

# Childbirth and changes in the distribution of resources and housework:

## Is couples' power allocation affected?

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# Why power?

- Social inequalities within households affect individuals' capabilities outside the household.
- Resources and unpaid work are often unequally distributed between household members (e.g. Vogler 2004; Roy 2005).
- Inequalities within couples are interrelated with power unbalances (Pahl 1983).
- Couples' power allocation is a crucial dimension of gender equality in societies.

# What is power?

## Influence on behavior

- the relative ability to influence another person's attitude or behavior (Rollins and Bahr 1976; Sprecher and Felmlee, 1997; Thibaut and Kelly 1991)

## Influence on results

- the capacity to produce intended effects (Browning et al. 1999; Gray-Little and Burks 1983)

# Who has power?

**Social exchange and resource theory** (e.g. Emerson 1962, Blau 1964, Homans 1964)

- The person with more resources has more power in the relationship.

**Gender theory** (e.g. Lorber 2003, West and Zimmermann 2002)

- Gender as a social institution frames partners' interaction.
- Individuals interact according to their gender identity.
- Women are less powerful than men – even when having more resources.

# Application of theories

## Rational choice theories

- have been mainly applied to the study of decision-making and money management systems in the U.S. and UK

## Gender theories

- have been used to analyze the division of housework and child care

## Few research on power

- has been conducted for Germany
- accounts for the dynamic character of intimate relationships

But: **Power can change!**

Do changes in partners' relative resources and the division of housework change their power allocation?

Do transitions such as marriage or childbirth change couples' power?

# Hypotheses

- The partner who's resources increase gets more power.
- Men profit more from an increase of resources than women.
- Changes to non-traditional gender arrangements increase men's power.
- Marriage and childbirth traditionalize relationships and, thus, decrease women's power.

# Empirical Strategy

## Data and sample

*pairfam* 2008/2009 – 2013

- Heterosexual couples (4.245 couple-years)
- Power information for both partners
- Separate analyses for men and women

## Method

Fixed-effects linear regression models



## Dependent variables

Influence on behavior

“How often does your partner make you to do things his or her way?”

Influence on results

“How often does your partner get his or her way when you can’t agree on something?”

## Explanatory variables

Resources

Relative income, relative employment status

Gender arrangements

Division of housework

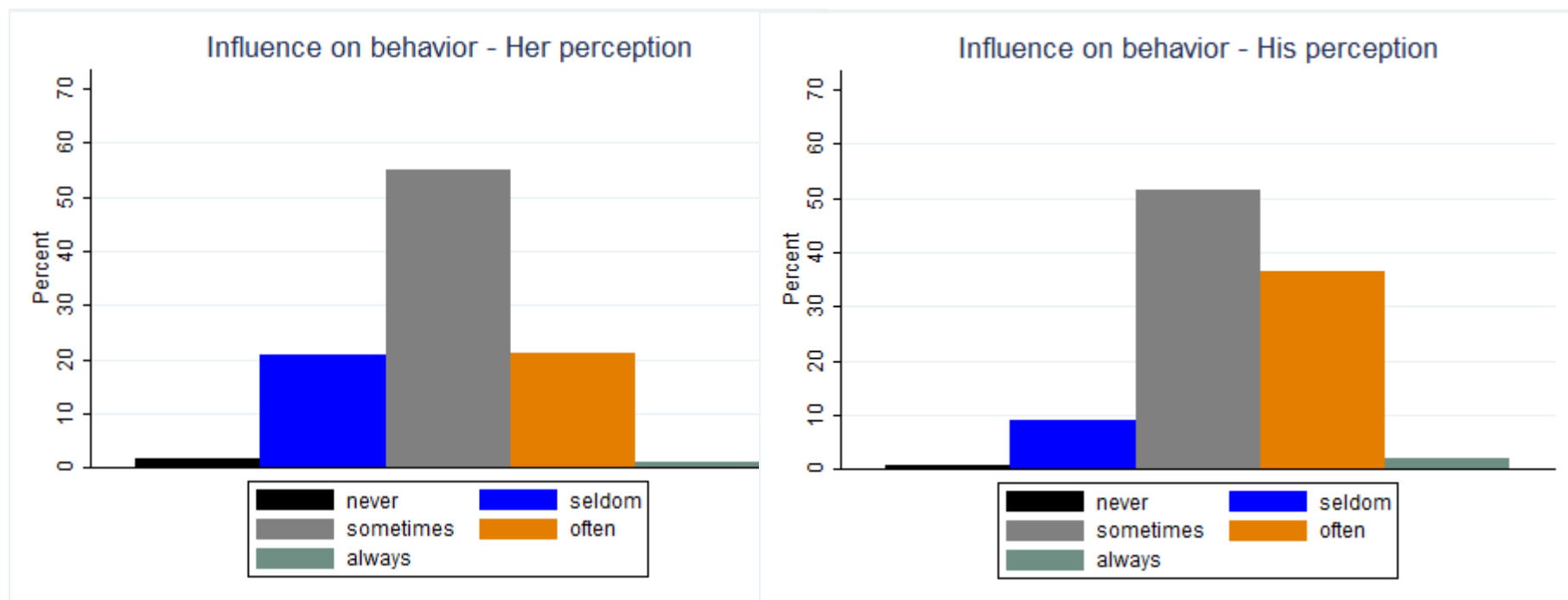
Transitions

Marriage, Child

## Controls

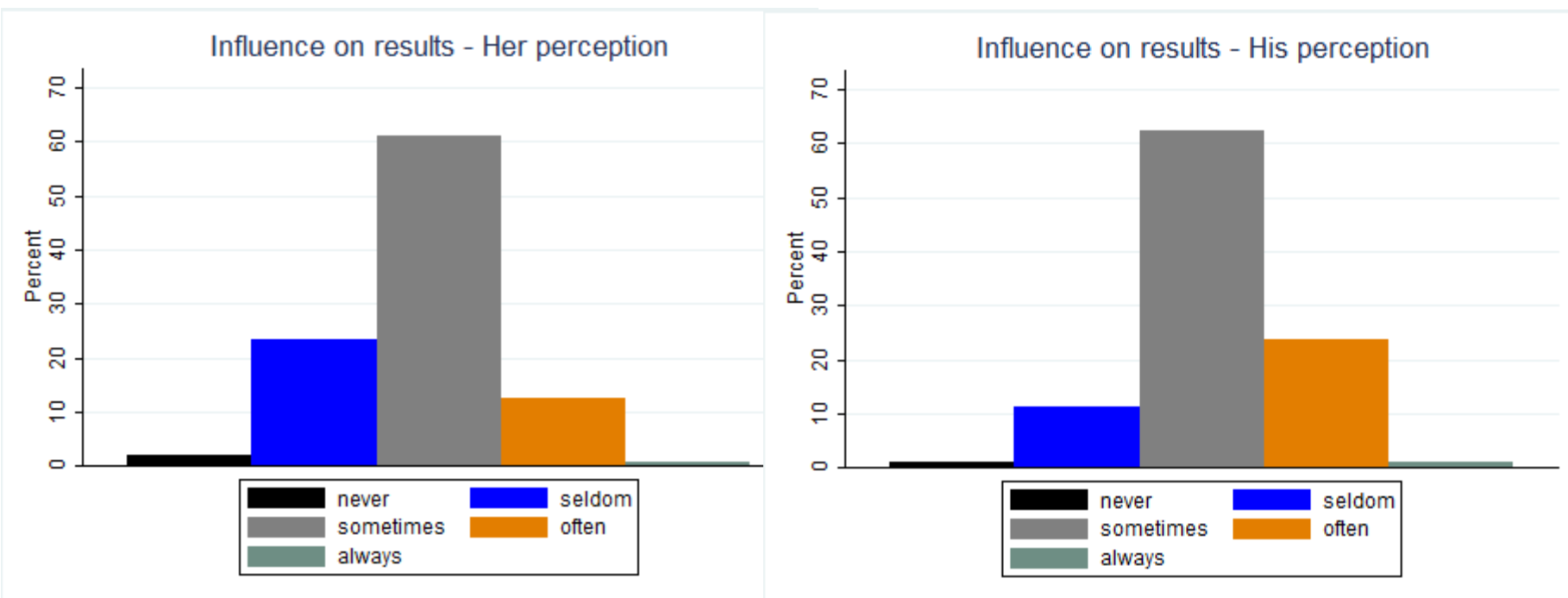
- His and her age
- Duration of relationship
- Household income
- Survey year (clustered)

# Descriptive results I



Notes: *pairfam* 2008/09-2013, percentages not weighted

# Descriptive results II



Notes: *pairfam* 2008/09-2013, percentages not weighted

- Individuals mostly perceive their partner to “sometimes“ have influence on behavior and results.
- Men more often perceive their partner to have influence.
- The gap between male and female partners‘ perception is biggest for the influence on behavior.

# Descriptive results III

**Table 1: Percentages of change to other categories of the dependent variables**

	Influence on results		Influence on behavior	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
<b>Never</b>	66.22	47.29	61.76	58.82
<b>Seldom</b>	47.62	53.85	49.26	55.07
<b>Sometimes</b>	23.46	21.32	28.80	31.46
<b>Often</b>	50.17	41.12	46.11	35.88
<b>Always</b>	57.14	80.77	66.67	72.73

Notes: *pairfam* 2008/09-2013, percentages not weighted

# Panel analysis

- Relative income and division of housework significant for women's perception of influence on results when using the first three waves
  - He has less power, when she gets more money.
  - He has more power, when she takes over more housework.
- Relative income and division of housework not significant when including the fourth wave.
- But: **Childbirth matters!**



# Panel analysis II

**Table 2: Fixed effects for influence on results according to men and women**

	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>
	<b>Women</b>	<b>Men</b>
<b>Child</b>	-0.232** (0.08)	0.093 (0.07)
<b>Constant</b>	2.653*** (0.66)	2.980*** (0.65)
<b>Sigma_u</b>	.623	.627
<b>Sigma_e</b>	.458	.451
<b>Rho</b>	.649	.659
<b>F Test</b>	***	***
<b>N</b>	4.187	4.187

Notes: Fixed-effects linear regression models, Dependent variable: influence on results (1 to 5); regression not weighted; other explanatory variables and controls not presented, \* $p < 0.05$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.001$ ; Data source: *pairfam* 2008/09-2013

- Children only affect women's perception significantly.
- Women perceive their partner to have less influence on results when a child is born.
- Men's perception of their partners' power is not changed through childbirth.

## Conclusion

- Changes in the allocation of resources or in the division of housework do not have an impact on partners' perception of the other's power.
- But women experience changes in the power relation, when a child is born.
- Children are a power asset for female partners – at least in their perception.
- Children seem to concern women more than men.

# Limitation

- Perception of power has been measured.
- Individuals' perceptions might be confounded
  - with personality characteristics or past experiences.
  - gender norms and ideas about how couples work and how power is allocated in the private sphere.



Barack Obama is regarded as the most powerful men in the world – but in the private sphere, it seems to be his wife who is top dog.

(<http://www.spiegel.de/fotostrecke/barack-obama-ist-aus-angst-vor-michelle-nichtraucher-fotostrecke-101803.html> am 24.09.13)

## Future research

- The role of perception has to be taken into account theoretically.
- It is interesting to investigate, whether the negative impact of childbirth is a longterm effect or whether the power relation is rebalanced after some time.
- In case the effect rather is a short-term effect, it should be analyzed what factors are crucial for rebalancing the relationship.

Thank you.

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