 2017), and personal well-being in different dimensions (Greenstein 2009; Strandh and Nordenmark 2006).

According to the levels of satisfaction by country, findings are normally consistent. Co-habiting or married couples from the Eastern European countries, with high rates of female labor participation but also high inequality within the relationship, reported lower level of family satisfaction than people from other countries, particularly for women (Forste and Fox 2012; Kornrich and Eger 2016). In Japan and South Korea, men were happier than women with their marital lives (Oshio et al. 2013). However, the importance a fair division of domestic labor has for a successful marriage was found to be considerably lower for Japanese population than for the rest of a wide set of countries, whereas for Chilean and Polish populations, the fair division was of much more relevance (Yodanis,

2010). For the British case, Blom et al. (2017) showed that women's satisfaction with the partner relationship was less affected by the division of household labor than men's, whilst Qian and Sayer (2016), in a study about Urban China, Korea, Japan and Taiwan proved that the share of housework was negatively associated with marital satisfaction among Japanese and Korean men, as well as among Taiwanese and Korean women.

To date, research has focused mainly on marital satisfaction, and less on the more general family satisfaction (Forste and Fox 2012). Clearly, these aspects overlap, as satisfaction with family life has been proven to work as a predictor of the individual general well-being (Forste and Fox 2012; Requena 1994). Using a cross-national approach, this article will explore whether super-specialization or super-equality (measured through the combination of two indexes on decision making and division of household labor) leads to higher levels of family satisfaction, and will also focus on the rarely studied factor of work-family conflict.

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Decision Making on Family Satisfaction

How decision making in the household affects the quality of the family life, as compared to the effects of the division of household labor, has received little attention so far. Some studies have stated that mental work associated to the responsibility of deciding over the family income, bringing up the children or planning the spare time constitutes an additional load to physical housework for females (Meier et al. 2006). Nevertheless, women's leading role in decision making also infers power to them (Bartley, Blanton and Gilliard, 2005; Mederer 1993; Van Willigen and Drentea 2001) and, even if studied for just a few of very specific items, Williams and Chen (2014) proved that both men and women perceived household power as desirable and positive, so this control may presumably have an impact on their satisfaction with family life. Thus, "household management is diffused" in its effects and is assumed to provide gains when sought for, in the cases where the household does not face financial problems (Treas and Tai 2012b: 1111). Forste and Fox (2012) found that joint decision making contributed positively to satisfaction with family life, although they did not distinguish between women's or men's main role in decision making when this was not shared. When assessing the influence over perceived social support, as another approach to well-being, Van Willigen and Drentea (2001), agreed with the positive effect of the equitable relationships with regards to housework and decision making, although they did not find significant differences by sex. Ruppanner (2010, 2012), also controlled for the partners' equilibrium on decision making when studying conflict about how to divide the

housework and arrived at similar results. For women, joint decision making had the most positive effect on marital relationship, followed by the situation in which she was the one who normally decided. For men, joint decision making was again the option yielding the lowest probability of marital conflict but, contrary to the findings for women, the likelihood of housework conflict increased if he was the one who usually made the decisions (Ruppanner 2012).

Basing research on a wide range of items on specific tasks, Meier et al. (2006) distinguished between household management and childcare management and proved that men were more satisfied the less they were involved in the management of tasks related to child care. However, none of those types of management had a significant effect on women's marital satisfaction.

2.2. Equity versus specialization

There are two contrasting views on how gender roles operate in the sharing of domestic tasks and paid-work and how this division of total work affects the satisfaction of both marital and family lives. Specialization theory, derived from the utilitarian model, presumes that the combination male-breadwinner and female-homemaking leads to an optimization of resources and an increase in productivity and, consequently, in the gains of the relationship (Becker 1981). Similarly, the gender model of marriage proposes that women and men's socialization in gender-typical pattern of behaviors explains the trend to happier marriages among spouses in highly specialized couples (Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Specialization and equity are normally measured from time involvement in household labor and paid-work. Women's lesser involvement and man's greater involvement in housework is interpreted as a decrease in specialization (Hook 2010).

Some of the divergences in the results so far could be explained by the different methodological approaches in the make up between work in and outside the home and how this is measured (Wilcox and Nock 2006). In some instances, equity was valued in terms of total time invested by each member of the couple and specialization refers to performing a certain type of tasks. In fact, Blom et al. (2017) argued that specialization and equity were not opposing concepts. As a result, the same amount of working hours by both spouses would mean perfect equity, while if one spouse had all paid work and the other only housework, this would be complete specialization.

Blom et al. (2017) did not find direct effects of specialization and equity but, when they made the variable interact with the respondent's gender ideology, stronger specialization reduced satisfaction if the man's gender ideology was more egalitarian. Wilcox and Nock (2006) also emphasized that, if personal values and attitudes align with the actual situation, marital quality increases (particularly in the case of traditional marriages).

In fact, happiness is a question not only of division of labor, but also of the normative and institutional support traditional marriages receive, the most obvious of which are the religious organizations. In this sense, the institutional model of marriage predicts that women are more satisfied in their marriages if they are strongly devoted to its institution (Wilcox and Nock 2006), whilst the most individualistic or "soul-mate" marriages, characterized by their commitment to love and self-development, are associated to lower levels of marital happiness (Amato 2012). The companionate model, egalitarian in terms of domestic labor, was distinguished for their higher levels of happiness if it was reinforced by the normative support from social networks and religious beliefs (Wilcox and Dew 2010, Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Equity theory suggests that individuals participating in inequitable relationships will suffer from increased conflict. If social exchange theory assumes that over-benefited individuals will be satisfied due to the maximization of their rewards in terms of marital satisfaction, this relation does not necessarily hold (Suitor 1991; Yogeve and Brett 1985). The "zero-sum game" hypothesis is, thus, contradicted in previous works (Barstad 2014).

Specialization or equity alternatives do not affect women and men similarly and the direction of their influence depended on the single/dual earner model of couples (Yogeve and Brett 1985), with a stronger influence on women (Blom et al. 2017).

However, little research has tried to combine the various elements that modulate the power balance of both members of the couple within the household. In terms of these balancing roles, not only the load of physical work at home, but also the responsibilities assumed in managing the family intervene to shape relationships and explain levels of satisfaction about family life. Super-specialization, defined in terms of assuming both the housework and the decision making, obviously implies more work, but it also means that the person who decides is also empowered within the partnership.

These previous arguments about power related to decision making and equity versus specialization with regards to housework sustain our first hypothesis and subhypothesis:

H1: The less powerful women and men are in the relationships, the more unsatisfied they feel with family life. We hypothesize this is the situation when one assumes the burden of domestic work and care of relatives, but have little relevance in household decision making. After controlling for hours of paid-work, the situations of *super-specialization* (one being responsible for housework and decision making with no paid work and the other doing all paid-work) and *super-equality* (if both in paid work) would lead to more family satisfaction.

H1.1. The number of hours of paid work modifies the effect of the different categories of the index on couple balance (housework together with decision making). The heavier the double burden faced by the person (paid and non-paid work), the more an individual's dissatisfaction with family life. As the number of paid-working time increases, the satisfaction of the people in the more specialized options will decrease much faster than the satisfaction of the people in the more egalitarian options.

For different socio-institutional contexts, some authors found evidence that confirms that public policies and cultural norms can foster or not the mothers' participation in the labor market, the work-family conflict and the fathers' involvement in raising children and the time spent with them (García-Román et al. 2017; Notten et al. 2017). This could be the case, for instance, in some Asian countries. Quian et al. (2016) proved that gendered division of labor was not significantly related to marital satisfaction for Japanese or Chinese women (as substantiated in Oshio et al. 2013 for Japan or Korea).

2.3. Distributive Justice Theory

People evaluate their circumstances according to the logic of distributive justice. Perception of fairness, or the degree of satisfaction with each personal situation, can be modeled through three main dimensions: outcomes (what actually happens), comparison (how one's own situation is perceived as compared with others') and justifications or sense of entitlement (whether the current personal situation is accepted by means of diverse considerations) (Major 1987; Thompson 1991). This perspective has been commonly used to explain perception of fairness using the division of labor at home as the main explanatory indicator (Greenstein 2009, Jansen et al. 2016). If people do not get what it is desired or expected (outcomes), have a high standard for comparison or find no acceptable

justifications for not obtaining the expected outcome, they will suffer from a sense of unfairness (Major 1987; Thompson 1991) that will contribute to a lower level of well-being. Some coherence between what is perceived as acceptable and what is actually experienced must exist (García-Faroldi 2007; for an application of this combination between *emic*, person's beliefs, *etic*, his/her conduct on happiness, see Requena 2017). From this perspective, outcomes have been measured normally as the real division of domestic tasks (Blom et al 2017), but they could also be extended to capture the idea of how work-family conflict is internalized by the members of the couple and how it affects happiness. Notten et al. (2017) pointed out that high-educated women were particularly prone to suffer work-family conflict. This view is considered in the second hypothesis:

H2. Despite the expected effect of hours of paid-work in combination with the division of labor at home, the strain associated to both paid and family work ("work-family conflict") will have a stronger effect than net time devoted to work outside the domestic sphere. It is quality of work in and outside the home place that has a larger impact on the degree of satisfaction with family life.

The comparative references can be framed in different scales. Some authors indicated that women did not tend to compare themselves to their partners, but rather to other women (like their mothers or friends), whereas men basically compared their situation to that of other men (Blom et al. 2017; Öun 2013). However, Greenstein (2009) pointed out that same sex comparisons prevail among traditional women, whilst different sex comparisons are more common among the egalitarian ones. Other authors emphasized that comparison referents are established at a national level, a line of thought related to the relative deprivation theory (Greenstein 2009). Perales et al. (2015), for instance, used relative deprivation theory to explain contextual effects over perception of fairness in the division of housework and also in family satisfaction. The way people assess their own situations, the extent to which they consider themselves to be better or worse off, is conditioned upon a general context that may come from the peer group, from the closer social network or even from a broader framework such as the country. Consequently, same individual levels of gender ideology or involvement in family care and household labor, yield varying degrees of contentment depending on the yardstick used to compare with others (Greenstein 2009).

Satisfaction with family life is, thus, partially explained by what it is typical for the country (Kornrich and Eger 2016; Mencarini and Sironi 2012). In his cross-national study, Greenstein (2009) postulated that perceived fairness was more strongly associated with family satisfaction in countries where gender ideology was more egalitarian.

Kornrich and Eger's findings (2016) support the relative deprivation perspective in that women were observed to be less satisfied when perceiving unfairness, while men were not, in the most egalitarian countries.

Regarding justifications, females have been traditionally socialized to accept an unfair division of housework, to assume their prominent role in bringing up the children and to admit their fewer opportunities within the labor market, all of which makes them less likely to judge inequality as unfairness (Major 1987; Thompson 1991). Not only objective, but subjective and symbolic factors underlie perceptions and it can be assumed that the same factors can also explain satisfaction. Consequently, individuals with a more traditional gender role ideology will be more prone to accept unequal divisions of work between partners in and outside the home (Ruppanner 2010). In addition, time availability has been also considered as a main acceptable reason for the unequal share of housework in the couple (Thompson 1991). The longer the number of hours of paid-work outside home, the shorter the time devoted to domestic tasks, with wives being more responsive to this measure than husbands (Bianchi et al. 2000; Poortman and Van der Lippe 2009). Furthermore, and due to the biased effect of time availability according to sex on domestic labor allocation, woman's perception that she is unfairly burdened increases with her time in market labor (Jansen et al. 2016; Öun 2013).

Thus, our third hypothesis reads: H3: It is expected that, in line with the relative deprivation theory in the framework of the distributive justice theory, satisfaction for partners in the most specialized situations will be lower in countries with higher level of gender equality and higher female labor participation rates. In these countries, the more egalitarian combinations will be more clearly the ones leading to greater family life satisfaction.

3. Method

3.1. Data source

The data for the analysis at the individual level come from the International Social Survey Programme (ISSP) - 2012. That edition focused on family and included questions about household management, division of housework and care of relatives as well as the perception of fairness ("Family and Changing Gender Roles IV"). Data was gathered for 41 countries, but Turkey, China and Taiwan were excluded in this research. China did not collect the precise number of hours of housework or family care while Taiwan was not considered because of the lack of information for the second-level variables. Turkey was omitted because it did not provide information on household

and personal income and on presence of children at home. Although it was noted in previous research that Mexico showed an outlier behavior (Reyes Brito 2018), it was kept in the data set since models did not change substantially as they were run with or without it. The pattern for the rest of the Latin American countries was also checked, again with no relevant variations in the results. In fact, past works with the ISSP-2012 included these countries as well (de Hoon 2017; Jansen et al. 2016; Reyes Brito 2018). The sample was limited to men and women living in partnership (heterosexual couples), who were aged from 18 to 65 (standard entry into legal adulthood and retirement age in most of the considered countries) and who had children. Information on living in steady partnership was not collected for Denmark and Great Britain, so for these countries cases that did not have a missing value in the index for the division on domestic tasks were considered. Initial sample sizes ranged from $n=399$ in Venezuela to $n=1368$ in Spain. Probability weights were applied to the descriptive analysis but, since they refer to level-1 units, they were not considered for the multilevel models.

3.2. Measures

Dependent variable. The dependent variable is self-reported satisfaction with family life. Responses ranged from 1 (*completely dissatisfied*) to 7 (*completely satisfied*), although the two lowest categories were combined due to the very few respondents that reported being very dissatisfied with their family life (as in Qian and Sayer 2016).

Although theoretically ordinal, the variable was treated as a continuous measure. The minimum number of categories has been often set at five to assure the robustness of parametric statistics (Johnson and Creech, 1983; Norman, 2010). Similar approach was used, among others, by Greenstein (2009), Forste and Fox (2012) and Kornrich and Eger (2016), with the data from the ISSP 2002.

Explanatory variables at the individual level. The main explanatory variable, an index on balance in the couple, was created as follows. Each respondent was asked to rate the amount of time spent weekly on housework and on relatives' care and then assess the amount of time that their partners spent on these two items. First, from these items, the relative difference of total hours between women and man was computed. Second, an index on decision making, ranging from score -6 (the woman always decides) and score +6 (the man always decides), was created from the three items on household management, and weighted according to the relative relevance each facet was given to value distribution of power in the relationship. First, "who usually makes the decisions about how to bring up the children", weighted as: mostly the woman (-3), mostly the man (+3), sometimes me/sometimes my partner,

we decide together and someone else (0). Next, “how the respondent and his/her spouse/partner organize the income that one or both receive”, weighted as: the woman manages all the money and give the man his share (-2), the man manages all the money and give the woman her share (+2) and, they pool all the money and each take out what they need/they pool some of the money and keep the rest separate/they keep their money separate (0). And finally, “who has the final say when making decisions about shared weekend activities”, weighted as: mostly the woman (-1), mostly the man (+1), sometimes me/sometimes my partner, we decide together and someone else (0).

Both, physical and mental work, were combined in the final balance index for each couple, which was categorized as: 1 “she does more housework and makes more decisions” (27.2%), 2 “she does more housework and he makes more decisions” (she is “underadvantaged” and he is the “overadvantaged”, in terms of Van Willigen and Drentea 2001) (10.4%), 3 “she does more housework and both make the decisions / both do the housework and he makes more decisions” (37.1%), 4 “egalitarian couple” (12.4%), 5 “he does more housework and both make the decisions / both do the housework and she makes more decisions” (8.7%), 6 “he does more housework and she makes more decisions” (he is “underadvantaged”, she is the “overadvantaged”) (2.5%), 7 “he does more housework and makes more decisions” (1.7%) (see Table I in the Appendix for further details about the variable construction).

Despite the weaknesses associated to stylized questionnaires as compared to time use diaries (Kan and Pudney 2008), we argue that the fact that the relative number of hours devoted to housework and caring has been taken into account instead of the raw number of hours, together with the creation of intervals in order to merge this variable with the one on the decision making, might help attenuate the systematic biases these authors detected for stylized estimates. Furthermore, robustness was checked for the indexes that resulted from different categorizations of the continuous variable, different weightings for the items on decision making and different combinations of both partial indexes, and several models were run accordingly (outputs are available upon request). Results did not differ substantially from the ones shown here.

The presence of children of different ages seemed to influence family satisfaction, as well as the perception of parenthood (Blom et al. 2017; Kornrich and Eger 2016; Vanassche et al. 2013). For this reason, a variable on the number of children up to school age -1 was included, together with another regarding the number of children between school age and 17. Regarding the appreciation of parenthood, two different indicators were included from a series of items with responses ranging from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). After studying the

correlation among all items, it was decided to keep the item “Watching children grow up is life’s greatest joy” as a single variable and compute a composite indicator as the mean of the following items: “having children interferes too much with the freedom of parents”, “children are a financial burden on their parents” and “having children restricts the employment and career chances of one or both parents”, with the same scale. Cronbach’s alpha is acceptably high: 0.68. The Spanish questionnaire only designed four answer categories (‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘disagree’, and ‘strongly disagree’), so the extra category ‘can’t choose’ was recoded into ‘neither agree nor disagree’, as in Jansen et al. (2016).

The questionnaire included a battery of questions about work-family conflict, in consequence, a composite indicator was calculated as the average of the scores from all of them, resulting in a scale of 1 (*never*) and 4 (*several times a week*). The items were: “I have come home from work too tired to do the chores which need to be done”, “it has been difficult for me to fulfill my family responsibilities because of the amount of time I spend on my job”, “I have arrived at work too tired to function well because of the household work I had done” and “I have found it difficult to concentrate at work because of my family responsibilities”. The relations between these items and the dependent variable were quite linear and all pointed in the same direction (Cronbach’s alpha=.77). Response “never” was assigned to all the people who did not have a job.

For gender ideology, a scale was built summing up the items “a pre-school child is likely to suffer if his/her mother works”, “family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job”, “a job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children”, “being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay”, and “a man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family” (Jansen et al. 2016). Cronbach’s alpha was 0.74.

The information provided by the ISSP-2012 about household income was not harmonized, and countries recorded income level in various ways, so a new variable for the deciles was created. Consequently, scores for the new variable run from 1 to 10. In case it was possible, personal income decile was used to input missing values in household income decile. Household income was preferred to personal income for two reasons: 1) it is satisfaction with family life what was being analysed, so it seemed more coherent to use this measure instead of the one on personal income; 2) with this decision, problems related to people who did not have a paid-job (or other income sources) and had no personal income were avoided.

The linearity of subjective social class and subjective health (from 1 (*poor*) to 5 (*excellent*)) was tested before their inclusion as continuous variables in the models. Self-assessment of good health state was previously proven to have a significant positive effect on marital satisfaction (Barstad 2014; Mencarini and Sironi 2012; Oshio et al. 2013).

In order to test equity versus specialization theories, together with the index on couple balance explained above, the hours of both partners' paid work were added to the equations, categorized in four groups: 0 (*no paid work*), 1-20 hours of work, 21-40 hours and more than 40 hours, with the following distributions: 20.6%, 3.1%, 35.0% and 41.3% for males, and 38.2%, 8.3%, 38.2% and 15.3% for females. The new variable was chosen from options ranging from the continuous version to the application of various classifications. Ultimately the most parsimonious and explanatory was chosen.

Age, duration of the relationship, and educational level were used as control variables (although the last two were not significant in the final models). All composite indicators and continuous variables were standardized to a 0-1 scale to facilitate the comparability of the intensity of the estimated coefficients.

Explanatory variables at the country level. In line with the distributive justice theory and the relative deprivation theory, country level variables provide information for the reference group to which people compare themselves. Gender ideology at a country level was measured through the Global Gender Gap (GGG) for 2016 (Greenstein 2009), which ranks “inequality” to “equality” from the lowest possible score 0 to 1 (World Economic Forum 2016). Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and female participation in the labor market (measured as the percentage of female population ages 15+ in the labor force) were the other country-level explanatory variables, as applied by Blanchflower et al. (2005) and Greenstein (2009). Data were scaled to set values in the range (0, 1).

3.3. Analytical Strategy

Multilevel analysis is the most effective approach to modeling given the nature of the data used, with individuals nested within countries. In this way, standard errors are not underestimated due to intra country correlations and second level variables are allowed as predictors in the models, in order to check for explanations at the country-level variability (Leckie 2010; Snijders and Bosker 1999).

Given that our assumption is that individual effects do not vary substantially across nations, random intercept models were applied. Maximum likelihood estimation was used. All analyses were carried out with Stata 14.

Different models were run: after computing the empty model to observe for the variance at a country level (not shown in the tables), individual and country level variables were included in the equations (Model 1, H1 and H2) and then cross-level interactions were added to test hypothesis 3 (Model 2). Then, in order to test our hypothesis H1.1 and H.2, a higher level of complexity was added with various interaction terms at the individual level. For the sake of simplicity and given that the effects of the remaining explanatory and control variables did not change substantially, only the new estimated coefficients are shown in models 3, 4 and 5.

4. Results

4.1. Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics for our main explanatory variables and our dependent variable by country. Argentina and Venezuela are the countries with the highest average degrees of satisfaction with family life, with mean values in between ‘very’ and ‘completely’ satisfied, followed by Iceland, Philippines, Switzerland and the United States, all of them with the same score. When empty models are run for women and men separately (results not shown), the first two positions remain the same, but then some variations are found by gender. Poland rises to the third place for men, whereas Iceland appears in the third place for women. At the other end of the scale, Lithuania (5.03), India (5.12) and South Korea (5.16) are the countries with the lowest average levels of family life satisfaction. Again, the empty models show some variations in gender. The same countries remain constant for males, while Lithuania, South Korea and Japan are ranked below India when females are considered.

At this aggregated level, no obvious relation seems to exist with the other variables in table 1, since these previously mentioned countries have diverse values in work-family conflict and distribution of household labor and decision making.

Consistent with earlier studies (Barstad 2014; Greenstein 2009; Hook 2010; Qian et al. 2016; Treas and Lui 2013), Nordic countries have the highest proportions of egalitarian division of domestic chores, family care and decision making (30.1% for Denmark, 28.8% for Sweden and 27.6% for Norway), whereas Japan, Korea and Poland can be considered the most specialized countries in terms of gender roles in the household, with the highest proportions of

households where she is the one in charge of the physical and mental work (67.0%, 58.2% and 52.5%, respectively). Mexico and South Africa are highlighted as the countries with the highest proportions of underadvantaged women (40.6%, 29.1% and 23.2%, respectively) assuming, as in Van Willigen and Drentea (2001), that this is the case when they bear with all the household work (chores and care) but have no relevant role in decision making.

Table 1. *Sample sizes and means of the main individual level variables per country*

country	Sample size	Work-family conflict (mean)	Female decision making and domestic labor (%)	Male decision making and female domestic labor (%)	Egalitarian relationship (%)	Satisfaction with family life
AR-Argentina	297	1.48	35.30	17.59	7.38	6.15
VE-Venezuela	328	2.52	24.16	14.84	12.42	6.11
IS-Iceland	479	1.79	21.54	2.78	25.91	5.95
PH-Philippines	743	1.70	39.52	16.84	4.95	5.95
CH-Switzerland	433	1.52	28.64	9.93	9.01	5.95
US-United States	449	1.71	27.25	10.35	15.02	5.95
HR-Croatia	437	1.68	19.78	5.80	13.97	5.94
PL-Poland	150	1.71	52.52	4.70	3.58	5.94
MX-Mexico	640	1.78	22.81	29.06	4.22	5.91
CL-Chile	477	1.86	36.26	21.66	6.25	5.89
IL-Israel	538	1.89	26.77	19.14	8.36	5.89
GB-Great Britain	217	1.67	18.95	6.18	19.79	5.85
AU-Australia	564	1.74	22.57	5.68	9.30	5.83
NL-Netherlands	351	1.50	25.26	12.01	14.38	5.82
ZA-South Africa	710	1.45	23.36	23.16	10.61	5.82
DK-Denmark	667	1.65	15.89	2.70	30.13	5.81
PT-Portugal	276	1.59	20.51	4.85	10.97	5.81
IE-Ireland	477	1.57	24.12	8.31	13.27	5.79
BG-Bulgaria	345	1.87	16.40	9.73	8.43	5.78
CA-Canada	315	1.64	19.80	3.08	19.99	5.78
BE-Belgium	778	1.62	24.39	4.48	17.16	5.76
ES-Spain	1082	1.73	28.75	6.88	12.95	5.75
AT-Austria	388	1.61	27.18	7.63	6.04	5.74
DE-Germany	659	1.62	24.58	6.52	10.80	5.74
HU-Hungary	368	1.62	35.13	7.27	6.46	5.72
SE-Sweden	386	1.70	12.69	3.37	28.76	5.71
NO-Norway	624	1.67	18.11	3.37	27.56	5.68
FI-Finland	471	1.61	20.35	4.37	21.97	5.67
FR-France	898	1.73	19.83	6.43	18.14	5.67
SI-Slovenia	458	1.48	14.19	6.55	10.04	5.66
SK-Slovakia	578	1.87	33.03	5.98	9.06	5.62
RU-Russia	395	1.83	31.46	15.54	6.44	5.54
CZ-Czech Rep.	749	1.56	27.59	8.85	10.54	5.46
LV-Latvia	450	1.74	32.19	8.90	12.63	5.45
JP-Japan	467	1.56	67.02	15.20	0.86	5.17
KR-Korea (South)	577	1.72	58.20	17.10	0.61	5.16
IN-India	552	1.93	7.51	20.89	1.77	5.12
LT-Lithuania	364	1.68	36.81	6.96	9.70	5.03
Total	19974	1.69	27.61	12.81	11.26	5.71

Table 2 shows the means and linearized standard errors for the main variables by sex. The maximum difference according to sex is found for the perception of fairness in the division of household labor, significantly higher for men, meaning a stronger perception that their partner is doing more than their fair share.

Table 2. *Means and linearized standard errors for the variables in analyses by sex*

	Men	Women
Number of hours of woman's paid work	22.10 (.216)	22.16 (.48)
Number of hours of man's paid work	36.30 (.220)	35.39 (.249)
Gender ideology (higher scores represent more egalitarian gender roles)*	3.06 (.010)	3.14 (.009)
Subjective health*	3.32 (.010)	3.27 (.010)
Work-family conflict (higher scores represent more the conflict)*	1.77 (.008)	1.62 (.007)
Parental appreciation (higher scores represent stronger agreement with the negative consequences of having children)*	2.82 (.009)	2.79 (.009)
Watching grow up is greatest joy (higher scores represent stronger agreement)*	4.38 (.008)	4.47 (.007)
Perception of fairness on the division of household labor (higher scores represent stronger perception that the partner is doing more)*	3.33 (.011)	2.18 (.010)
Subjective social class	4.66 (.019)	4.57 (.018)

*significant differences based on a 2-tailed independent t-test.

4.2. Multilevel models

Results are consistent for Model 1 and Model 2, without and with the cross-level interaction terms, except for the estimators of the balance index categories considered in the significant interactions with the Global Gender Gap.

Contrary to the expectations driven by the specialization theory, in the case of the women, all of the options that combine housework with family decision making have a negative impact on family satisfaction as compared to the egalitarian model (Model 1). The most dissatisfied are the women who are in charge of mainly all tasks (decision making, care and housework) or who live with a male partner who is himself in charge of these tasks. However, in the former case this negative effect is especially intensified as the GGG of the country grows (Model 2). In those countries in more egalitarian positions, the women's super-specialization implies for them less happiness with their family life. Men, on their side, are not significantly affected if she is the overloaded spouse, as compared to the egalitarian model.

The egalitarian option is what brings more well-being within the household, both for males and females (although for males it has no significant differences with other unbalanced options underbenefiting females – Model 1). The combination with the highest negative effect on family satisfaction for men corresponds to households where he

makes the decisions and he is responsible for housework and childcare. Then, for both sexes the fact of assuming the leading role when making decisions, on top of doing the housework, seems to add an extra burden that negatively affects family satisfaction. If generally men are more sensitive to situations that underbenefit them (Model 1, (5), (6), (7)), the contextual – country level – gender ideology can dramatically change the strength of the influence. In the least egalitarian countries (with a GGG close to 0.6), the disadvantage for men described as “he does more housework and both partners make the decisions” or “she makes more decisions and both partners do the housework” has a stronger negative effect on family satisfaction than in the countries with the highest GGG scores (close to 0.9), where the negative effect of the main factor is offset. Similarly, in high GGG countries, the situation in which the male partner has the prominent role in housework and the female partner in decision making does not cause lower satisfaction with family life, given that it is presumably accepted and normalized by the society. At the other side, if the gender ideological context is traditional that underadvantaged position for men will revert into lower levels of happiness in the household. Unexpectedly, just the opposite is observed for the women, so their family related well-being will not tend to improve with their overadvantaged position as their country’s GGG rises (Model 2, (5) and (6) together with interactions estimators).

The number of paid-working hours is not significant except for the case in which the man does not work for pay, situation that has a negative influence on the satisfaction level with family life for both men and women, although the impact is stronger for women (maybe as a result of what West and Zimmerman 1987, refer to as “doing gender”). More salient for the quality of the family life is how work and family are harmonized. The higher the reported personal work-family conflict was, the lower the level of satisfaction, with slightly stronger effects for women, who normally experience more work-family conflict (Notten et al. 2017; Steiber 2009). It seems, thus, that it is not the amount of hours itself that matters, but the type of work developed in and outside the home place. The strain associated to either context is what really alters the family’s well-being.

Results for control variables will be briefly discussed. Regarding appreciation of parenthood, the more intense the feeling that children limits the chances for professional career and impose an economic burden is, the lower the degree of satisfaction with family life. Accordingly, thinking that watching children grow up is the greatest joy will result in more family satisfaction. If the negative effect is more marked for women, the positive effect is higher for men. Together with the subjective health status, this is the most important predictor for men.

Consistent with previous works (Greenstein 2009; Sutor 1991; Wilcox and Nock 2006), the perception of fairness with regard to the division of household labor is relevant to assess the degree of satisfaction with family life, at least for women. Higher scores are related to greater satisfaction in the case of the women, although it is not significant for men. This might be a result of the skewed distribution of this variable, with relatively few cases that consider that the man does more than his fair share.

The more egalitarian a person's self-reported position in terms of gender-roles is, the lower the predicted degree of satisfaction with family life. This is largely consistent with comparable studies for Western countries, most likely due to unfulfilled expectations in the household (Forste and Fox 2012; Meil Landwerlin 2005; Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Household income and health status show a positive association with family life satisfaction, with the highest estimates of the models for women, emphasizing the importance of these variables on well-being for them. Younger couples are more likely to be satisfied and people after 40 are the least happy with their family lives (similar to findings by Foster and Fox 2012). The religious practices do not affect men and women exactly in the same way and influence men to a greater extent. Having some religious affiliation and attending religious services at least several times a year is positively related to family satisfaction (consistent with previous research, as in Amato 2012; Forste and Fox 2012), and, for men, having some religious affiliation even if never attending religious services as compared to people with no religious affiliation at all also proves beneficial to family satisfaction. However, the effect for women is not that clear.

The presence of children at home has contrasting effects for male and women, probably because of the different meaning of fatherhood and motherhood for their lives in terms of family responsibilities and workload. If having two or more children under school age increases the degree of family life satisfaction for men and, to a lesser extent, having one also seems beneficial, no significant effect is found for women. For the mothers, the degree of satisfaction is in fact altered negatively (although slightly) by the presence of one child at school age (-.076) or two or more (-.066). Similar findings for women were identified in previous research for marital satisfaction (Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Table 3. Multilevel regression models for satisfaction with family life, by gender

		Model 1		Model 2	
		Women	Men	Women	Men
index on	(1) compensation to her	-.303***	-.049	.390	.138
couple	(2) she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged	-.251***	.032	-.233***	.024
balance	(3) she somehow underadvantaged	-.119**	.026	-.113**	.023
<i>(prominent roles)</i>	(4) egalitarian (<i>ref.</i>)				
	(5) he somehow underadvantaged	-.100*	-.122**	1.143*	-1.048*
	(6) he underadvantaged / she overadvantaged	-.046	-.191**	1.078	-2.543**
	(7) compensation to him	-.327*	-.274***	-.306*	-.307***
woman's	0	.019	-.000	.017	-.004
hours paid-work	1-20	.078	.009	.075	.006
	21-40	.024	.052	.023	.049
	41+ (<i>ref.</i>)				
man's hours paid-work	0	-.160***	-.083*	-.159***	-.083*
	1-20	.009	.076	.012	.072
	21-40	-.026	-.012	-.024	-.014
	41+ (<i>ref.</i>)				
work-family conflict		-.369***	-.362***	-.368***	-.364***
negative parental appreciation		-.466***	-.385***	-.467***	-.384***
watching children grow up is greatest joy		.467***	.800***	.467***	.799***
perception of fairness on the division of household labor		.236***	.064	.240***	.069
gender ideology scale		-.112*	-.151*	-.111*	-.150*
subjective health status		.966***	.857***	.966***	.856***
children up to	0 (<i>ref.</i>)				
school age -1	1	.015	.097**	.016	.094**
	2+	-.035	.149***	-.036	.148***
children between	0 (<i>ref.</i>)				
school age and 17	1	-.076**	-.027	-.075**	-.026
	2+	-.066*	.007	-.065*	.005
household income (decile)		.189***	.160***	.188***	.158***
age	18-30 (<i>ref.</i>)				
	31-40	-.077	-.027	-.075	-.026
	41-50	-.162***	-.120*	-.161***	-.120*
	51-65	-.175***	-.050	-.171***	-.050
religiosity	no religion-never attendance religious services (<i>ref.</i>)				
	religious affiliation - never attendance religious services	.024	.086*	.021	.089*
	religious affiliation - less attendance than once a year	-.053	.040	-.055	.041
	religious affiliation - attendance at least several times a year	.089**	.114***	.086**	.117***
Global Gender Gap (GGG)		.566	-.082	1.080	-.182
GDP		-.029	-.166	-.038	-.166
female labor participation		.255	.987	.238	.908
GGG* (1) she does more housework+ makes the decisions				-.920*	-.263
GGG* (5) he does the housework + both make the decisions /both do the housework + she makes the decisions				-1.654*	1.225
GGG* (6) he does the housework + she makes the decisions				-1.510	3.222**
constant		4.656***	4.379***	4.275***	4.503***
var(cons)		.049	.054	.050	.052
var(residual)		.839	.787	.838	.786
N		7,699	6,433	7,699	6,433
Log likelihood		-10292.5	-8404.0	-10288.8	-8398.9

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

None of the main effects for the variables considered at the country level is significant, although some GGG interaction effects are, as discussed above. Contrary to what previous comparative research showed (Forste and Fox 2012; Kornrich and Eger 2016), country GDP has no significant influence on the individual's satisfaction with family life in our models (table 3). Nor is there any evidence for the effect of country female labor participation.

According to the empty models, variance partition coefficients (VPC) are 7.1% for men and 7.5% for women. Once the individual variables are included (models not shown), the total variance explained by country variations descend to around 6.0% for the women and 6.5% and 6.9% for men. Finally, with the variables at the country level, the VPC drops to 5.6% for women and 6.2% for men¹. In all cases, nonetheless, the likelihood ratio test statistic showed that there was evidence of country effect on the degree of satisfaction with family life, although most of the variance was explained at the individual level.

After taking into account a varied set of explanatory variables at the individual and contextual levels, the ranking of the countries changes to some extent according to the residuals (u_{0j}) of the final models (Figures 1 and 2). A cluster of Latin-American countries appears at the right end, with the highest levels of satisfaction once all considered variables are controlled for. We find the men in Venezuela, Chile, Argentina in the highest positions (Mexico in the seventh); and for the women, almost the same picture is drawn: Venezuela, Argentina, Chile, Switzerland, Croatia, Philippines and then, Mexico. At the other end, Lithuania remains with the lowest levels of family satisfaction for both sexes, followed by India and South Korea, in the case of men, and South Korea and Sweden, in the case of women. Worthy of note is the case of Sweden, that has dropped from middle-low positions in the original ranking to the lowest ones after considering the explanatory variables. Similar findings can be observed for the other Nordic countries, with Iceland suffering the most dramatic decrease, mostly for men. In consequence, levels of satisfaction are to a great extent explained by country differences in their population compositions according to the individual explanatory variables included in the model.

Fig. 1 Country effects for the final model (with no interactions), men

Fig. 2 Country effects for the final model (with no interactions), women

¹ These levels are consistent with previous works (Kornrich and Eger 2016; Notten et al.2017).

In order to test our hypothesis H1.1, the number of paid-working hours was made to interact with the index on couple balance (Model 3, Table 4). Results for the interaction coefficients were not significant and did not substantially improve the models, neither for men nor for women. As a result, in the next step, several options were applied in order to verify whether this lack of significance could be attributed to representativeness problems given the reduced sample sizes (Model 4, Table 4) or whether it could be attributed to an incorrect perspective. In fact, satisfaction might not be so closely related to the absolute number of paid-working hours but rather to the quality of work and family life (Model 5, Table 4).

Models above (Table 3) proved that number of hours of paid-work did not seem to be relevant to explain satisfaction with family life except when the man was not working at all outside the home, which had a negative impact on satisfaction regardless to gender. Thus, a simplification was proposed to combine the labor situation of both members (neither of them works, only the man works, only the woman works, or both work) and was made interact with the index on couple balance (Model 4, Table 4). The negative main effect on women's level of happiness with family life when they are in charge of most of the housework and decision making (Model 4) is counterbalanced to some extent if the man is the only one who works outside the home (although the final effect, considering main and interaction terms, is still negative). This case of super-specialization does not lead to higher women's well-being (thus it does not really support H1), but if she does not work outside the home and he does it attenuates the adverse impact.

The unhappiest scenario for men (for which there is statistical evidence) is when they do the housework and are the only breadwinners, but wives are the ones who normally make decisions (underadvantaged man at home, (6)). Power in the domestic sphere is limited for him this way. Similarly, when the division is unbalanced at home toward a higher male's participation in the housework or his lower participation in decision making (5) and he is the sole breadwinner, his level of satisfaction about family life tends to drop. In this case, the man might feel overloaded.

Finally, as the information on interactions with family-work conflict is analyzed, the results are hardly significant, and this conflict just increases its negative effect on the man's satisfaction clearly in the case of his disempowered or underadvantaged domestic role.

Table 4. *Multilevel regression models for satisfaction with family life, by gender. Interactions between the index on couple balance and paid work^a*

	Model 3		Model 4		Model 5	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
(1) compensation to her	-.261***	-.116	-.467***	-.110	-.298***	.016
(2) she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged	-.164*	.070	-.292*	-.078	-.219**	.026
(3) she somehow underadvantaged	-.042	-.031	-.221*	.022	-.124*	.051
(4) egalitarian (<i>ref.</i>)						
(5) he somehow underadvantaged	-.097	-.078	-.126	-.008	-.166*	-.112
(6) he underadvantaged / she overadvantaged	.058	-.076	-.057	-.077	-.088	-.026
(7) compensation to him	-.416*	-.382**	-.742**	-.313	-.488**	-.348**
hours of paid work <i>-hpw</i> (continuous variable) for woman (first column) and man (second column)	.131	.077				
hpw *(1) compensation to her						
hpw *(2) she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged						
hpw *(3) she somehow underadvantaged						
hpw *(4) egalitarian						
hpw *(5) he somehow underadvantaged						
hpw *(6) he underadvantaged / she overadvantaged						
hpw *(7) compensation to him						
partner's hpw: 0	-.160***	.001				
partner's hpw: 1-20	.015	.021				
partner's hpw: 21-40	-.022	.054				
partner's hpw: 41+ (<i>ref.</i>)						
none works (<i>ref.</i>)						
only the man works			-.086	.181		
only the woman works			-.040	-.029		
both work			.038	.079		
only the man works*(1) compensation to her			.316*			
only the man works*(2) she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged						
only the man works*(3) she somehow underadvantaged						
only the man works*(4) egalitarian						
only the man works*(5) he somehow underadvantaged				-.470*		
only the man works*(6) he underadvantaged / she overadvantaged				-.467*		
only the man works*(7) compensation to him						
work-family conflict (<i>wfc</i>)					-.377**	-.227
wfc*(1) compensation to her						
wfc*(2) she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged						
wfc*(3) she somehow underadvantaged						
wfc*(4) egalitarian						
wfc*(5) he somehow underadvantaged						
wfc*(6) he does more housework+she makes more decisions						-.814**
wfc*(7) compensation to him						
var(const)	.049	.053	.049	.053	.049	.054
var(residual)	.838	.786	.836	.784	.823	.785
n	7,699	6,433	7,699	6,433	7,699	6,433
log likelihood	-10290.0	-8400.8	-10282.0	-8391.3	-10288.1	-8396.2

^a only the main variable effects and the significant interaction terms are shown (in model 4, interaction terms for 'only the woman works' and 'both work' were all non significant and omitted); the remaining variables, not shown, have similar effects as in Table 3.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

5. Discussion

This article extends the idea of specialization versus equity (equality in our case) by adding the information on who takes the leading role in the decision making to the division of housework into a composite indicator and it studies the effects of this index on couple balance on the reported satisfaction with family life. Little research has examined in depth the influence of decision making within the household on marital or family satisfaction, and the existing evidence is not consistent. Some authors highlighted the positive effect of joint decision making (Forste and Fox 2012), but others did not reach significant results in that direction (Meier et al. 2006). Even if it can be argued that having a leading role in decision making within the household transfers power to the partner in charge (Bartley, Blanton and Gilliard 2005; Mederer 1993; Van Willigen and Drentea 2001), the findings of this research have indicated that this position could imply an increase in satisfaction if it is not combined with the largest share of care and domestic chores.

Regarding the division of household labor, literature to date has corroborated the positive impact of the more egalitarian scenarios in terms of housework share on satisfaction with family life, normally with more robust results for women (Barstad 2014; Coltrane 2000; Greenstein 2009; Ruppner 2010; Yogeve and Brett 1985). Nonetheless, the beneficial effects of equity have not always been proven and some authors challenged them through the models of gender, of specialization or of traditional family (Becker 1981; Oshio et al. 2013; Qian et al. 2016 for some Asian countries; Wilcox and Nock 2006). Elements of the traditional and non-traditional marriages are best matched in the companionate model (Wilcox and Nock 2006), although the most traditional alternative may also bring high levels of happiness with marital life as opposed to the more individualistic options, if these two models of marriages are reinforced by social institutions that lend legitimacy (peers, religious associations, etc.) (Amato 2012; Wilcox and Dew 2010).

Our results, however, point to the egalitarian option as the optimum one. In fact, they do not completely uphold our first hypothesis and subhypothesis. After controlling for the time of paid work, not only does the super-specialization model not lead to higher levels of satisfaction with family life, but also this model predicts the lowest ones, especially for women (despite country variations according to the Global Gender Gap, that make women in more egalitarian countries even more unhappy). Regardless of who is the member of the couple in each role for the

super-specialization case, this situation has the strongest negative influence on the woman's satisfaction with her family life. When considering female respondents, there is no support for the zero-sum hypothesis (Barstad 2014).

Contrary to what was expected (H1.1), the number of hours of her paid work does not have a significant influence and, as interactions are considered, these hours do not modulate the effect of the index on couple balance. Quian et al. (2016) also noted the fewer significant effects of paid labor on marital satisfaction as compared to division of housework.

Nonetheless, if he is the sole breadwinner, it seems more acceptable for her that she is in charge of the housework, the relatives' care as well as the decision making (*super-specialization* would be more tolerable in this traditional division of household labor).

Results for men show a different pattern. The worst alternative for them refers to their super-specialization, when they have the domestic role, and also their strongest implication in housework and least participation in decision making has a negative impact on their satisfaction about family life. This general trend is affected if the balance index is made interact with the Global Gender Gap, so in the most egalitarian countries in terms of gender ideology these negative effects are almost canceled out, because these household arrangements are more widely accepted (H3 cannot be precisely confirmed, but there is still some evidence for the relative deprivation theory, as in Mencarini and Sirone 2012). The main difference with the results for women is that now, if she is the spouse with the highest housework burden, the man's level of satisfaction is not as affected. In the same vein, Crompton et al. 2005 showed that men were more likely to feel very or completely satisfied in traditional household working arrangements, but these authors did not conclude the same marginal advantages for women. In other words, men do not seem so sensitive to their partner's over-load. Furthermore, and contrary to what was observed for employed women, if the man does not have a paid work, the level of satisfaction will be more likely to decrease for both sexes. Previous findings also emphasized the importance of male participation in the labor market, but no clear consensus had been reached about the impact of female paid-work. For instance, Greenstein (2009) pointed out the lower level of satisfaction of women who were employed full-time, whilst Kornrich and Eger (2016), in accordance with our results, noticed the lower impact of paid-work time in the case of working women.

The interactions included in our models also stress how the involvement of the man at home, even if it simply implies a slightly imbalance against him, reduces his degree of satisfaction if he is the only breadwinner or suffers high work-family conflict. The worst possible situation for him is when he is the only breadwinner or he suffers high work-family conflict, and she makes the decisions while he is the one in charge of the household chores.

Some of these findings could be partially explained in terms of “doing gender” or in terms of an etic-emic conflict (Requena 2017), even after controlling for gender ideology. Measuring satisfaction with family life is not only about the division of labor and decision making, but also about expectations about marital commitments, perception of fairness and comparisons with the broader context shaped by cultural norms and institutional forces. The equilibrium is surely not easy to uncover.

Despite all the expressed nuances, the general conclusion is that the “super-egalitarian” couples, defined in terms of division of housework, care of relatives and decision-making are more likely to feel happier about their family life than any of the other uneven or “super-specialized options”. If the perception of fair task distribution is summed up, levels of satisfaction will increase, in line with past research on perception of fairness in the division of house labor (Greenstein 2009; Kornrich and Eger 2016, Sutor 1991, Wilcox and Nock 2006).

Significant evidence is found to support our second hypothesis. The number of hours of paid work is not particularly relevant to explain satisfaction with family life, as compared to the conditions of strain suffered in any of the work or family domains, which have a clear negative effect.

The remaining variation explained at a country level must respond to other cultural factors or non-controlled individual variables. However, after all the individual and contextual explanatory variables considered, Latin-American countries still represent the most satisfied couples. At the other side, there is a more heterogeneous set of countries. In line with past works, some former Soviet nations are included among those with lower degrees of satisfaction with family life (Lithuania, Latvia or Czech Republic) (Blanchflower and Oswald 2005; Forste and Fox 2012; Kornrich and Eger 2016), together with South Korea and Japan, with a wide gap between Japanese men and women (as in Oshio et al. 2013). It is also worth noting that the moderate positive initial positions of the Nordic countries are ostensibly altered according to the residuals from the final models. These variations in the ranking

denote that much of the difference in performance across-nations is explained by variations in their population compositions.

This work sheds light on the effect of mental and physical work associated to the domestic sphere on the satisfaction with family life, especially by considering the dual roles of housework and decision making. However, further comparative research needs to be carried out in order to better unleash the micro and macro influences on satisfaction with family life, the complex interactions between what is actually done and what is desirable from the personal and the societal perspectives. It must be also borne in mind the limitations of the data source, because of the inherent difficulties of comparative studies and the caution some authors recommend when using stylized data (Kan and Pudney 2008).

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Appendix

Table I. Construction of the categories for the balance index, from the standardized partial indexes on division of housework and care, and decision making

	[-1, 0) she has a stronger role in decision making	0 both have a similar role	(0, 1] he has a stronger role in decision making	Distribution with weighted data
[-1, -0.125) he does more housework/care	(6) – he underadvantaged / she overadvantaged	(5)	(7) – compensation to him	7.9%
[-0.125, 0.125] both have a similar role	(5) - he somehow underadvantaged	(4) - egalitarian	(3) – she somehow underadvantaged	20.7%
(0.125, 1] she does more housework/care	(1) - compensation to her	(3)	(2) - she underadvantaged / he overadvantaged	71.4%
Distribution with weighted data	35.6%	47.1%	17.3%	

Figure2



