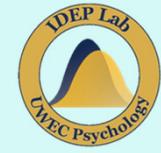




"It's Your Turn, Whether You Want to or Not" Men's and Women's Household Task Distribution Preferences

Caitlin Richmond, Laiken Peterson, & Michaela Gunseor
Faculty Mentor: April Bleske-Rechek
University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire ♦ Department of Psychology



Overview

- Studies suggest that the division of household labor and childcare, even in dual-earner households, is imbalanced.^{1,2}
 - For example, even among tenure-track faculty with small children, fathers report engaging in far less childcare than mothers do.³
- Mothers also report more enjoyment from many childcare tasks than fathers do,³ which raises the possibility that gender differences in work-and-family activity preferences may be linked to gender differences in task distributions.
- In fact, gender differences in work-and-family activity preferences show up before individuals are exposed to lifetime constraints (e.g., raising children).
- For example, some research suggests that male and female college students differ in their desire to take time off work to raise children. This difference is strong at both the beginning and end of their college career.⁴
- To investigate gender differences in activity preferences in a sample without lifetime constraints, we asked young men and women to report their foreseen enjoyment of various household and childcare tasks.
 - To get a comprehensive picture of preferences, we provided a varied list of common household and childcare activities as well as often-neglected activities (e.g., lawn care, finances, scheduling, vehicle maintenance, etc.).
- We predict that male-female differences in enjoyment of household and childcare tasks will parallel male-female differences in how men and women expect to share household and childcare tasks with a partner.

Procedure

- In an online questionnaire, all participants read a list of 59 household and 40 childcare tasks. Participants imagined themselves in the future and, using 7-point scales, rated (1) how they envisioned feeling about the tasks (*I'm Going to Hate It to I'm Neutral to I'm Going to Love It*), and (2) how they would prefer to split up the tasks with a cohabitating partner (*Always Me to Both Me and My Partner Equally to Always My Partner*).
- After rating the household and childcare tasks, participants were presented with two final questions. First, they imagined a household with absolutely no constraints and reported the distribution of work and household responsibilities they would like to have with a partner (*I would be the Breadwinner to We would share all responsibilities equally to I would be the Homemaker*). Second, participants imagined a household with realistic constraints where they and their partner would have to compromise and, using the same scale as before, reported what they would be willing to live with.

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Results

How Do Men & Women Feel About The Following Tasks?

Household Tasks				Childcare Tasks				
Women > Men		Men > Women		Women > Men		Men > Women		
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Decorating the Home	6.34	3.69	Keeping a Budget	3.93	4.94	Changing Diapers	3.57	2.76
Baking	5.99	4.94	Handling the Bills	3.33	4.13	Feeding Children	5.48	4.71
Buying Gifts	6.02	5.06	Doing the Taxes	2.54	3.69	Packing School Bags	6.21	3.88
Shopping for Household Items	5.92	4.59	Setting Up Phone/Cable Plan	3.11	4.31	Buying School Supplies	5.26	3.94
Keeping Family Calendar	5.77	4.09	Cleaning Out Gutters	2.28	4.23	Arranging Childcare	4.39	3.35
Rearranging Furniture	5.68	4.44	Vehicle Maintenance	2.78	4.25	Arranging Playdates	4.41	4.32
Keeping Track of Birthdays	5.67	4.19	Home Safety	3.84	5.25	Organizing Birthday Parties	5.52	4.53
Cleaning Counters	4.76	4.63	Taking Out Trash	3.8	4.75	Overseeing Child's Hygiene	5.06	4.12
Organizing Seasonal Clothes	4.98	3.58	Handling Minor Repairs	3.66	4.94	Buying Clothes for Children	5.96	4.32
Vacuuming	4.63	3.85	Minor Electric Problems	3.48	4.5			
Dusting	4.08	3.25	Supervising Repairs	3.46	4.25			
			Yard Care	3.87	5.44			
			Lawn Care	3.62	5.31			

Values represent mean responses for women and men that are statistically different ($p < .05$). Preferences were reported on a seven-point scale ranging from 1 (*I'm Going to Hate It*) to 7 (*I'm Going to Love It*). There are no values reported in the "men > women" column for childcare tasks because men did not score significantly higher on any childcare tasks when compared to women.

Breadwinner-Egalitarian-Homemaker Split



When asked to imagine a household with no constraints, men ($M = 3.65$, 95% $CI: 3.08 - 4.22$) and women ($M = 4.62$, 95% $CI: 4.38 - 4.86$) differed in how they preferred to share work and household responsibilities. Men ($M = 3.41$, 95% $CI: 2.84 - 3.98$) and women ($M = 4.55$, 95% $CI: 4.34 - 4.76$) also differed when asked to imagine a household with realistic constraints. In both cases, men's responses hovered around neutral with a slight lean toward being the breadwinner and women's responses leaned toward being the homemaker.

How Do Men & Women Prefer To Split The Following Tasks?

Household Tasks				Childcare Tasks				
Women > Men		Men > Women		Women > Men		Men > Women		
Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	
Handling the Bills	4.29	3.53	Dusting	2.44	5.00	Feeding Children	3.78	4.06
Doing the Taxes	4.79	3.75	Mopping	3.67	4.56	Packing School Bags	3.41	4.00
Setting Up Phone/Cable Plan	4.76	3.25	Sweeping	3.44	4.56	Buying School Supplies	3.24	4.24
Setting Up Insurance	4.74	3.31	Cleaning Spills	3.69	4.19	Arranging Childcare	3.57	4.29
Taking Out Trash	4.44	3.31	Vacuuming	3.44	4.23	Arranging Playdates	3.20	4.24
Handling Plumbing	5.86	2.94	Cleaning Refrigerator	3.55	4.37	Organizing Birthday Parties	3.05	4.29
Minor Electric Problems	5.29	2.69	Doing Laundry	3.21	4.56	Scheduling Appointments	3.17	4.18
Supervising Repairs	4.45	3.88	Ironing	3.40	4.73	Leaving Work to Care for Child	3.86	4.24
Home Safety	5.05	2.63	Preparing Hours for Guests	2.92	4.13	Nighttime Feedings	3.53	4.29
Cleaning Out Garage	4.82	3.09	Putting Things in Their Place	3.54	4.19	Finding a Babysitter	3.40	4.24
Cleaning Out Gutters	5.55	2.56	Repairing Clothes	2.95	5.00	Buying Clothes for Children	2.89	4.76
Selecting Vehicles	4.30	3.31	Retrieving/Handling Mail	3.76	4.00	Buying Gifts for Children	3.61	4.53
Washing Vehicles	4.44	3.37	Making Grocery List	3.09	4.06			
Vehicle Maintenance	5.47	2.75	Grocery Shopping	3.21	4.23			
Shoveling Driveway/Sidewalk	4.86	2.59	Planning Meals	3.21	3.87			
Lawn Care	5.00	2.59	Baking	2.61	4.12			
Yard Care	4.86	2.56	Changing Sheets	3.31	4.5			
Landscaping	4.54	2.58	Making Beds	3.62	4.75			
Putting Up Holiday Lights	4.21	3.44	Donating Old Clothes	2.86	4.38			
			Tracking of Family Locations	3.66	4.25			
			Organizing Seasonal Clothes	3.01	4.81			
			Planning Family Vacations	3.63	4.06			
			Arranging Social Events	3.17	3.94			
			Keeping Track of Birthdays	3.38	4.37			
			Keeping Family Calendar	3.07	4.56			
			Buying Gifts	3.10	4.31			
			Decorating the Home	2.44	4.83			
			Shopping for Household Items	2.95	4.25			
			Rearranging Furniture	3.17	4.06			
			Watering Plants	3.30	3.94			

Values represent mean responses for women and men that are statistically significant ($p < .05$). Preferences for how participants want to split the tasks were reported on a seven point scale ranging from 1 (*Always Me*) to 7 (*Always My Partner*). That is, higher scores indicate participants would prefer their partner complete the task. There are no values reported in the "women > men" column for childcare tasks because there was no childcare task on which women had a higher preference than men did for their partner to complete the task.

Discussion

- In the current study, 117 young adults reported how much they foresee enjoying various household and childcare tasks and how, in their ideal world, they would prefer to share household and childcare tasks with a partner. In addition, participants reported the role they would like to take on in their partnership when they imagined a life without constraints and then with constraints. This question was of particular interest to us because previous studies that have asked about roles have suggested that most men and women prefer a strictly egalitarian role in the home;⁵ however, those studies used forced choice methods (homemaker/breadwinner/egalitarian) rather than a rating scale. We have shown here that when given a sliding scale, men and women do not always choose to split responsibilities equally. In our study, when asked about a life with no constraints, 59% of men and 51% of women chose to share responsibilities equally, while 30% of men leaned towards the breadwinner role and 42% of women leaned towards the homemaker role. When asked about a life with realistic constraints, 47% men and 44% of women chose to share responsibilities equally, whereas 47% of men leaned towards the breadwinner role and 47% of women leaned towards the homemaker role.
- Previous studies of household and childcare tasks have focused on the division of labor between men and women, but have not taken into account men's and women's preferences for these common tasks. We investigated how much men and women in college foresee enjoying household and childcare tasks. We found that men's and women's enjoyment of the tasks mirrored their preferences for splitting the tasks. For example, men more than women foresaw enjoying home safety and yard care, and women, in turn, scored higher than men for wanting their partner to complete those tasks. Some of the gender differences in enjoyment ratings were quite large, implying that blindly pushing gender egalitarianism in all household and childcare tasks may actually work against partners' happiness.
- Next, we plan to ask adults who are cohabiting and raising children (living under constraints) how much they enjoy these household and childcare tasks, and how they currently split them with their partner. We expect that gender differences in task enjoyment ratings for that sample will be similar to the gender differences we observed in our young adult sample; we also expect, however, that the division of actual task labor between partners will not mirror the gender differences in enjoyment ratings as much as in the young adult sample, presumably because living with jobs and children constrains partners' ideal division of household and childcare tasks.