

The Influence of Egalitarian Gender Role Perceptions on Relationship Satisfaction and Family Cohesion

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Abstract

Over the past few decades, changes in gender expectations and increasing participation of women in higher education and employment have gradually reshaped family structures and relationship dynamics. Many couples are adopting egalitarian attitudes toward domestic responsibilities and decision-making now a days. The present review examines the influence of egalitarian gender role perceptions on relationship satisfaction and family cohesion. The paper draws on Social Role Theory (Eagly, 1987) and Equity Theory (Walster et al., 1978) to review existing literature on how gender role perceptions influence household labor distribution and relationship outcomes.

Existing research suggests that couples who endorse egalitarian beliefs often experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction when these beliefs are reflected in everyday practices (Carlson, Miller, & Sassler, 2016). However, tensions may arise when egalitarian ideals are not matched by the actual distribution of responsibilities within the household. Such discrepancies can contribute to role strain, emotional exhaustion, and conflict within relationships. The review further highlights the importance of institutional factors such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and supportive social norms that enable couples to implement egalitarian practices more effectively (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020).

Evidence also suggests that children raised in families characterized by cooperative parenting and shared responsibilities demonstrate stronger social and emotional development (Schoppe-Sullivan, Volling, & Barr, 2021; Ferreira, Albuquerque, & Santos, 2018). Overall, the review suggests that family cohesion is strengthened when egalitarian beliefs are reflected in everyday practices and supported by broader institutional structures.

Future research should move beyond traditional time-use measures and incorporate the psychological and cognitive dimensions of household labor in order to better understand gender dynamics within contemporary families.

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Keywords

Gender role perceptions, relationship satisfaction, family cohesion, cognitive labor, work–family balance

Introduction

Over the past several decades, gender roles within families have undergone significant transformation. Historically, family life in many societies followed a gendered division of labor in which men were primarily responsible for economic provision, while women were expected to manage domestic work and childcare. However, increasing female participation in higher education and the workforce has contributed to a gradual shift toward more egalitarian family structures.

Egalitarian gender role perception refers to the belief that men and women should share responsibilities and opportunities equally in both public and private spheres of life. This perspective challenges historically deep-rooted gender norms and promotes balanced participation in decision-making, employment, childcare, and household tasks. Several researchers suggest that egalitarian gender attitudes may promote fairness and cooperation within intimate relationships, which in turn can influence relationship satisfaction (Amato & Booth, 1995). Research suggests that the practical distribution of domestic responsibilities remains uneven in many households. Hochschild’s concept of the “second shift” illustrates how employed women frequently continue to perform the majority of household work after completing their paid employment responsibilities (Hochschild, 2012). (Second shift, referring to the unpaid domestic work performed after completing paid employment). More recent research has introduced the concept of “cognitive labor” or the “mental load,” referring to the invisible planning, organizing, and emotional management required to sustain daily family life (Daminger, 2019).

This discrepancy between egalitarian beliefs and everyday practices has been described as a “stalled revolution” by Hochschild. A stalled revolution is described as the revolution in which women’s participation in paid employment increased rapidly while men’s contribution to domestic labor changed more slowly. As a result, many couples face challenges in accommodating modern egalitarian expectations with persistent traditional patterns of household labor.

Understanding how couples negotiate these changing expectations is essential for examining relationship satisfaction and family cohesion in contemporary societies. The present review therefore explores the influence of egalitarian gender role perceptions on relationship satisfaction and family cohesion by synthesizing research from psychology, sociology, and family studies.

Research Gap

Although a substantial body of research has examined gender role attitudes and the division of household labor, relatively fewer studies have explored how egalitarian gender role perceptions simultaneously influence both relationship satisfaction and family cohesion. Much of the existing literature tends to focus either on marital satisfaction or on the allocation of domestic labor without fully examining the psychological and relational mechanisms that connect these variables.

In addition, many studies have concentrated primarily on Western populations, which may limit the generalizability of findings to societies where traditional gender norms remain more influential. Cultural expectations, family structures, and institutional support systems can shape how couples interpret and implement egalitarian gender roles within everyday life (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020). Therefore, there is a need for research that examines these dynamics across diverse cultural contexts.

Another emerging area of interest concerns **cognitive labor**, or the mental and emotional effort involved in organizing and managing family life. Although recent studies have highlighted the significance of cognitive labor in shaping gender inequalities within households, its long-term implications for relationship satisfaction and family cohesion remain insufficiently explored (Daminger, 2019).

Understanding how egalitarian gender role perceptions interact with household labor distribution, cultural expectations, and institutional structures can provide valuable insights for researchers, counselors, and policymakers. Addressing these gaps may contribute to the development of interventions and policies that support healthier and more cooperative family environments.

Theoretical Framework

Two major theoretical perspectives provide the conceptual foundation for this study.

Social Role Theory:

Social Role Theory suggests that gender differences in behavior are largely shaped by the social roles that men and women occupy within society (Eagly, 1987). According to this theory, individuals develop expectations about gender-appropriate behavior by observing patterns of role distribution within social institutions such as family, education, and employment. As societal roles evolve, expectations regarding gender behavior also change. Couples living independently in nuclear households may adopt more egalitarian practices compared to joint families since older generations may continue to reinforce conventional gender expectations.

Equity Theory

Equity Theory proposes that individuals experience greater satisfaction in relationships when they perceive fairness in the exchange of contributions and rewards. Within intimate relationships, partners evaluate the balance between the efforts they invest and the benefits they receive. When individuals perceive inequity in the distribution of responsibilities or rewards, dissatisfaction and conflict may arise. Within family relationships, perceptions of fairness in the distribution of household and caregiving responsibilities are therefore likely to influence relationship satisfaction (Walster et al., 1978).

Contribution of The Study

The present review contributes to the existing literature in several ways. First, it integrates sociological and psychological perspectives to examine the relationship between egalitarian gender role perceptions, relationship satisfaction, and family cohesion.

Second, the study highlights the role of perceived fairness and cognitive labor as important mechanisms that shape relationship outcomes in dual-earner families.

Third, by incorporating recent discussions on institutional support systems, the paper emphasizes the importance of structural factors such as workplace flexibility and family policies in enabling egalitarian family arrangements.

Materials and Methods

The present study adopts a narrative review approach to examine the relationship between egalitarian gender role perceptions, relationship satisfaction, and family cohesion. Relevant literature published between 1978 and 2024 was identified through systematic searches in major academic databases including PsycINFO, JSTOR, and Google Scholar.

Search terms included combinations of the following keywords: gender egalitarianism, gender role attitudes, division of household labor, second shift, cognitive labor, work–family conflict, relationship satisfaction, and family cohesion. Both theoretical and empirical studies were considered in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles and widely cited theoretical works that addressed gender role attitudes, family dynamics, and relationship outcomes. Studies were selected based on their relevance to gender role dynamics within families and their contributions to understanding relationship quality and family functioning.

A total of twenty-six core references were analyzed and synthesized to identify major themes related to egalitarian beliefs, household labor distribution, perceived fairness, and institutional influences on family dynamics and relationship satisfaction.

Conceptual Model of Gender Role Transition in Modern Families:

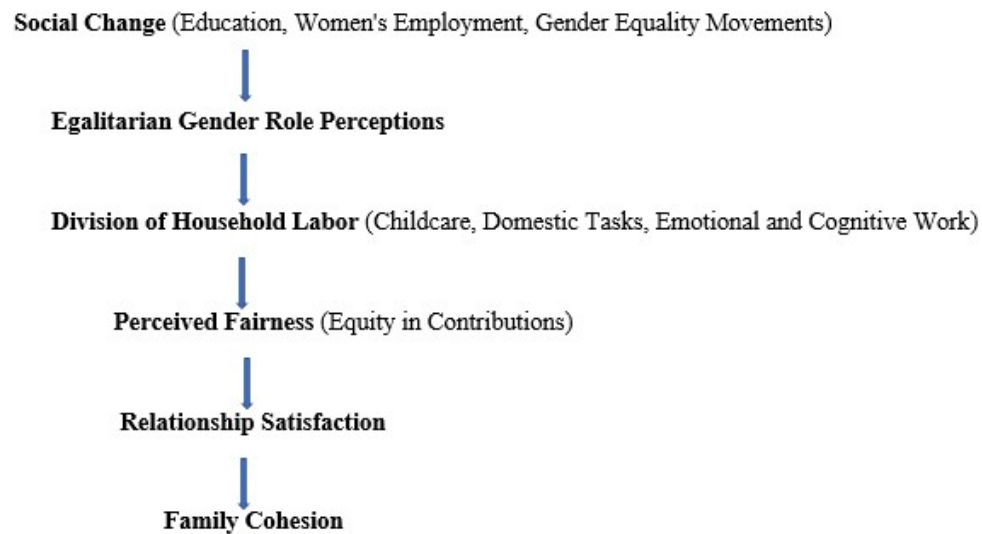


Figure 1: Conceptual framework showing how egalitarian gender role perceptions influence relationship satisfaction and family cohesion.

Results and Discussion

A growing body of research indicates that couples who share egalitarian gender attitudes often report greater relationship satisfaction, particularly when household responsibilities are perceived as fairly distributed (Carlson et al., 2016). Couples who perceive the division of household responsibilities as fair tend to report lower levels of conflict and greater emotional closeness. However, the interplay between egalitarianism and relationship satisfaction is complex and often mediated by practical realities within the household.

Even in households where both partners are employed full-time, women frequently perform a greater share of childcare and household tasks. This imbalance may lead to role strain and emotional fatigue, particularly when women hold strong egalitarian beliefs that are not reflected in everyday practices. Cognitive labor or mental load refers to the often-invisible processes involved in organizing family life, such as planning schedules, anticipating needs, and coordinating household

activities (Daminger, 2019). Because this form of labor is less visible than physical tasks, it often goes unrecognized despite its significant psychological impact.

Individuals who value equality may experience frustration when their daily experiences do not reflect those values. This tension may contribute to reduced relationship satisfaction and increased interpersonal conflict. Another important factor influencing family cohesion is the role of institutional support systems. Workplace policies, parental leave provisions, childcare availability, and cultural expectations all influence how couples distribute responsibilities within the family. When institutions continue to operate according to traditional breadwinner models, couples may face structural barriers that prevent them from implementing egalitarian arrangements.

Research suggests that countries with family-friendly policies, such as paid parental leave and flexible work schedules, tend to exhibit higher levels of paternal involvement in childcare and improved maternal well-being. This review proposes a conceptual framework that illustrates how egalitarian beliefs, behavioral practices, and institutional support interact to influence relationship satisfaction and family well-being.

Three-Legged Stool Model of Egalitarian Family Functioning:

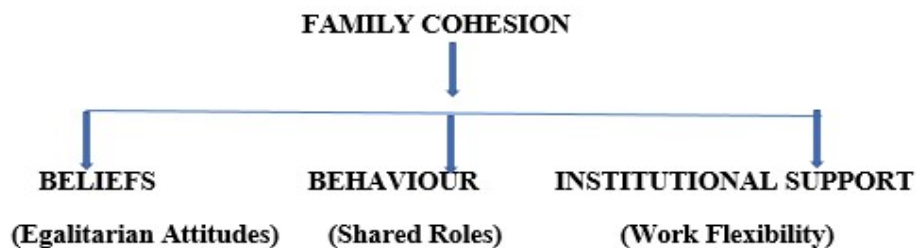


Figure 2: Three-Legged Stool model

Practical Implications

The findings of this review have several practical implications for individuals, families, and policymakers. For couples, recognizing the importance of perceived fairness in the division of household responsibilities may help reduce conflict and improve relationship satisfaction. Open communication regarding expectations and responsibilities can facilitate more balanced and cooperative family relationships.

For family counselors and therapists, understanding the psychological impact of unequal cognitive labor may assist in designing interventions that address hidden sources of relationship strain. Encouraging shared decision-making and greater paternal involvement in childcare may strengthen family cohesion. Research has also shown gender differences in leisure patterns. Women's leisure time is often fragmented by domestic responsibilities, whereas men's leisure tends to be more uninterrupted (Bittman & Wajcman, 2000). Chronic stress resulting from incompatible role demands between professional and domestic spheres may have impact on the mental health.

Policies that support work-life balance can contribute to healthier family environments and improved well-being for both parents and children. Family cohesion, may also be shaped by broader institutional structures such as workplace policies and childcare support. Structural lag occurs when workplaces and policies remain tethered to the outdated breadwinner model (Riley & Riley, 1994). Countries utilizing use-it-or-lose-it paternity quotas (e.g., Sweden) see higher paternal involvement and increased maternal satisfaction (Rehel, 2014).

Limitations and Future Research

Although the present review synthesizes existing research on egalitarian gender role perceptions and family dynamics, several limitations should be acknowledged. First, much of the available literature has been conducted in Western contexts (Chung & van der Lippe, 2020), which may limit the generalizability of findings to societies with different cultural norms and family structures.

Second, many studies rely on self-reported measures of household labor and relationship satisfaction, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Future research should incorporate longitudinal and observational methods to capture changes in gender role negotiations over time. Further research should also examine the influence of socioeconomic status, cultural background, and intersectional identities on the implementation of egalitarian family arrangements.

Conclusion

Egalitarian gender role perceptions represent an important dimension of contemporary family life. The growing acceptance of gender equality has encouraged many couples to adopt more balanced approaches to domestic responsibilities and decision-making. When egalitarian beliefs are supported by fair distributions of household labor and supportive institutional policies, couples are more likely to experience higher levels of relationship satisfaction and stronger family cohesion.

However, the persistence of traditional domestic expectations and structural

barriers within workplaces continues to challenge the implementation of egalitarian ideals. Achieving greater gender equality within families requires alignment between individual attitudes, everyday behavioral practices, and supportive institutional policies. When these elements work together, families are better able to foster cooperation, reduce conflict, and promote healthy development for both partners and children.

Egalitarian family functioning may be understood as an interaction between three interrelated components: beliefs, behavior, and institutional support. Father's efficacy improves significantly when nurturing role beliefs are supported both personally and institutionally, as observed in dual-earner families where father involvement rises over time (Schoppe-Sullivan et al., 2021; Ferreira et al., 2018).

However, the stalled revolution highlights the necessity of comprehensive policy reforms. Research shows that when institutional constraints are removed, individuals overwhelmingly prefer egalitarian arrangements (Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). To move forward, systemic changes—such as transferable parental leave and flexible work schedules—are critical to facilitating the modern dual-earner dyad (Yoon, 2017).

Satisfaction is highest not necessarily when roles are perfectly 50/50, but when the partners' ideology matches their practice. Friction occurs primarily in mismatched dyads—like, an egalitarian woman married to a traditional man. Furthermore, shared childcare correlates with higher sexual satisfaction and long-term relationship quality (Carlson et al., 2016).

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