

1. Introduction

For decades, it was argued that men would only hold more marital power because they were the main (if not only) breadwinner. Now that women make their own living, it was assumed that those resource contributions would just as easily translate into marital power as it has been observed with men. If everything would go as planned, women should nowadays experience the most accommodating relationships they have ever experienced. Based on equality, women would bargain for autonomy and connection in their relationship, backed up by their significant resource contributions. Women would no longer be the ones that had to balance work and family on their own. They would bargain with their partners to find a balance that includes both spouses in both hemispheres: family and work life. But do women hold now more marital power and have stronger input into the decision-making of the household? The short answer is: No.

The long answer will follow. Even when assuming that women's resource contributions are as easily translated into marital power, it seems like women do not know how to make their share of marital power count. When being discontent in a relationship, women seem to prefer leaving the relationship over bargaining with their partner and changing the relationship to be more fitting to their needs. The female financial independence is causing women to exit relationships more easily as they are not dependent on their spouses' income anymore. This phenomenon is controversial to what male financial independence does. Men have used their share of marital power (that is derived from relationship contributions like income) to bargain in relationships and change them to be accommodating to their needs. Of course, no one expected it for women to be different. But as women became more financial independent, the divorce rate raised. For women their financial independence gave them an opportunity to leave unsatisfying relationships, offering them a choice that they did not have before. But even when this choice might be a relief for many women at first, the incapability of using their marital power to bargain and change relationships to their needs will render them dissatisfied in any relationship to come.

England and Stanek Kilbourne see fear of conflict as the main reason why women would rather use their marital power to exit a relationship than to bargain for a

more accommodating relationship (England and Stanek Kilbourne 164). It seems that women today have access to the power to change relationships for the first time in history but have not used it yet. Fear of conflict might be one reason. An identification with gender stereotypes that depicts women as communal and nice might be another reason. In order to find out what influences female decision-making and the usage of female marital power, the differences that make up unequal decision-making in partnerships will be explored.

The core of this work is the postulation of a theoretical framework that includes gender system, marital power and relationship equality. These three spheres are important to female decision-making in couples with special attention to the usage of female marital power. Establishing the framework lays the foundation to further pursue the answer to the question of how the use of female marital power is influenced by relationship equality and conflict. Starting with the gender system, an understanding will be gained on how current culture influences relationship bargaining and thus the distribution of power within every female-male partnership. Continuing to marital power, these cultural forces will be further explored as they influence the power distribution even before bargaining takes place by devaluing female relationship contributions. The outcome of relationship bargaining is the varying degrees of relationship equality a couple can attain. Through the gender system bias only few couples behold relationship equality as current gender stereotypes work against them. The theoretical framework will be tested concerning the connection of conflict and relationship equality on the usage of female marital power. Leading to the research question:

How do the level of relationship equality and the level of conflict account for variance from original preference in female decision-making?

The research interest asks for a connection of relationship equality and conflict level and their potential effect on deviation from the original preference for female decision-making. The deviation from the original preference is not only a measurement on how far the female decision-maker will win the argument but also a measurement on how far the female decision-maker will make her marital power count in the bargaining.