

Gender and Division of Household Labor

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This paper discusses numerous variables that impact the division of household labor between men and women— income, race, education, gender ideologies, age, marital status, employment status, and presence of children in the home—and sheds light on the unequal distribution of household labor between men and women, which impacts the overall well being and advancement of the female gender.

¹Housework involving cleaning, cooking, doing laundry, washing dishes, and shopping devours three to four thousand hours for the average housewife each year (Davis 1981). Since a lot of women work full time in the labor market and spend an equal amount of time performing household chores, female housework performance has been labeled the “second-shift.” Researchers have become more and more interested in studying household labor division especially because female work participation reduces the amount of time women have to perform housework, placing more demands on men to pick up the slack (Batalova & Cohen 2002). However, despite working full time in the labor market, women spend more time performing household chores compared to their male counterparts.

Therefore, this paper will discuss numerous variables that impact division of household labor between men and women that include: income, race, education, gender ideologies, age, marital status, employment status, and presence of children in the home. It will also compare different living arrangements between men and women to analyze how time spent performing housework changes or remains the same for both genders as they move through different stages in their lives. The types of household chores are also unevenly distributed between the sexes. A further investigation into male and female type housework will also be discussed. All of these factors combined appear to have a negative impact on females, who continue to perform most of the household labor. Therefore, this topic is essential and significant because it sheds light on the unequal distribution of household labor between men and women, which impacts the overall well being and advancement of the female gender. Moreover, researchers have tried

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to use different perspectives in their discussion regarding division of household labor in order to help explain the unequal distribution of household chores between the genders. Among these perspectives are the time-availability argument, the resource-power perspective, and socialization and gender role attitudes. This paper will discuss and analyze each of these perspectives in greater detail.

Current division of household labor between men and women is neither fair, nor rational. It has been reported that in all living situations, women spend more time performing housework compared to men, while the gender gap is the greatest among married couples (South & Spitze 1994). This gender gap between men and women regarding division of household labor was very slim and perhaps nonexistent before ownership of private property came into existence. In "The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State," Engels argued due to ownership of private property, sexual inequality became reality (Collins & Makowsky 2005). Before private property, the entire family worked and shared in housework duties. They also shared food and collaborated in the labor to create it. Men may have been held accountable for hunting animals, while women gathered fruits and vegetables. Overall, both sexes carried out economic tasks that were uniformly vital to not only their family's survival, but the community overall. During these eras, community was fundamentally an extended family in which women's domestic role was prized and valued (Davis 1981). However, ownership of private property brought changes in the family system in

which women became dominated. As society transitioned from matriarchal to patriarchal, women were expelled from the public economic sphere and confined to household labor (Collins & Makowsky 2005). Moreover, the term "Housewife" had come to represent women as the custodians of an undervalued domestic life. However, this definition did not hold true for the flood of immigrant women who joined the ranks of the working class in the Northeast, nor the black women who were separated from their home to contribute to the slave economy in the South (Davis 1981). As a result, Nineteenth century U.S. society contained both white women who worked tirelessly in factories for meager wages, and black women who worked incessantly under the oppression of slavery. Therefore, although the term "housewife" was only representative of the social conditions of the bourgeoisie and middle-class, Nineteenth century thought created the term housewife as a universal symbol for womanhood (Davis 1981).

The Effects of Diverse Living Arrangements and Marital Status on the Division of Household labor between Men and Women

Today women have made great strides in the economic sector and education, but continue to perform a majority of the housework. In the past fifteen years, increasing number of scholars have conducted research on division of household labor. Throughout this time women have made significant changes in employment and income. Today more women are taking on the role of sole

breadwinner. However, in light of these changes, household work is still dominated by women (Greenstein 2000). Women spend 33 hours per week on household tasks, while men perform 18 hours (South & Spitze 1994). It has also been indicated that women who earn more money than their male counterparts perform a disproportionate share of the housework (South & Spitze 1994; Greenstein 2000). The reason for this may stem from female guilt, because as more wives are taking on the breadwinner role in the family, men may start to feel resentment. Therefore, in order to avoid inflicting any harm to the husband's self esteem and supremacy, women may feel obliged to perform more housework. In households where females are the top earners, husband and wives possess a "concealing" process indicated by Goffman, to diminish the stigma of their "deviant" roles. Husbands in turn reduce their social interactions with others and remain quiet about their wives' careers (Greenstein 2000). Moreover, the gender gap remains the largest among married couples regarding household labor division (South and Spitze 1994). Perhaps the reason why a significant number of researchers solely focus on housework in married family circles. However, the discussion of labor division between men and women would not be complete unless all living arrangements are assessed, since different stages in people's lives can help researchers compare the changing trends in the amount spent in household labor from one stage of an individual's life to another, notably going from singlehood to joining the ranks of couplehood. Therefore, diverse living arrange-

ments that include: living alone, cohabiting, living with a spouse, living with friends or roommates, or living with relatives are important factors in discussing division of household labor, since people alter their living arrangements as they move through different stages in their lives. As divorce rates have increased, there are an increasing number of individuals living independently. For instance, today one in two marriages end in divorce, altering the couples living arrangements (Yodanis 2005). Moreover, more and more couples are deciding to cohabit. Therefore, many argue it is important to also study cohabitating couples' division of household labor because of the increasing number of individuals becoming cohabiters, implying marriage is not the only acceptable form of union between men and women (Batalova & Cohen 2002).

Studies indicate that cohabitating women do more housework than never-married women. It is also highest in marriages and lowest among widows and divorcees. Meanwhile, men's housework remains consistent for both cohabiters and married individuals (South & Spitze 1994). It only increases significantly for widowed men by 6.0 hours (Gupta 1999). Moreover, cohabiting women do less housework than married women, while men reduce their housework performance significantly upon entrance into marriage or cohabitation (Batalova & Cohen 2002). Therefore, men decrease their housework performance as they enter into couple households, but increase it when they leave couple households. The opposite holds true for women, who increase their housework upon entrance

into couple households by more than 7 hours, but decrease their housework when they leave couple households (Gupta 1999). Therefore, this indicates that a couple household regarding division of household labor significantly benefits men.

The Impact of Education, Presence of Children, Age, Liberal Ideology, and Race on Division of Household Labor between Men and Women

Additional variables have been tested in numerous studies to indicate whether they have an impact on the division of household labor between men and women. One of these variables is education. Among women, education is inversely related to housework, while for men the connection tends to be positive and significant (South and Spitze 1994). Education is considered an important factor in the discussion of housework because it has been argued that educated men and women possess a more egalitarian attitude, which can help create an equal division of household labor (South & Spitze 1994). For instance, studies indicate that for each additional year of schooling, housework time is reduced by an hour for women. Entering school also has an impact on housework time by 2.0 hours (Gupta 1999). Another variable tested is the presence of children in the home. The addition of children ages 0-4 years old increases female housework by 3.3 hours. However, as children grow to ages 5-11, it remains significant. For teen years, it is only the male teens who add to the women's housework time (Gupta 1999). Therefore, the presence of children at home increases the amount of

time spent on house-chores predominately for women, in which pre-teenagers produce somewhat more work than older children (South & Spitze 1994). Other variables that include younger age and liberal ideology are thought to have a positive impact on the attainment of equality between men and women regarding division of household labor. Additionally, married couples in which the wife earns more money, works full-time, or in which the husband is not employed full time, possess a more egalitarian division of housework (Batalova and Cohen 2002). Moreover, there is a big variation in gender division of household labor across different races. It has been reported that white men perform a small share of housework compared to Black or Hispanic men—even as white women continue to perform less housework than Black or Hispanic women. The reason for this is accredited to whites having greater economic resources that enable them to make use of more housework services (Cohen 1998).

The Effect of Income on Division of Household Labor between Men and Women

Another variable that impacts women due to performing a majority of the household tasks is income. Previous research has overwhelmingly shown a negative correlation between household responsibilities and wages in the workplace. It has been argued that women's unequal responsibility for household work may be an important factor in explaining the earning gap between men and women (Noonan 2001). The discrepancy in gender wages

can be attributed to individual characteristics that include work experience and tenure. This discrepancy is tied to gender differences in home production time (Hersch & Stratton 2002). The effort and energy spent performing household chores have an enormous impact on the amount of energy accessible for market work. It has been argued if effort placed in household work and wages are positively associated, the wages of workers who hold the most responsibilities in performing household chores will decrease compared to the wages of their less overwhelmed counterparts, regard-less if their human capital characteristics and experience in the labor market are the same (Hersch & Stratton 1997). The amount of time and energy spent on housework also has an impact on decision making factors regarding looking for jobs that have flexible work hours, a workplace closer to home, and less out of town travel requirements to help incorporate housework responsibilities with work requirements. This in turn suggests that these compensating disparities anticipate that jobs with these characteristics will pay far less (Noonan 2001). Moreover, it has been indicated that housework has the same impact on wages for single men, but has a negative impact on married women compared with married men. It has been suggested that gender divided house chores performed by married persons may be the prominent reason (Hersch & Stratton 2002). Therefore, housework has two distinct factors that include number of hours and type of tasks (Noonan 2002).

Male and Female Type Tasks Regarding Household Chores

Women not only perform more household chores, but the household chores performed by both sexes also differ. Thus, household labor is separated by sex (Greenstein 2000). It has been argued that female housework is more repetitive and continuous which include: cooking, cleaning, shopping, washing dishes, doing laundry, and making beds. Therefore, since female tasks require daily performance, it could have an impact on the number of hours left to work in the labor market. These female tasks may also have to be performed during specific times throughout the day, which can hamper a woman's ability to stay at work for longer hours to attend work related activities. These responsibilities can prevent women from gaining more experience and seniority at work (Noonan 2001). Moreover, male housework involving outdoor maintenance, yard work, and automobile repair, is more flexible in time and frequency (Gupta 1999). Men usually perform chores outside the home, which may not revolve around daily child care. It has been implied that male tasks are usually performed during the weekends, away from market work time. Therefore, due to the flexible and infrequent nature of male tasks, men are better able to acquire adaptable scheduling around paid work (Noonan 2001). Furthermore, Female type tasks devour more time for married women than for any other group. While regarding men, cohabitating males spend 2.5 hours more per week performing traditionally female chores compared to married men, while

married men spend more time on outdoor maintenance, generally known as male type chores (South & Spitze 1994). Divorced and widowed men spend 6 to 8 hours more per week performing female-type tasks compared to married men. Overall, married and cohabiting men spend less time on female chores and more on male type tasks than men in other marital statuses (South & Spitze 1994). It has been reported that men perform 70% of the “male” tasks, where as women perform 75% of the “female” tasks (Greenstein 2000). Moreover, it has been suggested than an equal division in the amount and type of housework performed by men and women in the home is necessary to help narrow the gender gap in wages (Noonan 2001).

Perspectives on Gender Division of Household Chores

There are numerous perspectives formed by scholars who study division of household labor between men and women. The first is the resource-power perspective, which implies that work’s focal point resides in economic and social contexts, in which the husband and wife take into account their individual resources as bargaining tools over who will perform which household chore. However, it is suggested that a wife’s resources may be disregarded by male dominance at the societal level (South & Spitze 1994). Moreover, the reason why married men spend a certain amount of time performing household chores stems from their desires and ideology, rather than in relation to the resources of their wives (Milkie & Robinson 1998). Another perspective is

the time-availability perspective, which stems from human capital theory. This perspective takes into account how much time a wife works outside the home and how much time she spends performing house chores. The time availability model however does not provide a complete explanation since most studies indicate that although employed women perform less hours of housework, the differences are too small (Greenstein 2000). An additional perspective is the socialization and gender role attitude, which implies that male and female behavior regarding housework stems from how men and women have been socialized to believe is appropriate male and female behavior (Batalova & Cohen 2002). Moreover, it is suggested that although women’s ideologies are continuously being altered, men’s are not. The attainment of equal household labor division between both sexes relies heavily upon the employment of nontraditional (egalitarian) gender ideologies (Greenstein 2000).

Distinction between Male and Female Satisfaction and Ideologies Regarding Division of Household Labor

Research regarding household labor division has not only taken into account numerous factors, which include: income, race, and education; but also feelings, beliefs, gender ideologies, and marital conflict. For instance, inequality regarding division of house-hold labor is often connected with a woman’s sense of unfairness, depression, and marital dissatisfaction, where as men’s contribution in routine recurring chores is the primary reason for marital satisfaction (Lavee & Katz 2002). A

wife's dissatisfaction regarding household labor division plays a vital role in the emergence of conflict between spouses. For instance, dissatisfaction and conflict regarding household labor division may be a crucial component in explaining decreased marital satisfaction among wives after the birth of their first born (Kluwer, Heesink and Vliert 1996). Moreover, female perception regarding household labor division may vary according to what women were socialized to value in a relationship as it relates to their social and standardized principles of what is reasonable and rightful (Lavee & Katz 2002). Females who feel their husbands should take equal part in performing household tasks, and in turn pressure their husbands to take part in housework, create homes in which husbands perform more housework (Kluwer, Heesink, and Vliert 1996). Therefore, Gender Ideology, how a person perceives himself or herself regarding market and family rules traditionally associated with gender, is a significant factor studied by researchers in determining equality between genders regarding division of household labor (Greenstein 1996). For instance, lower marital quality is linked to a more segregated division of labor for egalitarian women (Lavee & Kutz 2002). Meanwhile, a husband's gender ideology is not linked to household labor division for men married to traditional wives compared to men with egalitarian wives. In actuality, a husband's household labor performance decreases as gender ideology becomes more traditional. Therefore, men who are married to traditional women, have very little correlation regarding their gender

ideology and share of domestic labor (Greenstein 1996).

Division of household labor is a constant and vital process, which results from an interactive compromise between couples. Therefore, it requires researchers to not only look at the different characteristics of males and females as individuals, but to also take into consideration the interactions between them (Greenstein 1996). Husbands' and wives' dissatisfaction is often approached from an individual perspective (Kluwer, Heesink, and Vliert 1996). However, studying the interactions between husbands' and wives' gender ideologies has allowed researchers to suggest that a major reason why women's employment increase has not been followed by equivalent changes in husbands' contributions regarding domestic work is because the husbands' gender ideology has not kept up with those of their wives in the transition from traditional "separate spheres" ideologies to more egalitarian beliefs (Greenstein 1996).

Gender Production in Everyday Housework

It has been argued by many scholars that marital household is perceived as a "Gender Factory," in which gender is produced through everyday housework performance (Batalova & Cohen 2002). Therefore, housework creates gender in the course of everyday performance of supremacy, compliance, and other behaviors symbolically tied to gender. Moreover, people's perceptions of gender are usually crippled and lacking cohesion. Their implications of what they believe and how they feel

translating into household behavior are contradictory (South & Spitze 1994). For instance, men have argued that both sexes should be equal, but fail to contribute to the development of equality when it comes to performing their share of the housework. Therefore, women continue to take on more than their share of the housework, since men continue to shy away from performing their half.

Conclusion and Hypotheses

Studies on housework have been twofold: one, researchers have focused on the number of hours spent performing specific household chores by both genders (South & Spitze 1994); while other researchers have focused on analyzing the impact of the division of household labor on gender ideologies and satisfaction among men and women (Lavee & Katz 2002). This paper analyzes both types of studies by numerous researchers to help provide a complete analysis regarding gender and division of household labor. Numerous variables were discussed in relation to their impact on the division of household labor between men and women. Among these variables were income, race, education, gender ideologies, age, marital status, employment status, and diverse living arrangements. All of these factors have an effect on the division of household labor between men and women. *H1*: educated men and women will contribute to greater equality in the sharing of housework. It has been argued that men and women, who have obtained an education, tend to possess a more egalitarian attitude, which can help create a more equal division of

household labor (South & Spitze 1994). Another factor is the marital status of men and women. *H2*: Women who are single, divorced, or widowed will spend less time performing household chores compared to married women. The reason for this lies in the absence of a husband to clean after, thus leading to less housework performance. Meanwhile, the opposite holds true for men, since single, divorced, or widowed men perform more housework compared to married men. The reason is accredited to the absence of a wife, who can help clean, thus leading to more housework performance for men (South & Spitze 1994). A third variable that impacts the division of household labor is earning status. *H3*: Husbands married to women with almost equal earnings will perform the most housework. It has been suggested that although dependent wives perform the largest share of housework at 68%, housework performed by wives tend to reduce as their economic dependence decreases (Greenstein 2000). It has also been argued that wives with no earnings perform forty five hours of housework per week, whereas wives who are the sole earners perform 30 hours (Greenstein 2000). Moreover, a fourth variable that impacts the division of household labor includes diverse living arrangements. *H4*: Couples who cohabit before marriage will perform an equal share of housework. It has been implied that couples who cohabit tend to possess a more egalitarian view regarding division of household labor (Batalova & Cohen 2002). *H5*: paid employment is another variable that has an impact, since women who are employed will reduce their housework performance. It has been argued that

every additional hour of paid employment decreases women's housework by seven minutes (Gupta 1999). *H6*: Age also has an impact on the division of household labor since it has been argued that younger people possess a more egalitarian belief regarding housework. Gender ideologies are a significant factor in discussing the division of household labor. *H7*: individuals who possess a more non-traditional (egalitarian) belief regarding division of household labor will contribute to greater equality in the sharing of housework. It has been argued that couples who hold traditional views regarding gender and marital roles will live in traditional households, where the wife will perform most of the housework. Meanwhile, couples with less traditional views will possess a more egalitarian belief regarding housework performance, which will lead to greater female satisfaction and less marital conflict (Greenstein 2000).

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