

Economic Dependency in Cohabitation and Marriage, and the Division of Labor in the Home

VOLKER LUDWIG *

Abstract

Using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel, this study follows 850 initially cohabiting couples, for 7.7 years on average, in order to examine the impact of changes in relative annual earnings on changes in spouses' housework hours and in their relative contributions to domestic chores. Findings from multivariate fixed-effects models support the view that marriage reinforces the traditional female homemaker model because wives become more economically dependent on their partners following the transition to first marriage. Moreover, marriage seems to strengthen the impact of relative resources on the division of domestic labor. These processes appear for the most part to be gender-neutral: under conditions of a modern female breadwinner marriage, husbands increase their participation in housework substantially, and they do so even more than otherwise similar cohabiting men. Results are in line with predictions of resource-based theories. In contrast to previous studies, the author finds only mild evidence of women displaying their adherence to gender norms despite contradicting economic incentives. Similar arguments that husbands and wives are 'doing family' can be ruled out empirically.

* PhD candidate in sociology, University of Mannheim, Center for Doctoral Studies in the Social and Behavioral Sciences (CDSS), D7, 27, D-68131 Mannheim, phone: +49 (0)621-181-2418, email: vludwig@mail.uni-mannheim.de.