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Abstract

This study asks whether relative resources (work/retirement) and attached bargaining power, are associated with relationship satisfaction among older couples and whether degree of pooling money is a moderating factor. Spending decisions in a couple are likely more influenced by the partner with the greatest bargaining power, which may lead to different levels of relationship satisfaction. However, meaning of relative resources is likely dependent on how partners organize resources, which in turn may shape relationship evaluation. For couples who pool all money, it should matter less who brings in the money. The study uses nationally representative Swedish GGS 2012–2013 and a subsample of older coresident respondents ($n = 1737$). The analysis approach is logistic regression where the outcome is whether the respondents are completely or not completely satisfied with relationship. Contradicting relative resource theory, but partly supporting doing gender theory, results show that working respondents with a working partner, are least often satisfied with the relationship. Respondents in couples with a working woman and a retired man, are also satisfied less often, but the association disappears when adjusting for degree of pooling. Relative resources are not central for all couples, except couples where both partners work. Degree of pooling helps to understand older couples' relationship satisfaction but does not moderate the association between relative resources and relationship satisfaction except among retired couples. Future research should acknowledge degree of pooling as a central dimension in studies on couple dynamics and outcomes among older couples.

Keywords: relative resources, degree of money pooling, bargaining, relationship satisfaction, Sweden

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Introduction

At various life course stages, the resources that partners bring to a union will carry different weights and meanings (Stocks et al., 2007), not least as needs are different. Such different meanings of resources may influence not only negotiation over decisions about spending but also partners' level of satisfaction with the relationship. In later life, the value of resources may carry extra importance, as most individuals have already transitioned from working to being retired or will do so in the near future (Campolo & Di Pino, 2020). This leads to resources being harder to acquire and possibly scarce. Making this situation more challenging for couples is that often one partner retires earlier than the other (Kridahl & Kolk, 2018). When entering retirement, a (re)negotiation over priorities, both monetary and task-related, is likely to take place, which may affect the relationship quality.

In this study, we investigate whether older partners' economic resources and the attached bargaining power are associated with relationship satisfaction. We argue that partners acquire bargaining power from their position of being retired or working. Using retirement as a proxy for analyzing bargaining power between older partners has been applied in earlier studies (Bonsang & van Soest, 2020; Campolo & Di Pino, 2020). Earlier research has shown that money organization is directly related to many dimensions of relationship quality. For example, in Sweden, older couples who pool all money seldom report financial conflicts (Kridahl & Duvander, 2020), and in the U.S., joint bank accounts have been shown to relate to stronger feelings of intimacy (Addo & Sassler, 2010). To fully understand how partners' relative resources relate to relationship satisfaction, we argue that whether partners pool household money needs to be considered as a factor (Dew, 2008; Lundberg & Pollak, 1996). We therefore investigate whether pooling money (measured as partners pooling all money, pooling some money, or keeping money separate) moderates the relationship between satisfaction and bargaining.

Relationship satisfaction has frequently been linked to couples' economic resources (Conger et al., 2010; Dakin & Wampler, 2008; Hardie et al., 2014; Kaufman & Taniguchi, 2006; White & Rogers, 2000). When resources are scarce, there may be more reason to argue, and consequences may also be more severe. More affluent couples may also be able to easily pay for professional help (Dakin & Wampler, 2008). Older couples are more likely to have scarce resources, but other factors also distinguish them. Understanding the challenges of relationship quality in later life is important for maintaining quality of life (Dyrdal et al., 2011; Lawrence et al., 2019), maintaining health (Kiecolt-Glaser & Newton, 2001; Schmitt et al., 2007) and reducing loneliness (Bucher et al., 2019).

The number of years spent in retirement with a partner are expected to increase as a result of increasing longevity and better health among older individuals (Compton & Pollak, 2021). Older retired individuals have few opportunities to increase their earnings, a fact that changes the stakes negotiating between partners. Economic dependencies are more likely frequent and more severe at this life stage,

and older couples often have less economic margins, leading to, for example, difficulty in leaving dysfunctional relationships (Lin & Brown, 2020; McManus & DiPrete, 2001; Tach & Eads, 2015).

The role of the relative resources for relationship satisfaction in later life has thus far not been studied in a Nordic context; therefore, we chose to study Sweden. The existing studies from other contexts are few, potentially not comparable and sometimes outdated (Bulanda, 2011; Moen et al., 2001). In Sweden, both women and men are expected to participate in the labor market, and they do so almost to the same extent; this trend also prevails among today's older generations (Gustafsson & Jacobsson, 1985; Stanfors, 2014). Welfare policies support individuals in financially difficult circumstances, and pension policies are meant to provide income security in old age for all citizens. Nevertheless, there are still gender differences in women's and men's economic resources and attachment to the labor market. Women have lower earnings, more often work part-time and in low-income occupations, and take the largest share of childcare, which is one of the reasons that women have considerably lower pensions (on average approximately 30%) (König et al., 2019; OECD, 2019). The gender pension gap (women receive on average 70% of men's pensions) is higher than the wage gap (on average 90%) (Statistics Sweden, 2014b). Women also tend to retire earlier; the mean age of retirement was 64 for women and 66 for men in 2012 (OECD, 2017). Knowing the context of Sweden is important for understanding the link between partners' relative resources and relationship satisfaction, but we also need theoretical guidance, which is presented next.

Theoretical framework

We use relative resource theory (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996), which postulates that individual and relative employment, income and education are dynamic resources that translate into relationship power to be used in partner negotiations. The partner with the greatest resources, such as the most gainful activity, is in the best position to bargain for more favorable conditions for himself or herself (Lundberg & Pollak, 1996; Rogers, 2004). We argue that more resources lead to more decision power and a more satisfying relationship for this partner. Being retired may thus be a less beneficial position when the other partner works. When both partners work or are retired, the bargaining power between the partners is closer, and thus, the partners may have lower relationship satisfaction. This is particularly true for retired couples, as they, on average, have fewer resources to use in negotiations, and compromises can be difficult to reach when resources are scarce. Anything that improves an individual's bargaining position increases that individual's share of the gains from the relationship (Hersch, 2003). Which partner has the greatest bargaining power may change over the course of the relationship (Rogers, 2004), and the transition to retirement is one of the major transitions in the life course of a couple.

However, bargaining seldom operates in a gender-neutral context. A gendered perspective indicates that gender shapes and sustains roles (Fenstermaker & West, 2002; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This has traditionally been seen in couples where men are the main providers and women are

responsible for the family and household. Women's employment and other economic resources are perceived as less important (even in households where the women work full-time). Partners' perceptions of their economic resources and the choices they make about money are also shaped by normative perceptions about gender roles and norms (Fenstermaker & West, 2002). Empirical findings indicate that traditional gender role division still persists today, also among older couples in Sweden (Anxo et al., 2011). Traditional gender role division is also positively related to various couple outcomes for couples of all ages, such as a greater likelihood of marriage and a lower likelihood of divorce (Bertrand et al., 2015; Jalovaara, 2003; Kalmijn et al., 2007). When a woman is out of the labor market traditional gender roles are restored (contrary to when a man is). Such a situation goes against traditional gender roles (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This reasoning suggests that older partners should be more satisfied when the man works and the woman is retired than when the opposite is the case (Wilkie et al., 1998). The same is likely true in circumstances when it is easier to maintain traditional gender roles, such as when both partners are retired.

In accordance with discussions on the organization of household resources (Pahl, 2003; Vogeler & Pahl, 1993), older partners pool money because they are committed to each other and strive for the stability and well-being of the union, irrespective of who brings most money to the household. Pooling couples also often decide together on expenditures and the allocation of money (Pahl, 2003; Vogeler & Pahl, 1993). Commitment to a partner has been shown to be an important predictor of relationship satisfaction among older couples (Clements & Swensen, 2000). However, not all older couples pool all money; often, they pool part of their money (Duvander & Kridahl, Forthcoming; Evans & Gray, 2021). In general, partners who keep money separate have been shown to have high independence (Vogler & Pahl, 1993). This strategy may create more challenging circumstances for older couples, for example, a greater likelihood of experiencing financial disagreements (Duvander & Kridahl, 2021). Depending on how much money partners pool, they may make more or less positive assessments of the relationship (Blau et al., 2010; Lundberg & Pollak, 1996; Woolley, 2003), which has also been observed among older couples (Duvander & Kridahl, 2021). Moreover, pooling money may change the importance of relative resources (Woolley, 2003). When older partners pool all money, this may moderate the association between relative resources (and the bargaining power that follows) and relationship satisfaction. Among couples who pool all money, both partners have access to the money, and ultimately, it does not matter who brought the money to the household. Older partners who keep money separate strive to be as economically independent as possible (Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003), which may promote a negative evaluation of the relationship.

Research on the links among relationship satisfaction, relative resources and pooling of money

There is some earlier empirical evidence regarding whether and how partners' economic resources (in the form of working or being retired) are associated with relationship satisfaction. One U.S. study found

that older couples in which the wife worked and the husband did not were less satisfied with the relationship. This study did not find any differences in satisfaction between couples in which both partners worked or were retired or in which the husband continued working and the wife was retired (Bulanda, 2011). Other studies have found similar patterns, indicating that when partners have a nontraditional role arrangement, it lowers relationship quality (Ekerdt & Vinick, 1991; Lee & Shehan, 1989; Myers & Booth, 1996). However, other studies have not found any association between employment status and relationship quality (Szinovacz, 1996). Much of this research is based on contexts where the male-breadwinner model is most common (e.g., Szinovacz, 1996). In the majority of couples in Sweden, both partners participate in the labor market from which they eventually retire. There is a rich body of research on the division of labor and relationship satisfaction among younger couples (Gong, 2007; Wilkie et al., 1998), but the findings are mixed (Amato et al., 2003; Blom & Hewitt, 2020; Bulanda, 2011; Davey & Szinovacz, 2004; Gong, 2007; Hardie et al., 2014; Lee & Ono, 2008; Moen et al., 2001; Sprecher & Felmlee, 1997).

Resources that come into the relationship are often assumed to be ‘pooled’ (Woolley, 2003), but money is allocated and distributed differently across couples. Some couples pool all money, some keep separate pots and others keep some money in a joint pot and maintain the rest in individual accounts (Duvander & Kridahl, forthcoming; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003; Nyman, 1999; Roman & Vogler, 1999). Some partners choose to pool all the money, with only one of them having access to and control over the money (Pahl, 1995). The different strategies of pooling money differ in terms of the partners’ degree of control of and access to household money (Nyman & Dema, 2007; Vogler & Pahl, 1993; Yodanis & Lauer, 2007). Strategies have been shown to reflect how partners perceive household and individual resources and expenditures (ibid.). The partners’ choice of whether and how to pool money also indicates their level of investment and integration in the union (Addo, 2017; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003; Oropesa et al., 2003; Pahl, 2008; Treas, 1993). Relationship dynamics are not static over time, and partners change strategies over time (Duvander & Kridahl, Forthcoming; Evans & Gray, 2021; Heimdal & Houseknecht, 2003).

Strategies of money organization in couples also involve some form of (regular) communication between partners. Negative financial behavior and communication between partners may be a reason for relationship dissatisfaction (Conger et al., 1994; Harper et al., 2000; Markman et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2007). For example, a Swedish study on older partners showed that those pooling money to a greater degree had a lower likelihood of experiencing financial distress, which may facilitate relationship quality (Kridahl & Duvander, 2020). Among younger couples, pooling money, having shared financial values and making financial decisions together are associated with better relationship quality and cohesion (Addo & Sassler, 2010; Addo & Zhang, 2020; Kenney, 2006; Totenhagen et al., 2019).

Expectations

Based on the theoretical framework and existing literature, we postulate a set of expectations listed in Table 1. Relative resource theory predicts that a partner who is still working while the other partner is retired will have higher relationship satisfaction than the retired partner. The working partner has more resources and, thus, an advantage in any negotiation over decisions on spending. The total amount of resources is higher when both partners work than when both partners are retired, and bargaining power is more relevant in couples with fewer resources. For this reason, we assume that relationship satisfaction is greater when both partners work than when both partners are retired. In line with this reasoning, a retired individual with a working partner will have the lowest relationship satisfaction, as that individual has the least bargaining power.

We also postulate a set of competing expectations based on the gendered roles and expectations within the couple. Doing gender theory predicts that accordance with traditional roles promotes high relationship satisfaction, indicating that the woman being retired and the man working is the most beneficial arrangement for relationship satisfaction, while the woman working and the man being retired is the most disadvantageous. Following this theoretical argument, working partners would have the lowest relationship satisfaction, as this arrangement goes against traditional gender roles. Retired partners may maintain traditional role division more easily and thus potentially experience higher relationship satisfaction than working couples.

Given that the statistical analysis finds support for any of the expectations postulated by the relative resource theory and/or doing gender theory, we further expect that any association weakens or diminishes when we control whether and how the couple pools money. We expect that partners are most satisfied when they pool their money.

Table 1 Ranking of relationship satisfaction according to the study expectations (1=highest, 5=lowest)

<u>Relative resource theory</u>	<u>Doing gender theory</u>
Responding partner most satisfied when:	Responding partner most satisfied when:
1. Responding partner works, other partner retired	1. Woman retired, man works
2. Both partners work	2. Both partners retired
3. Both partners retired	3. Both partners work
4. Responding partner retired, other partner works	4. Woman works, man retired

Data and method

We use the national representative Swedish Generations and Gender Survey (GGS) of 2012–2013. Of the randomly selected sample of 18,000 individuals, 9,866 individuals responded to the questionnaire (response rate 54%). From these individuals, a subsample is drawn including individuals aged 60–80 (born 1933–1953) who have a partner they are either married to or cohabiting with. The age interval is chosen because the study's focus is on individuals who are either retired or about to retire. The

subsample consists of individuals in different-sex relationships (n 1,764), as we aim to distinguish gender dynamics. The survey includes questions about partners, such as employment status, age and education. There are at least two advantages of using the GGS. First, the sample size is large compared with that of other one-country studies on relationship satisfaction. Second, there is a good age distribution among the older respondents, which allows us to study unions at different older ages.

Dependent variable

The dependent variable is whether the respondent is satisfied with the relationship; the corresponding survey question is How satisfied are you with the relationship to your partner? The answers are provided on a 0 to 10 Likert-type scale; the higher the number is, the greater the relationship satisfaction. This is a widely used indicator of relationship satisfaction (Hardie et al., 2014; Blom & Hewitt, 2020). In total, 27 respondents skipped this question or answered ‘not applicable’; thus, they are excluded from the subsample (final n 1,937). Figure 1 displays the distribution of relationship satisfaction by gender using the scale (0, completely dissatisfied with relationship; 10, completely satisfied with relationship). It shows that women and men have a similar understanding of relationship satisfaction (mean woman 8.7; mean men 8.9). For both genders, approximately 10% of the respondents rank their relationship as 0–6. Thereafter, the proportion of respondents with greater relationship satisfaction increases, particularly among those who rank their relationship as an 8 or 9. Almost 50% of the sample is completely satisfied.

As relationship satisfaction is negatively skewed, it is difficult to predict values at the end of the tail in the distribution using a continuous measure. The character of the distribution also makes it difficult to split it into more than two groups (Figure 1). The mean is used to split the distribution and compare individuals who are more or less completely satisfied, i.e., with scores of 9–10, with individuals who have a reduced degree of satisfaction, i.e., scores of 0–8 (which we refer to as ‘not completely satisfied’). Using this method, in the latter group, we cluster individuals with very different evaluations of their relationships, but they all have reduced relationship satisfaction in common. We apply logistic regression to predict relationship satisfaction, as it does not assume linearity. The results are much clearer and easier to interpret when the outcome is dichotomized as it is here. Descriptive statistics are presented in Figure 1 and Table 2. Others have also assessed rankings below 9 on a 0–10 scale as reduced relationship satisfaction (Fincham & Bradbury, 1987); some used the GGS but for Germany (Naderi & Diabaté, 2018). Having a positively skewed distribution of relationship satisfaction is common in the literature, including among older individuals (some have an average of approximately 8.5) (Blom et al., 2017; Blom & Hewitt, 2020; Bulanda, 2011; Fincham & Bradbury, 1987; Hardie et al., 2014; Mund & Johnson, 2020; Naderi & Diabaté, 2018) and Sweden (Wiik et al., 2009).

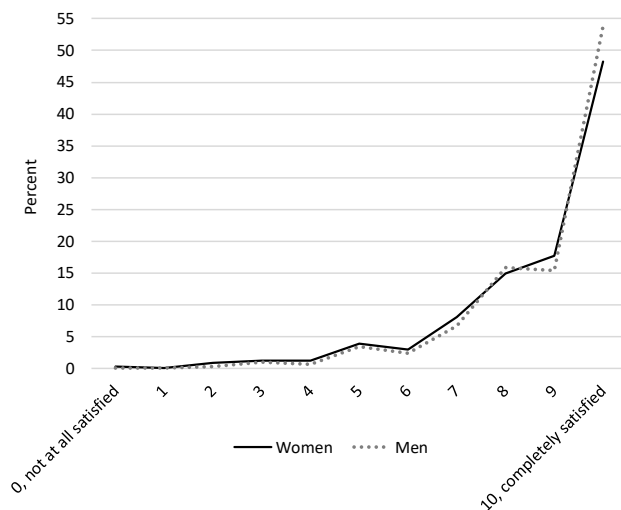


Fig. 2 Distribution of relationship satisfaction (n 1764)

Independent variables

The independent variable is whether the partners work or are retired, indicating relative resources or (non)gendered practices. The variable is slightly differently categorized depending on the theoretical perspective. First, the expectations based on the relative resource theory are gender neutral; thus, the variable is categorized as follows: 1) both partners are retired; 2) both partners work; 3) the responding partner works, and the other partner is retired; and 4) the responding partner is retired, and the other partner works. The doing gender perspective requires a gendered variable and is therefore categorized as follows: 1) both partners are retired; 2) both partners work; 3) the woman is retired, and the man works; and 4) the man is retired, and the woman works.

The key variable is how the partners organize household money, and the survey question is How is money organized in your household? The answers are operationalized according to Pahl's frequently applied typology of household money organization, which has, over the years, been further developed by Pahl and other scholars (Pahl, 1983; Vogler & Pahl, 1993). The answers are as follows: 1) we pool all money and we each take out what we need, 2) we pool some of the money and keep the rest separate, 3) we each keep our money separate, 4) I manage all the money and give my partner/spouse his or her share, 5) my partner/spouse manages all the money and gives me a share, and 6) another system. The fourth, fifth and sixth categories are combined because they are much less common in contemporary Sweden (in our study and others, Evans & Gray, 2021) and labeled 'other way'. The variable is labeled 'degree of pooling money'. We assume this variable to moderate the association between relative resources and relationship satisfaction. A moderating variable influences the presence, direction or level of a relationship between variables (Vancouver & Carlson, 2015).

We further include variables that have been shown to be associated with relationship satisfaction and to be indicators of relationship quality, stability, and interdependence, i.e., financial

strain (Vinokur et al., 1996), marital status (Aarskaug Wiik et al., 2012; Skinner et al., 2002), common children (Raley & Sweeney, 2020; Teachman, 2008), educational level composition (Heiman et al., 2011; Schwartz & Han, 2014), age composition (Li & Fung, 2012; Rothstein, 2010), relationship duration (Levenson et al., 1993) and disability of both partners (Korporaal et al., 2013; Yorgason et al., 2008).

Financial strain is measured as whether the couple has difficulties making ends meet. The answers are 1) 'with great difficulty', 2) 'with difficulty', 3) 'with some difficulty', 4) 'fairly easily', 5) 'easily' and 6) 'very easily'. In total, 11% of the respondents reported either 'with great difficulty', 'with difficulty' or 'with some difficulty'; hence, these categories are grouped with the category 'fairly easily' and labeled 'yes' (37% of the couples).

Marital status and common children are dichotomous variables. Educational composition is composed of 'low' and 'high' education. High education corresponds to tertiary education, and low education corresponds to less than tertiary education. Similar to relative resources, two categorizations are used: one gender-natural and one gender-specified. The gender-neutral categorization is as follows: 1) both partners low, 2) responding partner low and other partner high, 3) responding partner high and other partner low and 4) both partners high. The gender-specified categorization is as follows: 1) both partners low, 2) man low and woman high, 3) man high and woman low and 4) both high.

Relationship duration is categorized in approximately 20-year intervals. Age composition is operationalized as the partner is the 1) same age or +/- 2 years apart, 2) more than 2 years older and 3) more than 2 years younger. The average age difference in a union is approximately two years in Sweden, and the husband is usually older (Kolk, 2015). Age composition has been shown to be closely linked to power dynamics within couples (Grøntvedt & Kennair, 2013; McKenzie, 2015).

The health of partners is operationalized as whether one or both partners suffer from disability. Other measures of health, such as partners' general health status, would provide greater variation than disability because the latter is a relatively severe health impairment that is more often present after the age of 80 (Santoni et al., 2015). Among those aged 60–80, disability may suggest a severe and time-consuming burden on the relationship, particularly as one partner most likely needs to provide care to the disabled partner.

Analytical strategy

The first three models address expectations based on relative resource theory. The first model includes the relative resources (Model 1, Table 3), and the following model also includes the degree of pooling, which potentially moderates the association between relative resources and relationship satisfaction (Model 2, Table 3). The third model is adjusted for financial strain, marital status, common children, educational composition, age composition, relationship duration and disability of partners (Model 3, Table 3). To address the expectations based on doing gender theory, a similar approach is used, but the

gender-specific variable on relative resources is instead included (Table 4). The results are presented as odds ratios, with asterisks indicating significance levels.

Study limitations

The study has at least five limitations. First, the study does not aim to investigate causal associations; however, access to longitudinal data may have helped to establish the causal order. Second, a one-item indicator has frequently been used in previous research, providing strong concept validity (Keizer & Schenk, 2012; Naderi & Diabaté, 2018). Similarly, the dichotomization of indicators that aim to evaluate relationships has frequently been applied in the literature, for example, relationship satisfaction (Naderi & Diabaté, 2018; Wiik et al., 2009) and relationship happiness (Heiman et al., 2011). Nevertheless, a multi-item indicator would nuance the answers, particularly considering that a large share of the respondents report high relationship satisfaction. Both partners' reports of relationship satisfaction would additionally nuance the relationship quality, but such information was not available in the data. Third, partners' bargaining power is often transmitted from their labor market participation, but it may also be an indicator of other aspects of the relationship. The models are, therefore, adjusted for partners' education, age and health, which are resources that can be transmitted as relational power. Fourth, it would be enlightening to adjust for both partners' earnings to further investigate how relative resources shape relationship dynamics. However, the data only include responding partners' earnings. Fifth, the response rate (54%) is low compared to the average response rate for countries participating in the first wave of the Generations and Gender Programme (67%). The data has been weighted by age, sex, region, country of birth, education, income and family status (Fokkema et al., 2016).

Results

Table 2 displays the descriptive statistics of the full sample and separated by respondents' gender. In total, 34% of the respondents report not being completely satisfied with their relationship (9–10). In 60% of the couples, both partners are retired, and in 18% of couples, both partners are working. Additionally, in 8% of the couples, the man is working and the woman is retired, and in 14% of the couples, the woman is working and the man is retired. More retired women than men are with a retired partner, whereas more men than women are with a working partner. The corresponding gender-natural variable is displayed in Table A1, Appendix. Regarding the degree of pooling, 49% of the couples pool all money, 23% pool some money and 18% keep money separate. Furthermore, 57% of the couples have low education, and 17% of the couples have high education. In 16% of the couples, the woman has high education and the man has low education, and in 10% of the couples, it is the opposite. The gender-natural variable is displayed in Table A1, Appendix. Moreover, 37% of the respondents report having difficulties making ends meet. The majority of the couples are married and have common children (87% and 73%, respectively). Regarding age composition, 46% of the respondents have a

similar-age partner, 30% have a younger partner and 24% have an older partner. Regarding age composition of the couples, there is a gender difference, with 10% of women and 48% of men reporting having a younger partner. A much smaller share of men have a younger partner, and a larger share of women have an older partner (8% and 43%, respectively). Approximately 10% of the couples have been together for less than 20 years, 30% have been together for 20–39 years and 60% for 40–62 years. The average duration of the relationship is 38 years. Less than 30% of the respondents are disabled or have a disabled partner, and this situation is slightly more common among women.

Table 2 Descriptive statistics of the variables in the study

		All %	Woman reporting %	Man reporting %
Relationship satisfaction	9-10 (completely satisfied)	67	65	68
	0-8 (lower satisfaction)	34	35	32
Partners' relative resources	Both partners retired	60	65	54
	Both partners work	18	15	22
	Man works and woman retired	8	9	8
	Woman works and man retired	14	11	16
Degree of pooling money	Pool all money	49	48	50
	Pool some money	23	24	22
	Keep separate	18	17	18
	Other ways	10	10	10
Educational composition	Both partners low	57	57	58
	Woman high and man low	16	17	15
	Woman low and man high	10	9	10
	Both partners high	17	18	17
Difficulties making ends meet	Yes	37	34	39
	No	63	66	61
Married	Yes	87	87	87
	No	13	13	13
Common children	Yes	73	73	73
	No	27	27	27
Age composition	Partner same age, 2 years younger or 2 years older	46	47	44
	Partner more than 2 years younger	30	10	48
	Partner more than 2 years older	24	43	8
Relationship duration	1-19 years	11	10	12
	20-39 years	31	29	32
	40-62 years	58	61	56
Partners' disability	Both or one partner disabled	28	30	25
	Neither partner disabled	72	70	74
Total n		1737	822	915

The first part of the logistic regression results addresses expectations based on relative resources theory by using the gender-neutral measure of relative resources (Model 1, Table 3). The results show that working respondents with a working partner have 1.44 higher odds of not being completely satisfied with their relationship than respondents who are retired and have a retired partner. Additionally,

working respondents with a retired partner have 1.55 higher odds of being not completely satisfied. Relationship satisfaction does not differ between retired respondents with either a retired or working partner.

The second part of the results addresses the expectations based on doing gender theory (Models 1-3, Table 4). Similar to the previous model, working respondents who have a working partner have higher odds of not being completely satisfied with their relationship. As the model includes gender-specified relative resources, there is a slightly different pattern. When the woman is working and the man is retired, the respondents have 1.36 higher odds of not being completely satisfied than when both partners are retired. There are no statistically significant differences when the man is working and the woman is retired compared with when both partners are retired.

Variations in relationship satisfaction are expected to diminish when adjusting for the degree of pooling money (Model 2, Tables 3-4). In these models, the respondents continue to have higher odds (1.44) of not being completely satisfied when both partners are working than when both partners are retired. This result indicates that relative resources are independently important for relationship quality, irrespective of whether and how couples pool money. For working respondents with a retired partner and respondents in a union with a working woman and retired man, the results are opposite and are no longer statistically significantly different from those of other respondents.

Models 2-3, Tables 3-4, show that respondents are more likely to be not completely satisfied with their relationship when they have a lower degree of pooling or keep money separate than when the couple pools all money. To determine whether the respondents adopting different degrees of pooling are statistically significantly different from each other in the evaluation of their relationship, the reference category is changed. The results show a gradient in which the more money the partners keep separate, the greater the likelihood that they are not completely satisfied. The odds ratios are pooling 1 (reference), partial pooling 2.23, separation 2.48, and other ways 1.86 (all associations $P > 0.001$). 'Other ways' has the lowest likelihood of respondents not being completely satisfied (compared to pooling all). However, we refrain from further interpretation of this result, as this is the most heterogeneous group, and it is not possible to know how the partners pool the money in this category (which is our focus).

Finally, we note the adjusting variables (Model 3, Table 3). The results also show that respondents are more likely to be not completely satisfied when the couple has difficulties making ends meet, when the partners are not married, when the partners do not have common children, when at least one partner has a disability or when both partners are highly educated. In the gender-specified education variable (Table A2, Appendix), respondents are also more likely to be not completely satisfied when the woman has high education and the man has low education and when both partners have high education. Respondents who have been together with their partner for 40–62 years are more likely to be completely satisfied with their relationship (Model 3, Table 3).

Table 3 Odds ratios of not being completely satisfied with relationship by relative resources (gender neutral) and degree of pooling money from logistic regressions, stepwise models

		Model 1 or	Model 2 or	Model 3 or
Partners' relative resources (gender-neutral)	Both partners retired	1	1	1
	Both partners work	1.44***	1.44***	1.38***
	Responding partner works and other partner retired	1.55**	1.48	1.36
	Responding partner retired and other partner works	1.15	1.13	1.18
Degree of pooling money	Pool all money		1	1
	Pool some money		2.23***	2.41***
	Keep all money separate		2.48***	2.50***
	Other ways		1.86***	1.84***
Difficulties making ends meet	No			1
	Yes			1.56***
Married	Yes			1
	No			1.38*
Common children	Yes			1
	No			0.56***
Educational composition (gender-neutral)	Both partners low			1
	Responding partner high and other partner low			0.68***
	Responding partner low and other partner high			1.01
	Both partners high			0.76
Age composition	Partner same age, 2 years younger or 2 years older			1
	Partner more than 2 years younger			1.09
	Partner more than 2 years older			1.18
Relationship duration	1-19 years			0.82
	20-39 years			1
	40-62 years			0.72***
Partners' disability	Neither partner disabled			1
	Both or one partner disabled			1.44***
Gender of responding partner	Woman			1.15
	Man			1
Total n		1737	1737	1737

Significance levels * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

In the robustness analyses (Table A3, Appendix), respondents indicating a score of 9 on the Likert-type scale are included with those who are not completely satisfied with their relationship (scores of 0-9), and hence, those who are completely satisfied are those who indicated a 10 on the scale; the results of these analyses are similar to the main results in Models 1-3 in Table 3. These analyses strengthen our main findings that pooling does not moderate the association among couples where both partners work and among couples where the respondent is retired and the partner works. We also conclude that the results are not too sensitive to whether those with quite high relationship satisfaction (9 on the scale) are included with those who are not completely satisfied. Nevertheless, this approach increases the share of couples who are not completely satisfied from 33% to 52%, which adds to the heterogeneity of the group of couples who are not completely satisfied.

Table 4 Odds ratios of not being completely satisfied with relationship by relative resources (gender-specified) and degree of pooling money from logistic regressions, stepwise models

		Model 1 or	Model 2 or	Model 3 ^{A)} or
Partners' relative resources (gender-specified)	Both partners retired	1	1	1
	Both partners work	1.44***	1.44***	1.38***
	Woman retired and man retired	1.36**	1.27	1.18
	Man works and woman retired	1.21	1.26	1.28
Degree of pooling money	Pool all money		1	1
	Pool some money		2.23***	2.42***
	Keep all money separate		2.48***	2.54***
	Other ways		1.86***	1.85***
Total n		1737	1737	1737

Significance levels * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. Models adjusted for difficulties making ends meet, marital status, common children, educational composition (gender-specified), age composition, relationship duration, partners' disability, gender of responding partner ^{A)} Complete model is displayed in Table A2, Appendix.

Discussion

The study investigated relationship satisfaction among older individuals living with a partner in contemporary Sweden. To examine relationship satisfaction, the respondents were divided into those who were completely satisfied and those who were not completely satisfied. The majority of the women and men in the sample were completely satisfied, similar to findings in many other settings (Naderi & Diabaté, 2018). This finding may not be surprising among Swedish couples aged 60 and older, as it is relatively uncomplicated to divorce in Sweden – the normative and economic barriers do not create a hindrance, resulting in more satisfied couples being those more likely to stay together. The divorce rate has slowly increased among individuals aged 60 and older over the last two decades (Statistics Sweden,

2020). This demographic change makes it even more interesting and central to investigate why individuals are not completely satisfied with their relationships. In the study, 34% of the respondents were not completely satisfied. This finding was further investigated by linking partners' economic resources and relationship satisfaction. We applied relative resource theory and doing gender theory to help understand the association. Whether the partners were retired or employed was used as an indicator of the partners' relative resources leading to their bargaining power. The link between the ability to bargain for valued conditions of the relationship and relationship satisfaction was additionally expected to weaken when adjusting for whether and how partners pool money.

Based on relative resource theory, working partners have more resources than retired partners, enabling them to shape the relationship according to their preferences. Thus, we expected that retired respondents with a working partner would be the least satisfied and that working respondents with a retired partner would be the most satisfied. Alternatively, according to doing gender theory, the most satisfied respondents would be those in couples that have the most opportunity to follow traditional gender roles (e.g., with men working and women retired). Thus, respondents in unions with working women and retired men were expected to be least satisfied. The findings did not support the expectations based on relative resource theory. Instead, working respondents with a working partner were more likely to not be completely satisfied with their relationship than retired respondents with a retired partner. There are most likely other omitted aspects that play a more crucial role in relationship satisfaction, such as that it may be exhausting to work at this life stage. Working respondents with a retired partner were more likely to be not completely satisfied, which is also opposite to what the relative resource theory predicts. This finding was only statistically significant in the bivariate model; thus, we refrain from speculating about potential explanations.

The finding that working respondents with a working partner were more likely to not be completely satisfied partly supports expectations based on doing gender theory. This theory predicts that working couples show the opposite of traditional gender roles, creating challenging situations where the partners' roles and responsibilities may be renegotiated and spheres may be crossed. On the other hand, retired partners can be more bound to traditional gender roles. The woman can continue to perform the household tasks and attend to matters related to the couple and the family. When both partners work, it may be harder to maintain this role division, even in a country such as Sweden, where normative gender roles are less strong in couples (Anxo et al., 2011). This may also explain why we did not find a difference in relationship satisfaction between couples where both partners were retired or the man was working and the woman was retired. Among these couples, earlier role arrangements can potentially remain intact or become stronger, as other studies have pointed out when discussing relationship dynamics among older couples (Bertogg et al., 2021).

In line with our expectations, the results indicate that the degree of pooling of money did not moderate the association between relative resources and relationship satisfaction among working respondents with a working partner. These respondents continued to be not completely satisfied even

after adjusting for the degree of pooling. It is possible that for these couples, relative resources have an independent association with relationship quality, or perhaps important variables were omitted. When two partners work at the age of 60+, it is possible that they feel fatigued and/or stressed, which may have a negative spillover effect on their relationship quality (similar to partners' health status). Their economic situation may also be challenging, which is in line with our finding that partners who cannot make ends meet are more likely to be not completely satisfied. Moreover, the results were the opposite for working respondents with a retired partner and respondents in a union with a working man and a retired woman, for whom the degree of pooling moderated the association between relative resources and relationship satisfaction. At first, these respondents were not completely satisfied, but when adjusting for the degree of pooling, they were no longer more likely to be not completely satisfied than other couples. Hence, relative resources did not operate in a vacuum and were not what shaped relationship quality for these respondents or for the other groups of couples (except for couples in which both partners worked). The allocation of resources may play a more central role because it indicates partners' commitment. The interpretation of the result is speculative, as we do not know what the different degrees of pooling of money represent for the couples.

The degree of pooling is in itself complex and contains constraints and opportunities for the individual partner and the couple. Being linked to gender ideology, dynamics and structures, the degree of pooling shapes different circumstances for older women and men and the possibilities to maintain high relationship quality. The findings did not reveal substantial differences in women's and men's evaluations of their relationships. However, this does not suggest that they have similar preconditions to act according to their preferences within the relationship. We recommend that future research acknowledge the degree of pooling of money as a separate dimension in studies on couple dynamics and outcomes among older couples. For example, future large-scale investigations may more comprehensively examine how and why the different degrees of pooling vary in relation to relational well-being. It would be especially enlightening to explore which groups of older partners are more exposed and vulnerable than others, also considering same-sex couples.

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Appendix

Table A1 Descriptive statistics of relative resources and educational composition (gender-neutral)

		All respondents %
Partners' relative resources (gender-neutral)	Both partners retired	60
	Both partners work	18
	Responding partner works and other partner retired	9
	Responding partner retired and other partner work	13
Educational composition (gender-neutral)	Both partners low	57
	Responding partner high and other partner low	14
	Responding partner low and other partner high	12
	Both partners high	17
Total n		1737

Table A2 Odds ratios of not being completely satisfied with the relationship by relative resources (gender-specified) from the adjusted model (complete Model 3 in Table 3), logistic regression

		Model 3 or
Partners' relative resources (gender-specified)	Both partners retired	1
	Both partners work	1.38***
	Woman retired and man retired	1.18
	Man works and woman retired	1.28
Degree of pooling money	Pool all money	1
	Pool some money	2.42***
	Keep all money separate	2.54***
	Other ways	1.85***
Difficulties making ends meet	No	1
	Yes	1.56***
Married	Yes	1
	No	1.38*
Common children	Yes	1
	No	0.56***
Educational composition	Both partners low	1
	Woman high and man low	1.38***
	Woman low and man high	1.16
	Both partners high	1.47***
Age composition	Partner same age, 2 years younger or 2 years older	1
	Partner more than 2 years younger	1.08
	Partner more than 2 years older	1.19
Relationship duration	1-19 years	0.81
	20-39 years	1
	40-62 years	0.71***
Partners' disability	Neither partner disabled	1
	Both or one partner disabled	1.44***
Gender of responding partner	Woman	1.17
	Man	1
Total n		1737

Significance levels * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A3 Odds ratios of not being completely satisfied with relationship, coded as ‘Not completely satisfied’=0-9, and ‘Completely satisfied’=10, adjusted models logistic regressions

		Model 1 or	Model 2 or	Model 3 or
Partners’ relative resources (gender-neutral)	Both partners retired	1	1	1
	Both partners work	1.46***	1.44***	1.27***
	Responding partner works and other partner retired	1.45**	1.38**	1.26**
	Responding partner retired and other partner works	1.10	1.07	1.06
Degree of pooling money	Pool all money		1	1
	Pool some money		2.07***	2.05***
	Keep all money separate		1.75***	1.69***
	Other ways		1.53***	1.50**
Difficulties making ends meet	No			1
	Yes			1.37***
Married	Yes			1
	No			1.39*
Common children	Yes			1
	No			0.62***
Educational composition	Both partners low			1
	Responding partner high and other partner low			1.67***
	Responding partner low and other partner high			1.21
	Both partners high			1.65***
Age composition	Partner same age, 2 years younger or 2 years older			1.03
	Partner more than 2 years younger			1
	Partner more than 2 years older			0.94
Relationship duration	1-19 years			1.16
	20-39 years			1
	40-62 years			0.74**
Partners’ disability	Neither partner disabled			1
	Both or one partner disabled			1.18**
Gender of responding partner	Woman			1.30**
	Man			1
Total n		1737		1737

Significance levels * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

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