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The myth of equal partnership and its effect on women's relationship quality

The effect of traditionalization on relationship
quality among traditional and egalitarian women

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Abstract

The current study examines the consequences of making the transition to parenthood for several aspects of relationship quality, i.e. intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction of 83 Dutch women. We expected that women who reduced their work hours would experience a decrease in relationship quality during the transition to parenthood and that this decrease would be bigger for egalitarian women compared to traditional women. Measurements took place at the second or third trimester of pregnancy and eight months after childbirth. Results show a negative effect of becoming a mother on relationship quality in general. Contradictory to our expectations, women who did not reduce their work hours experienced a bigger reduction in passion during the transition to parenthood than women who did go back in work hours. This means that women who go back more in work hours, experience more passion in their relationship eight months after childbirth, than women who go back less hours or do not go back at all. This effect was not found for intimacy and relationship satisfaction. Finally, it seemed that task division before childbirth did not have a moderating effect on the association between traditionalization and relationship quality. It seems to not matter whether women in this sample were more traditional or more egalitarian before childbirth for how much their relationship quality decreased.

Keywords: relationship quality, intimacy, passion, relationship satisfaction, work hours, parenthood, traditionalization

Introduction

The transition into parenthood is for most people a life-changing event. New parents are faced with new demands, which challenge the norms that control their day-to-day activities (Johnson & Huston, 1998). A transition can be understood as a change in role occupancy and is a marker in the life course that marks a distinction between life before and after a particular change or event (George, 1993). Most transitions are singular events that take place at a particular moment in time, like the transition to parenthood (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005). A lot of research has been conducted on the transition to parenthood, with the latter having both positive consequences, such as feelings of joy (Petch & Halford, 2008, in Kluwer, 2010), and negative consequences for personal and relational wellbeing (Kluwer, 2010). One phenomenon that is apparent during the transition to parenthood is a change in task division between partners. It seems that many heterosexual couples who go through the transition to parenthood become more traditional in their work/caretaking division, in the sense that women decrease their number of paid work hours and increase their time spent on caretaking and nonpaid household duties. Their partners, often men, remain working the same or even increase their number of paid hours, while contributing significantly less to the household (Baxter, Buchler, Perales & Western, 2015; Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). We call this phenomenon *traditionalization*.

Whereas there seems to be a trend in the Netherlands towards a more equal distribution between men and women in terms of number of work hours, still a lot of heterosexual couples make the decision to reduce the mother's work hours during the transition to parenthood (CBS & SGP, 2018). While several authors have written about different types of task divisions between partners and their consequences for several aspects of life (e.g. Rhoden, 2003; Xu & Lai, 2004), not much attention has yet been paid to the phenomenon of traditionalization during the transition to parenthood. In the current study, we will look at the effect of traditionalization on several aspects of the relationship. Because the transition to parenthood seems to have larger consequences for women compared to men (Mayrhofer, Meyer, Schiffinger & Schmidt, 2008; Schober, 2010), it was chosen to focus the current study on the mother's perspective.

Impact of the transition to parenthood on the relationship

In the current study, we understand relationship quality as consisting of several components: intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction, in line with the study of Fletcher, Simpson, and Thomas (2000). Several studies show that in general, the transition to parenthood negatively affects the relationship. Parents become less satisfied with their relationship

(Twenge, Campbell & Foster, 2003; Doss, Rhoades, Stanley & Markman, 2009), and intimacy and passion levels tend to decrease (Hackel & Ruble, 1992).

Various explanations can be given for the drop in relationship quality during the transition to parenthood. In her review, Kluwer (2010) addresses two factors that play a role in how couples deal with major life transitions: adaptive processes and personal and situational characteristics. Adaptive processes refer to ways in which couples deal with relational difficulties and conflict (Karney & Bradbury, 1995), which form an important determinant of relationship quality. How couples deal with stressors and problems of parenthood can alleviate or exacerbate the impact of the transition on their relationship quality (Kluwer, 2010; Kamp Dush, Rhoades, Sanberg-Thoma & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2014).

Personal and situational characteristics, such as gender and work situation can also influence how much impact the transition has on the relationship. Women tend to experience a stronger decline in relationship satisfaction than men (Twenge et al., 2003), just as couples who are younger, less educated, and married fewer years (Belsky & Rovine, 1990). Based on previous studies, we can expect that on average, relationship quality drops during the transition to parenthood. Hence, our first hypothesis is:

H1: It is expected that relationship quality (i.e. intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction) decreases between the second or third trimester (T1) and eight months after childbirth (T3).

Changes in work hours during the transition to parenthood

Many women change their work hours when their first child is born (Hynes & Clarkberg, 2005), which could be considered a move towards a more traditional task division. Even though recent studies show that men and women prefer a more egalitarian task division, still many women reduce their work hours during the transition to parenthood (CBS & SCP, 2018). Despite egalitarian preferences, many couples doubt whether this ideal situation is attainable, given the economic and social conditions that demand long hours for successful employment and parenting (Gerson, 2010, in Pedulla & Thébaud, 2015). This choice for a decrease in work hours and a possible resulting shift toward a more traditional division within heterosexual couples is often made because during the transition to parenthood, men may have better career prospects or higher earnings than women (Grunow, 2019). Moreover, the Dutch society has been arranged in such a way, that working less hours as a woman is almost the status quo.

There are several institutional and societal factors that contribute to this 'part-time culture' in the Netherlands, such as tax systems and parental leave arrangements. Furthermore, many Dutch citizens share the social norm that fathers should be responsible for generating income, while mothers should be responsible for taking care of the household and the children (Dutch Ministry of Finance, 2020). It is known that in the Netherlands, women often work part time and earn on average 5-7% less than men (when working the same number of hours; CBS & SCP, 2018). In the Netherlands, almost 40% of mothers decide to work less hours or even stop working after childbirth, while most Dutch men keep working the same number of hours or start working more (CBS & SCP, 2018). It thus appears that becoming a parent leads to more adaptations for women compared to men.

For heterosexual couples to hold on to a more egalitarian division, where both partners work the same number of hours and caretaking and household duties are equally divided, even after childbirth, it is important that prior to the transition to parenthood, couples already have an equal distribution and that they believe in the importance of equal shares in work, caretaking and household tasks (Dominguez-Folgueras, Jurad-Guerrero, & Botía-Morillas, 2017). In heterosexual couples who remain egalitarian after childbirth, it is important for the relationship that both partners make equal changes in their time allocation (i.e. both keep or reduce their work hours). Despite the fact that more and more couples achieve an egalitarian division, there are still a lot of couples who become more traditional during the transition to parenthood. Based on previous research on work hour change during the transition to parenthood, our second hypothesis is:

H2: Because women with a more egalitarian task division before childbirth work quite a lot, they are more likely to more strongly reduce their work hours after child birth than women with a more traditional task division before childbirth.

Prenatal expectations and the postnatal relationship

Additionally, transition-specific predictors might play a role, such as prenatal expectations. These expectations might include how competent one will be as a parent and expected task divisions (Lawrence, Rothman, Cobb & Bradbury, 2010). Several authors write about the effect of expectations on relationship quality. For example, Belsky (1985) found that couples whose postnatal experiences were less positive than what they expected during pregnancy, experienced greater declines in relationship satisfaction, especially among women. Hackel and Ruble (1992) found that violated expectations regarding the division of childcare

and household responsibilities have a negative effect on the relationship. Goldberg and Perry-Jenkins (2004) found similar results: it appears that it is not the actual division of labor – or rather its degree of inequality – that predicts relationship quality to drop, but the expectation women have of this division. It thus has to do with the women's perceptions. The question here is under what circumstances inequalities in the task division between partners will be perceived as unequal. To explain this process, we can look at relative deprivation theory.

Relative deprivation theory and task division between partners

Relative deprivation theory makes several assumptions about the experience of justice. Firstly, whether someone feels unjustly treated is dependent upon a subjective evaluation of outcomes. Secondly, in order for justice phenomena to become relevant, the outcome must be valued by the individual. Thirdly, the perceptions of inequity are a result of comparison processes. When people perceive they have been treated unjustly, they will feel distressed, and are motivated to try to restore equity in their relationship. When an outcome is similar to that of a comparative referent (e.g. another person), it is considered equitable. When an outcome is considered less than what was expected, the individual will feel deprived in a relative sense (Crosby, 1976; Greenstein, 1996).

It can be argued that there are three elements that contribute to the perceptions of fairness: outcome values, justifications, and comparison referents (Major, 1987, in Greenstein, 1996). Women with more egalitarian preferences differ in general from more traditional women in what they want out of their relationship (outcome values), their perception of the legitimacy of the process that resulted in the outcome (justifications), and in the standards they use to judge the outcome (comparison referents). Greenstein (1996) proposes that inequalities in the division of labor affects perceptions of fairness and relationship quality in different ways for more egalitarian versus more traditional women. He explains three possibilities for this difference, based on RDT. First, there is a difference in relative value women place on various characteristics of their relationships. Egalitarian women might value autonomy and independence, while traditional women might be more concerned with stability and harmony in their relationships. These two types of women probably want and expect something different from their relationships.

Second, there might be a difference in women's choice of comparison referents. A woman might not perceive the inequality in task division as unfair, because she feels that is consistent with what she expected the division to be based on (1) what she perceives in similar women's relationships, (2) past experiences, or (3) the division that is considered normal in her

referent group. These aspects are probably different for more traditional women and more egalitarian women. For example, egalitarian women might base their expectations on their past experiences or those of their family; they might base their expectations on what similar women have, such as their friends; or they might base them on their reference group of women, who are economically and ideologically similar to themselves. Traditional women will probably use different comparison referents for which a more traditional pattern is the status quo.

Third, there may be differences between women in how they react to inequalities in the task division, according to whether they perceive the task division as the result of a justifiable or legitimate process. If a woman truly believes that women in general should take on all household and caretaking duties – even those who work full time –, then she will probably see the inequality between her and her partner as the result of a legitimate process, and not perceive it as unfair (Greenstein, 1996).

Relative deprivation theory and relationship quality

One of the reactions to this perception of unfairness is that a woman might try to change the situation, which might result in dissatisfaction with her relationship if she fails to change it. Another reaction to try to solve the feeling of injustice, is to cognitively restructure the situation (Greenstein, 1996). A woman can, for example, devalue the division itself (“I do not mind doing all the housework”), or her own contribution to the task division (“My work is not that important anyway”), or she can revalue her partner’s contribution (“He earns more than I do and his job is more important so it makes sense that I take a step back”).

Several studies did find differences between more egalitarian and more traditional women. Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, and Siero (2000) found that egalitarian women, in this case defined as “women who are explicit proponents of an equal division of labor and who are in favor of changing society in a more egalitarian direction” (p.760), with an unequal division of labor experienced more discontent in their relationship than did traditional women. Similarly, Dew and Wilcox (2011) and Petts and Knoester (2019) found that especially women who expect more equality in the work/caretaking division, experience increases in time spend on childcare and housework and decreases in time for paid work as stressful, unfair, and an insult for their professional identity.

Based on RDT, we can expect that this change in task division, and especially a change in work hours, will be experienced differently by more traditional women compared to more egalitarian women. Egalitarian women will probably perceive this new inequality in the division of labor as not fair, as this is not in line with what they expect in their relationship,

with what they see at their comparison referents, and what they see as a fair outcome. We therefore expect egalitarian women to experience a larger decrease in relationship quality as a result of a change (decrease) in work hours. Traditional women – those who are more likely to perceive the ‘ideal’ marriage to consist of a man whose main job is financially supporting his family, and a woman who is mainly responsible for caretaking and the household – on the other hand, will probably see a work hour reduction as consistent with their gender ideology and therefore feel that this seemingly unequal distribution is fair. They will therefore experience a smaller decrease in their relationship quality, as a result of a change in their work hours. Hence, our third hypothesis is:

H3: It is expected that among women with a more egalitarian task division before childbirth, reducing work hours after childbirth will have a negative effect on relationship quality (i.e. intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction) eight months after childbirth (relative to before childbirth). This relationship between change in work hours and reduced relationship satisfaction is expected to be absent among women with a more traditional task division before childbirth.

Method

Overview

In this study, an existing longitudinal dataset was used to test the hypotheses. Data was collected in 2011 and 2012 among couples who were expecting their first child. Participants completed a questionnaire during the second or third trimester of their first pregnancy (Time 1), at four months postpartum (Time 2), at eight months postpartum (Time 3) and at 1 year postpartum (Time 4). For this study, data from the first measurement and third measurement were used to test the hypotheses, and only data from couples were used. The first measurement was chosen because it represents a baseline, the situation before childbirth. The third measurement was chosen because it can be expected that women have gotten used to the new situation eight months after childbirth and have resumed working. Several respondents filled in that they were looking for a job or were voluntary unemployed. Due to the fact that this study looks at women who changed their workhours, it was decided to not take into account women who were looking for a job or who were voluntarily unemployed at Time 1.

Participants and procedure

Participants were recruited in 2011 in several ways: through other participants, online pregnancy forums, social media, advertisements, and other sources (e.g. flyers at a midwife's office). Both the mother and father were required to fill in the whole questionnaire. The questionnaire had to be filled in online and was in Dutch.

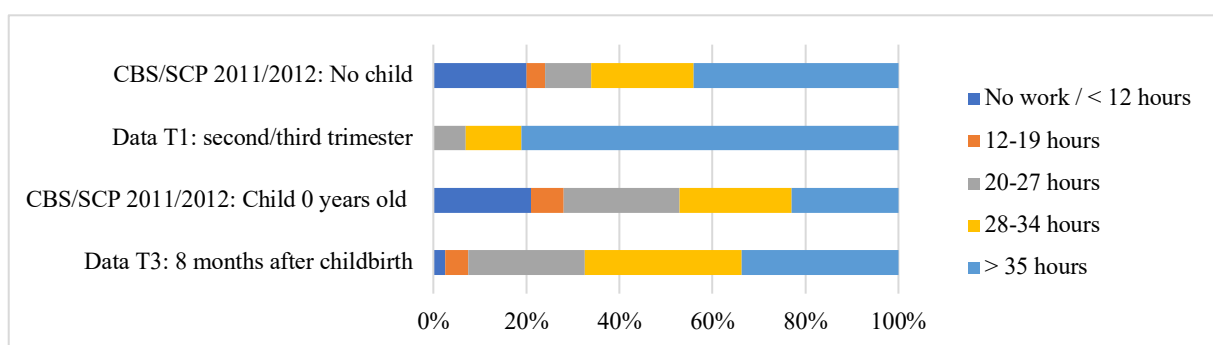
Data were collected via online questionnaires on four different moments. At Time 1, 229 (100%) mothers and 200 (96.7%) fathers participated, at Time 2, 219 (95.6%) mothers and 183 (87.6%) fathers participated, at Time 3, 155 (67.7%) mothers and 122 (58.4%) fathers participated, and at Time 4, 137 (59.8%) mothers and 112 (53.6%) fathers participated. All four waves were completed by 132 (57.6%) of mothers and 97 (46.4%) of fathers. Couples were left in when the woman filled in both wave 1 and wave 3 and when her (male) partner filled in the necessary variables for the cluster analysis in wave 1, and his work hours in wave 3. The final data set consisted of 166 respondents (83 couples).

Participants were on average 23.38 weeks pregnant at Time 1 ($SD = 7.14$). Length of relationship at Time 1 ranged from one year to eighteen years, with an average of 6.30 years ($SD = 3.60$). Five couples reported that the pregnancy was unplanned (6.0%). Of the couples, 47 were married (56.6%), 16 lived together with a cohabitation agreement (19.3%) and 20 lived together without a cohabitation agreement (24.1%). This is representative of young parents in the Netherlands, of which approximately half is not married when they have their first-born (CBS, 2016). Demographics can be found in Table 1.

When we compare the number of work hours that women from the dataset work before and after childbirth to women's average work hours without a child and with a child younger than 1 in the Dutch population (see Figure 1; CBS & SCP, 2018), we see that more women in our dataset work over 35 hours a week than on average in the Netherlands. Furthermore, there are no women in our dataset at Time 1 that work less than 12 hours and only a few at Time 3, which is also not representative of Dutch women in the same period. We could therefore conclude that, when looking at work hours, our sample is not truly representative of the Dutch female population.

Table 1. *Time 1 Sample Characteristics women vs men*

	Women (<i>N</i> = 83)	Men (<i>N</i> = 83)
Age in years (<i>M</i>)	28.90 (<i>SD</i> 3.49)	31.44 (<i>SD</i> 4.56)
Education (%)		
Elementary school	0	1.20
Lower vocational education	1.20	2.41
Intermediate vocational education	22.89	28.92
University of applied sciences	39.76	36.14
University	34.94	28.92
Post-doctoral	1.20	1.20
PHD	0	1.20
Work hours	39.58 (<i>SD</i> 7.55)	46.38 (<i>SD</i> 7.59)
Work hours change T3-T1 ¹	-7.76 (<i>SD</i> 8.59)	-2.34 (<i>SD</i> 7.04)
Work situation %		
Full-time (min. 38 hours)	55.4	79.5
Part-time	44.6	14.5
Looking for work	0	3.6
Voluntarily unemployed	0	2.4
Hours spent on household per week	5.41 (<i>SD</i> 3.96)	4.17 (<i>SD</i> 3.31)

Figure 1. *Number of work hours of Dutch women in 2011/2012² (no child and child of 0 years old) and of women from analyzed sample (second/third trimester and eight months after childbirth)*

Note: ¹ A negative value denotes a reduction in work hours

Note: ² Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) & The Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP)(2014). Emancipatie monitor 2014.

Measures

All scales used are previously validated scales. After calculating the Cronbach's alpha for each scale with its items, the scales were computed by taking the means of the items.

Demographic variables. The demographic variables that were measured and have been analyzed are: age, gender, level of education, work situation, length of relationship, marital status, length of current pregnancy, and whether the pregnancy was planned.

Actual work hours. The actual work hours (including overtime and travel time) on average per week were measured with a single question.

Income. Monthly net income was measured with a single question. Participants could choose between several categories which indicated an income range. The answers consisted of the following categories: less than €1000,-; between €1000,- and €2000,-; between €2000,- and €3000,-; between €3000,- and €4000,-; between €4000,- and €5000,-; more than €5000,-.

Hours spent on household. Average hours spent on household per week was measured with a single question.

Dependent variables^{3,4}

Intimacy. Intimacy was measured with a subscale from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components measure, consisting of 3 items, developed by Fletcher and colleagues (2000). The items from this subscale were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) and asked respondents how satisfied they were with the intimacy in their relationship. The Cronbach's alpha for the 3-item Intimacy subscale at T1 was $\alpha=.81$, the Cronbach's alpha at T3 was $\alpha=.70$, indicating good reliability of both scales.

Passion. Passion was measured with a subscale from the Perceived Relationship Quality Components measure, developed by Fletcher and colleagues (2000). The items from this subscale were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (very dissatisfied) to 5 (very satisfied) and asked respondents how satisfied they were with the passion in their relationship. Two items were added to this construct, namely 'How satisfied are you with how often you and your partner have sex?' and 'How satisfied are you with the quality of the sex between you and your partner'. The Cronbach's alpha for the 5-item Passion subscale at T1 was $\alpha=.89$, the Cronbach's alpha at T3 was $\alpha=.93$. These alphas point to good to excellent internal consistencies.

Note: ³ Commitment was also measured in the questionnaire, but showed very low item correlations. It was therefore decided to not include commitment scores in the analyses.

Note: ⁴ Dutch translations of intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction questions can be found in Appendix A.

Relationship satisfaction. Relationship satisfaction was measured with a subscale from the Investment Model Scale, consisting of 5 items, developed by Rusbult, Martz, and Agnew (1998). The items from this subscale were scored on a five-point scale ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (completely agree), and asked several questions regarding relationship satisfaction, for example: 'I feel satisfied with our relationship' and 'My relationship is close to ideal'. The Cronbach's alpha for the 5-item Relationship satisfaction subscale at T1 was $\alpha=.61$, which is considered adequate. The Cronbach's alpha at T3 was $\alpha= .86$, which is considered a good internal consistency.

Other variables that were measured in the used dataset focused on work aspects (e.g. satisfaction with salary), personal resources (e.g. stress), adaptive processes (e.g. conflict behavior), and several questions regarding the satisfaction with e.g. social support. Due to specific research questions and the broad informational contents of the dataset, these variables were not analyzed in the current study.

Statistical analyses

Firstly, same sex couples and couples who had not filled in the first or third wave, or necessary variables in one of the two waves, were excluded from the analysis. Secondly, a preliminary analysis was conducted. This process consisted of identifying missing answers. Secondly, outliers were identified. The first step for outlier detection was to create boxplots and identify outliers. To check the identified outliers, standardized values were created. Datapoints were considered outliers when $z > 2.58$ (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). Because the identified outliers were considered properly sampled from the population, it was decided to not exclude these but to change the score for just the outlying case so that it is still deviant, but not as deviant as it was. For these cases, a raw score was assigned that is one unit larger (or smaller) than the next most extreme score. This was done to reduce the impact of the outlier. Finally, means, standard deviations, and bivariate correlations (Pearson) were calculated for every research variable. This included both dependent and independent variables, as well as variables that were used for the cluster analysis. To explore the relationships between the research variables and net income, bivariate Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were calculated, as net income is an ordinal variable.

After the preliminary analyses, a cluster analysis using K-means clustering was performed to identify two groups of couples: a relatively more traditional group and a relatively more egalitarian group. Although there is some research on egalitarian and traditional task divisions between partners, with men being more responsible for paid work and income and

women being more responsible for caretaking no definition is provided on what these two types of divisions entail exactly. Due to this lack of information, it was decided to take a data-driven approach to distinguish two groups of couples based on their task division before childbirth (T1) (i.e. more egalitarian vs. more traditional). With SPSS 26, a K-means Cluster analysis was used to generate two groups varying on their egalitarian characteristics. In line with earlier research on task divisions (e.g. Wilkie, Ferree & Ratcliff, 1998), the number of paid work hours of the women and the difference in hours between her and her partner were added to define the clusters, as well as her net income, the difference in net income between her and her partner, her household hours, the difference in household hours, her age, and the age difference between her and her partner. These variables were chosen because these are often thought of as explanations for a woman's choice to reduce her work hours while her partner keeps the same work hours. Due to the small sample size, we decided to identify two clusters to maximize group size within clusters. The measures used were standardized to prevent multicollinearity and to resolve issues that exist when different scales are used. Furthermore, because not all participants filled in all the questions regarding the variables that were used in the cluster analysis, cases were excluded pairwise. Afterwards, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to test the validity of the clusters. Due to the fact that a MANOVA only takes into account couples that filled in all cluster variables and does not look at couples who are missing one or several answers, we also conducted separate analyses of variance (ANOVA) to test the differences between the two identified clusters on the cluster variables.

Overview of analyses

To test Hypothesis 1, paired samples *t* tests were conducted to assess the impact of the transition to parenthood on intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction. For these tests, scores on Time 1 were compared to scores on Time 3.

To test Hypothesis 2, an independent samples *t* test was performed, to see if there is a difference in work hours change between egalitarian and traditional women.

To test Hypothesis 3, one-way ANCOVA's (analyses of covariance) were conducted to determine statistically significant differences between traditional and egalitarian women in the effect of work hour changes (T3-T1) on their levels of intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction eight months post-partum (Time 3), controlling for intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction in the second or third trimester (Time 1)⁵.

Note: ⁵Due to a lack of male respondents that filled in work hours at Time 3 ($N = 56$) and a non-significant effect in the ANCOVA's, it was decided to exclude *work hour change of partner* from the analyses

Results

Preliminary analysis

To explore the relationships between the different independent and dependent variables, first, bivariate Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficients (r) were calculated. Using Cohen's (1988) guidelines, significant medium to large positive correlations were found between the dependent variables (i.e. intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction). Second, in order to explore the relationships between the research variables and net income, bivariate Spearman's rho correlation coefficients were calculated. Significant medium to large correlations were found between net income and household hours, age and cluster membership (see Table 2).

Cluster analysis

A K-means cluster analysis identified two meaningful clusters (see Table 3). MANOVA on the clustering variables showed an overall significant effect (Wilks' Lambda = .27, $F(8,63) = 21.73$, $p < .001$). The two clusters were significantly different from each other in terms of women's work hours and hours spent on household, and the differences between her and her partner in these variables, and her net income, but not in terms of her age, the age difference between her and her partner, and the difference in net income between her and her partner. An analysis of the mean score on each of the subscales formed the basis for naming and describing the clusters. This led to 22 women in the first cluster, referred to as the more traditional cluster, and 61 women in the second cluster, referred to as the more egalitarian cluster. The egalitarian cluster includes women with partners who are more equal in work hours, net income, and hours spent on the household. The more traditional cluster includes women whose partners have more work hours, a higher net income, and who spent less hours on the household than their women.

Table 3. Cluster description along grouping variables.

Item	Cluster 1	Cluster 2	<i>F-value</i>	<i>p-value</i>
	More traditional (<i>N</i> =22) <i>Mean (SD)</i>	More egalitarian (<i>N</i> =61) <i>Mean (SD)</i>		
Work hours woman	32.91 (7.42)	41.98 (6.04)	32.24	<.001***
Work hours difference (man-woman)	14.52 (9.38)	3.72 (7.61)	27.19	<.001***
Household hours woman	10.27 (4.38)	3.63 (1.65)	100.96	<.001***
Household hours difference (man-woman)	-5.59 (4.88)	.41 (3.85)	33.55	<.001***
Net income women ²	2.05 (9.38)	2.48 (.60)	8.25	.005**
Net income difference man- women	.45	.14	1.62	.208
Age woman	29.59	28.35	2.05	.156
Age difference man-women	2.50	2.53	.001	.972

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

Note:² Net income was asked in ranges: 1 = less than €1000,- a month, 2 = between €1000,- and €2000,- a month, 3 = between €2000,- and €3000 a month, 4 = between €3000,- and €4000,- a month, 5 = between €4000,- and €5000,- a month, 6 = more than €5000 a month.

Table 2. Means, standard deviations, Cronbach's α (diagonally) and correlations between variables ($N = 83$)

Variables	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Cluster	1.73	.44											
2. Age woman	28.68	3.50	-.16										
3. Net income woman ²	2.37	.64	.31**	.40**									
4. Household hours	5.41	3.96	-.75**	.14	-.21								
5. Work hour change	-7.76	8.60	-.17	.09	.04	.15							
T3-T1													
6. Intimacy T1	4.51	.46	-.19	-.08	.10	.11	-.10	(.808)					
7. Intimacy T3	4.08	.61	-.11	.05	.09	.01	-.15	.56**	(.704)				
8. Relationship satisfaction T1	4.58	.37	-.04	.11	.19	.01	-.13	.51**	.44**	(.611)			
9. Relationship satisfaction T3	4.49	.54	-.19	.13	.07	.06	-.10	.43**	.74**	.55**	(.859)		
10. Passion T1	3.67	.74	-.10	.10	.10	.08	-.002	.56**	.49**	.31**	.28*	(.895)	
11. Passion T3	3.23	.92	-.14	-.01	-.01	.15	-.18	.41**	.71**	.29**	.55**	.61**	(.931)
12. Work hour change partner T3-T1	-2.34	7.04	.10	-.05	-.05	-.08	-.24	.13	.06	.04	-.09	-.001	-.01

NB. *SD* = Standard deviation

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

Note:² Net income was asked in ranges: 1 = less than €1000,- a month, 2 = between €1000,- and €2000,- a month, 3 = between €2000,- and €3000 a month, 4 = between €3000,- and €4000,- a month, 5 = between €4000,- and €5000,- a month, 6 = more than €5000 a month.

Testing the hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Does relationship quality change during the transition to parenthood?

Intimacy. A two-tailed, paired samples t test with an alpha of .05 was used to compare intimacy scores at Time 1 ($M = 4.51$, $SD = .46$) and intimacy scores at Time 3 ($M = 4.08$, $SD = .61$). On average, intimacy scores were significantly lower at Time 3 compared to Time 1, $t(82) = 7.38$, $p < .001$. Cohen's d for this test was 0.79, which is considered a medium to large effect.

Passion. A two-tailed, paired samples t test with an alpha of .05 was used to compare passion scores at Time 1 ($M = 3.67$, $SD = .74$) and passion scores at Time 3 ($M = 3.23$, $SD = .92$). On average, passion scores were significantly lower at Time 3 compared to Time 1, $t(82) = 5.42$, $p < .001$. Cohen's d for this test was 0.54, which is considered a medium effect.

Relationship satisfaction. A two-tailed, paired samples t test with an alpha of .05 was used to compare relationship satisfaction at Time 1 ($M = 4.58$, $SD = .37$) and relationship satisfaction at Time 3 ($M = 4.49$, $SD = .54$). On average, relationship satisfaction scores at Time 3 were .09 points lower than at Time 1, but this difference was not statistically significant, $t(82) = 1.68$, $p = .097$. Cohen's d for this test was 0.19, which can be described as a small effect.

Conclusion. Partly confirming Hypothesis 1, a reduction was found on two indicators of relationship quality, namely passion and intimacy. No significant reduction was found for relationship satisfaction. This suggests that on average, passion and intimacy of couples in this sample dropped during the transition into parenthood, but that couples are not less satisfied with their relationship.

Hypothesis 2: Differences in work hour change between more egalitarian or traditional women

An independent samples t test was used to compare average work hour change reported by women in the 'more traditional' cluster ($N = 22$, $M = -5.41$, $SD = 12.09$) to that of women in the 'more egalitarian' cluster ($N = 58$, $M = -8.66$, $SD = 6.74$). Levene's test indicated unequal variances ($F = 8.81$, $p = .004$), so degrees of freedom were adjusted from 78 to 26.11. Consequently, Welch's t test was used to compare the work hour change of the 'more traditional' cluster to that of the 'more egalitarian' cluster. The t test was non-significant, $t(26.10) = 1.19$, $p = .24$, two-tailed, $d = 0.39$, 95% CI of the mean difference $[-2.36, 8.85]$. This means that there is no significant difference in work hour change between 'more traditional' women and 'more egalitarian' women: egalitarian women do not significantly go back more in work hours than traditional women in the current sample.

Hypothesis 3: Differences in the effect of work hour change on dependent variables between more egalitarian and more traditional women

Hypothesis 3a: intimacy. A one-way analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) was used to compare the effect of work hour change on intimacy levels at T3 for more traditional women and more egalitarian women. A covariate was included to partial out the effects of participants' intimacy levels at T1. The ANCOVA indicated that intimacy at T1 was significantly related to intimacy at T3, $F(1,75) = 26.12, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .26$. Furthermore, there was no significant effect of work hour change on intimacy T3, $F(1,75) = 1.35, p = .25, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .02$. Also, the effect of cluster membership on intimacy T3 was statistically non-significant, $F(1,75) = .81, p = .37, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$. Finally, there was no significant interaction between cluster membership and work hour change $F(1,75) = 1.01, p = .32, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$.

Hypothesis 3b: passion. An ANCOVA was used to compare the effect of work hour change on passion levels at T3 for more traditional women and more egalitarian women. A covariate was included to partial out the effects of participants' passion levels at T1. The ANCOVA indicated that passion T1 was significantly related to passion T3, $F(1,75) = 44.24, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .37$. Also, the effect of work hour change on passion T3 was statistically significant, $F(1,75) = 2.47, p = .03, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .06, B = -.02$, which points to a negative effect of work hour change on passion scores. This means that women who go back more in work hours, have a smaller reduction in passion scores than women who go back less in work hours (or who have a smaller change in work hours). Furthermore, the effect of cluster membership on passion T3 was statistically non-significant, $F(1,75) = .66, p = .42, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$. Finally, there is no significant interaction between cluster membership and work hour change $F(1,75) = .18, p = .67, \text{partial } \eta^2 > .01$.

Hypothesis 3c: relationship satisfaction. An ANCOVA was used to compare the effect of work hour change on relationship satisfaction at T3 for more traditional women and more egalitarian women. A covariate was included to partial out the effects of participants' relationship satisfaction at T1. Examination of the Shapiro-Wilk statistics and histograms indicated that the ANCOVA assumption of normality was violated, but due to the robust nature of ANCOVA, this is not considered problematic. The ANCOVA indicated that relationship satisfaction T1 was significantly related to relationship satisfaction T3, $F(1,75) = 29.9, p < .01, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .29$. Furthermore, the effect of work hour change on relationship satisfaction T3 was statistically non-significant, $F(1,75) = .43, p = .52, \text{partial } \eta^2 = .01$. Also, the effect of cluster membership on relationship satisfaction T3 was statistically non-significant, $F(1,75) =$

2.45, $p = .12$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$. Finally, there was no significant interaction between cluster membership and work hour change $F(1,75) = .02$, $p = .90$, partial $\eta^2 < .01$.

Discussion

The general aim of the current study was to extend previous research on the effect of the transition to parenthood on relationship quality in three ways. Firstly, based on the outcomes of previous studies, we tested the effect of the transition to parenthood on different aspects of relationship quality after childbirth. It was expected that relationship quality would drop during this transition. Secondly, we tested whether traditionalization, i.e. a drop in work hours, affects relationship quality eight months after childbirth. It was expected that a larger reduction in work hours would negatively affect the different aspects of relationship quality. Thirdly, we tested whether task division before childbirth played any role in this association. Based on relative deprivation theory, it was expected that women who were relatively more egalitarian before childbirth would experience a larger drop in relationship quality as a result of going back in work hours, compared to women who were relatively more traditional before childbirth. In the following paragraphs, major findings, implications, limitations, and suggestions for future research will be discussed.

Relationship quality during the transition to parenthood

In line with prior research, we found support for the first hypothesis. The transition to parenthood seems to be related to a reduction in different aspects of relationship quality. All aspects of relationship quality, i.e. intimacy, passion, and relationship satisfaction dropped between the second/third trimester to eight months after childbirth. This is congruent with previous studies (e.g. Hackel & Ruble, 1992; Kluwer, 2010). The drop in different aspects of relationship quality could be explained by several factors, such as the new experience of parenting, where most attention goes to the child and less to the relationship, and possible arguments that might develop as parents have to find a way to agree upon their own way of caring for and raising the child (Kamp Dush et al., 2014). As we did not have a non-parent control group, we cannot be sure that this decrease is solely the result of the transition to parenthood. However, because many previous studies did demonstrate the negative influence of the transition to parenthood, with a non-parent control group, we can say that this transition is likely to be related to a reduction in relationship quality.

Work hour change as an explanatory factor

The second hypothesis predicted that there was a difference between more egalitarian women and more traditional women in how much they reduced their work hours. We expected that more egalitarian women would go back more in work hours than more traditional women. Contrary to our hypothesis, we found no significant difference between these two groups. It might be that the average number of work hours for our group of traditional women at Time 1 was higher than what is 'common' for relatively traditional women. When we look at the study of Buunk et al. (2002), we see that their 'traditional' group works on average 14.55 hours per week. In our sample, the traditional cluster works on average 32.91 hours at Time 1. We could expect that, when women already work few hours (e.g. in Buunk et al., 2002), they will not go back in work hours as much as they did in our sample, and a difference in work hours reduction between egalitarian and traditional women would be more likely to be found. To find a difference between the two groups, there has to be a relatively big difference in scores between the two groups, which was not the case in the current study.

Work hour change, task division, and relationship quality

The third hypothesis predicted that women who were relatively more egalitarian before childbirth would experience a larger drop in relationship quality as a result of going back in work hours, compared to women who were relatively more traditional before childbirth. Firstly, it was found that type of task division before childbirth had no effect, neither directly nor as a moderator for the association between work hour change and relationship quality. We did find, however, that work hour change significantly predicted passion scores. It was found that a larger reduction in work hours predicted passion scores to drop less vehemently, while women who did not reduce their work hours, experienced the strongest reduction in passion. Bear in mind that this was found regardless of how passionate the relationship was before childbirth.

This result is contrary to what we expected. We expected that reducing work hours would be detrimental for the relationship, in line with previous research of Buunk et al. (2002), but we see the opposite: it seems to be difficult to maintain passion in the relationship when both partners remain working the same number of hours. This might be explained by time-based work-family conflict (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). When time and attention devoted to one role make it difficult to spend enough time in another role, time-based conflict occurs. Besides being a worker, a mother, and many other things, a woman also has a role as wife or partner. Time-based conflicts can take up two forms: the first form occurs when one or multiple roles, in this case the role of mother and worker, take up so much time, that there is hardly any

time left for the other role, in this case the role of partner. The other form occurs when preoccupation with a specific role due to role demands results in an individual being mentally absent in another role. For example, a mother is having quality time with her partner, but she might be mentally preoccupied with work issues or her child. This ultimately leads to time and energy needed for the romantic partner role, being spent on the work or family role (Edwards & Rothbard, 2000). This can result in unfulfilled demands of the romantic role, which, in the case of the current study, may lead to a larger decrease in passion for women who do not reduce their work hours that much or at all, during the transition to parenthood.

Theoretical implications

This study contributes to existing literature regarding the transition to parenthood and its effects on the relationship. Despite the large amount of research on this subject, much less is known about the roles of traditionalization and task division before childbirth. Previous research by Buunk et al. (2000) found that an unequal division of labor causes more discontent among egalitarian women compared to traditional women, but the role of a change in work hours has not received much attention. By including that aspect to the analysis, the current study extends existing research.

As the current study was focused solely on the relationship quality of the mother, it might be interesting to also look at the relationship quality of the partner. The current study shows that relationship quality deteriorates for the mother, but the experienced relationship quality of the father has not been taken into account. It could be that his relationship quality drops as well, but not as much, as was found in a previous meta-analysis by Twenge et al. (2003). Previous studies suggest that there may be gender differences in timing and magnitude of changes in the relationship after childbirth. For example, a study by Grote and Clark (2001) found that mothers tend to demonstrate a sudden decline in relationship satisfaction after childbirth, whereas fathers tend to show a more gradual decline, which is not evident until six to fifteen months after childbirth. It might therefore be interesting to also take into account the relationship quality of the partner when looking at the effect of traditionalization.

Finally, it might be useful to pay attention to fathers who reduce their work hours, to see what the effects are for the relationship. Due to attrition over time, a problem common in this field of study (Schoppe-Sullivan & Fagan, 2020) and strict selection criteria (i.e. we only included couples in the analyses of whom the woman worked both at Time 1 and Time 3 and filled in all necessary variables), this variable was not taken into account. When the father goes back in work hours and takes on more caretaking and household duties, while the mother stays

working the same number of hours, it might be that this is less negative for the relationship compared to when they stay working the same number of hours. It might even be that the relationship suffers less during the transition to parenthood, when they share both paid and unpaid work more equally, as they have more time with each other and for the family (Adema et al., 2017).

Practical implications

To obtain a more equal division between men and women, family policies must be in place that facilitate fathers to reduce their work hours and take on a more equal share of caretaking and household duties, and as a result reduce tensions in the work-family balance. Despite several family policies that are in place in the Netherlands that make a more equal task division possible, such as public daycare services for preschool-aged children and partially paid paternity leave, we still observe the phenomenon of traditionalization, in which the mother makes concessions. A report by the Dutch Ministry of Finance (2020) states that expanding paternity leave directly after childbirth, might result in a more egalitarian task division between partners. Until recently, fathers could only take up one week of paternity leave, which was payed for by the employer. From July 1 2020 onwards, partners in the Netherlands are allowed to take on 5 weeks of 'birth' leave, during which they can get a benefit from the UWV, instead of salary from their employer (Rijksoverheid, n.d.). Advantages of extending paternity leave are supposedly less earnings- and career penalties and/or hiring discrimination associated with taking leave for childbearing women, as temporal leave from a job around childbirth is not solely a risk posed by women, but also by men (Adema et al., 2017).

However, despite this positive development, only extending paternity leave policies might not be sufficient to get more egalitarian task divisions in Dutch couples. Additionally, it is important that a societal shift takes place, in which father involvement is encouraged and socially accepted (Thompson, Beauvais & Lyness, 1999; Adema et al., 2017). A recent report by Rutgers, an organizational center of expertise on sexual and reproductive health and rights in the Netherlands, shows that fathers hardly use their paternity leave, because they are afraid for negative reactions, it is too much hustle for the organization, or because it is not considered 'normal' in the organization or in the fathers social network (Rutgers, 2019). The step towards more paternity leave in the Netherlands might thus a good first step, but in order to achieve a more equal society, we have many more steps to take in society.

Limitations and recommendations for future research

A number of factors limit the results of the current study. Firstly, the sample that was studied in the current study consisted of only parents. We therefore do not know if the decrease in relationship quality is an effect exclusive to new parents, or that it happened to any couple during the time the data was collected, non-parents included. Other studies provide contradicting evidence regarding this topic. A meta-analysis by Twenge et al. (2003) found that first-time parents experience a greater and more sudden decline in relationship satisfaction than nonparents, while other studies propagate that there is no difference between parents and non-parents (e.g. Huston & Vangelisti, 1995). To rule out alternative explanations like maturation effects, it would be useful to repeat the current study and use a comparison group of non-parents.

Secondly, the current study used two measurements, namely the second/third trimester of pregnancy and eight months after childbirth. To see whether the decrease in relationship quality is permanent, it would be useful to include more measurements. Kelly and McGrath (1988, in Huston & Vangelisti, 1995) argue that researchers need to incorporate multiple measurements when conceptualizing causality, as an effect can follow different paths. It might only be a temporal effect that occurs in the first year after childbirth, but it could also be that relationship quality keeps decreasing over time (e.g. Twenge et al., 2003) or that it returns to prenatal levels after the child reaches the school age. It is therefore recommended to repeat the current study but include multiple measurements over a longer course of time.

The third limitation has to do with the measured variables. A drop in relationship quality due to preferences regarding task division has been explained by RTD and work-family conflict. However, in the used dataset, only aspects of the 'real' task division were measured, such as work hours. Underlying variables that could have explained certain relationships between variables, such as prenatal expectations (Belsky, 1985; Hackel & Ruble, 1992), implicit gender-role stereotypes (Endendijk, Derks & Mesman, 2018), and experienced work-family conflict have not been measured. In a future study, it would be recommended to include these factors, so it can be tested whether those expected explanations are valid explanations.

Fourthly, as was mentioned before, our traditional group was not similar to traditional women in previous studies (e.g. Buunk et al. 2002). In future studies, it is recommended to look more closely at what being 'traditional' and 'egalitarian' entails in previous studies, rather than using a data-driven approach. Furthermore, as Buunk and colleagues (2002) included gender-role stereotypes to also define who was egalitarian and who was traditional, it is recommended

to include both gender-role attitudes and factual information in future studies to decide who belongs to which group.

Finally, due to fact that we used an existing dataset, which was collected for a different study with a different purpose, and the selection criteria we used for the current study, the sample we did the analyses on was relatively small ($N = 83$). This small sample size reduces the power of the analysis, which increases the chance of a type II error. This means that we might incorrectly accepted the null hypothesis and the study might have failed to find significant (subtle) effects that actually exist. Another aspect that decreases the power of the analyses is the relatively big difference in group size between the more traditional ($N = 22$) and the more egalitarian group ($N = 61$). This large imbalance might not have adequate statistical power to detect any differences between these groups, leading to a higher chance of making a Type II error. As we tested an interaction effect in the current study, and interaction designs ask for an even bigger sample size than normal designs with only main effects, which in the case of G*Power calculator, is not taken into account (for more info, see the article of Roger Giner-Sorolla about Powering your interaction, from January 24, 2018). For future studies, it is recommended to use a bigger sample in general and to have a more equal division between the egalitarian and traditional groups.

Conclusion

The present study contributes to the knowledge regarding the impact of work hour change and task division on several aspects of relationship quality across the transition to parenthood. Results showed that for our sample, the transition to parenthood seemed to have a negative effect on relationship quality, but that a decrease in work hours weakened this negative effect for passion. This means that women who more strongly decreased their work hours across the transition to parenthood, experienced a lesser decrease in passion. We could conclude that in our society, a transition to a more traditional task division, compared to holding on to an egalitarian division, might not be that bad after all, at least for experienced passion in a woman's relationship. However, this enforces the norm of traditionalization in Dutch society: it is a self-enforcing mechanism. When women experience firsthand that their passion reduces when they keep working the same number of hours after childbirth, or when they hear experiences from their environment, they might decide to reduce their hours after all, while they first might have tried to maintain an equal task division. This way, women live up to the existing norm of traditionalization and traditionalization will stay the status quo in the Netherlands. For this to change, it might be necessary to look more closely at other ways to create more equal divisions

in couples, for example by looking at father involvement (e.g. the partner changing his work hours) and societal norms that promote the move to a traditional division.

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Appendix A: questionnaire

Many variables were measured in the used dataset, but only the items that were used for the current study are stated below.

Demographic variables

1. Wat is uw geboortedatum?
2. Wat is uw geslacht?
3. Wat is uw huidige werksituatie
 - a. Ik werk full-time (minstens 38 uur per week)
 - b. Ik werk part-time
 - c. Ik ben werk-zoekende
 - d. Ik heb geen betaald werk (vrijwillig werkloos)
4. Hoeveel uren werkt u feitelijk gemiddeld per week? (inclusief overuren en reistijd)
5. Wat is uw netto inkomen per maand in euro's?
 - a. Minder dan 1000
 - b. Tussen 1000 en 2000
 - c. Tussen 2000 en 3000
 - d. Tussen 3000 en 4000
 - e. Tussen 4000 en 5000
 - f. Meer dan 5000
6. Wat is uw burgerlijke staat?
7. Hoe lang hebt u een relatie met uw partner (in jaren)?
8. Hoeveel tijd heeft u de afgelopen week besteed aan huishouden (in uren)?
9. Wat is de hoogste opleiding die u hebt gevolgd of die u nu volgt?
 - a. Lagere school
 - b. Lager beroepsonderwijs (LTS, LEAO, VGLO, Huishoudschool, LBO)
 - c. (M)ULO, 3 jarige HBS, MAVO, MBO, VMBO, Gymnasium, HBS, Atheneum, HAVO
 - d. Kweekschool, Ped. Academie, Soc. Academie, HTS, HEAO, HBO
 - e. Universiteit (WO)
 - f. Anders namelijk...
10. Hoeveel weken bent u (is uw partner) in verwachting
11. Was de zwangerschap gepland?

Relationship variables**Intimacy**

Hoe tevreden bent u met:	Heel ontevreden	Ontevreden	Niet ontevreden/ niet tevreden	Tevreden	Heel tevreden
Hoe intiem uw relatie is?					
Hoe hecht uw relatie is?					
Hoe verbonden u bent met uw partner?					

Passion

Hoe tevreden bent u met:	Heel ontevreden	Ontevreden	Niet ontevreden/ niet tevreden	Tevreden	Heel tevreden
Hoe hartstochtelijk uw relatie is?					
Hoe wellustig uw relatie is?					
Hoe intens uw relatie is op seksueel gebied?					
Hoe vaak u en uw partner seks hebben?					
De kwaliteit van de seks tussen u en uw partner?					

Relationship satisfaction

	Helemaal oneens	Gedeeltelijk oneens	Niet eens, niet oneens	Gedeeltelijk eens	Helemaal mee eens
Ik ben over het algemeen tevreden met mijn relatie.					
Mijn relatie is veel beter dan relaties van anderen.					
Mijn relatie lijkt op de ideale relatie.					
Mijn relatie geeft me voldoening en maakt me gelukkig.					
Ik sta over het algemeen positief tegenover mijn relatie.					