
HOUSEWORK IN MARITAL AND NONMARITAL HOUSEHOLDS*

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Although much recent research has explored the division of household labor between husbands and wives, few studies have examined housework patterns across marital statuses. This paper uses data from the National Survey of Families and Households to analyze differences in time spent on housework by men and women in six different living situations: never married and living with parents, never married and living independently, cohabiting, married, divorced, and widowed. In all situations, women spend more time than men doing housework, but the gender gap is widest among married persons. The time women spend doing housework is higher among cohabitants than among the never-married, is highest in marriage, and is lower among divorcees and widows. Men's housework time is very similar across both never-married living situations, in cohabitation, and in marriage. However, divorced and widowed men do substantially more housework than any other group of men, and they are especially more likely than their married counterparts to spend more time cooking and cleaning. In addition to gender and marital status, housework time is affected significantly by several indicators of workload (e.g., number of children, home ownership) and time devoted to nonhousehold activities (e.g., paid employment, school enrollment)—most of these variables have greater effects on women's housework time than on men's. An adult son living at home increases women's housework, whereas an adult daughter at home reduces housework for women and men. These housework patterns are generally consistent with an emerging perspective that views housework as a symbolic enactment of gender relations. We discuss the implications of these findings for perceptions of marital equity.

Until 20 years ago, social science research on housework was largely nonexistent (Glazer-Malbin 1976; Huber and Spitze 1983), but since then, research on the topic has exploded. Patterns of housework and how housework is experienced by participants have been documented in both qualitative (e.g., Hochschild with Machung 1989; Oakley 1974) and quantitative studies (e.g., Berk 1985; Blair and Lichter 1991; Coverman and Sheley 1986; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Rexroat and Shehan 1987; Ross 1987; Shelton 1990; Spitze 1986; Walker and Woods 1976). The vast majority of these studies have focused on married couples, but a few have examined cohabiting couples as well (e.g., Blumstein and Schwartz 1983; Shelton and John 1993; Stafford, Backman, and Dibona 1977). The rationale for fo-

cus on couples is typically a research interest in equity (Benin and Agostinelli 1988; Blair and Johnson 1992; Ferree 1990; Peterson and Maynard 1981; Thompson 1991) and in how changes in women's employment and gender roles have changed, or failed to change, household production functions.

Very few studies have examined housework as performed in noncouple households composed of never-married, separated or divorced, or widowed persons (e.g., Grief 1985; Sanik and Mauldin 1986). Such studies are important for two reasons. First, people are spending increasing amounts of time in such households at various points in their lives due to postponed marriages, higher divorce rates, and a preference among adults in all age categories (including the later years) for independent living. For example, the proportion of households that includes married couples decreased from 76.3 percent to 60.9 percent between 1940 and 1980 (Sweet and Bumpass 1987), and the number of years adult women spend married has decreased by about seven years during the past several decades (Watkins, Menken, and Bon-

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gaarts 1987). It is important to learn how housework is experienced by this substantial segment of the population to understand the household production function in general and because performance of housework is related to decisions about paid work and leisure time for people in these categories.

Second, the housework experiences of single, divorced, and widowed persons go with them if they move into marriage or cohabitation—these experiences are part of the context in which they negotiate how to accomplish tasks jointly with a partner. People may use those prior experiences or assumptions about what they *would* do if the marriage or cohabiting relationship dissolved to set an alternative standard when assessing an equitable division of household labor, rather than simply comparing their own investment in housework to their partner's. Thus, by understanding factors affecting housework contributions by men and women not living in couple relationships, we can better understand what happens when they do form those relationships.

Our broadest objective in this paper is to analyze how time spent doing housework by men and women varies by marital status and to interpret this analysis in relation to the "gender perspective" on household labor. Focusing on six situations defined by marital status and living arrangement, we seek to determine how men and women in these different situations compare in the amounts of time they spend doing housework, whether these differences can be attributed to differences in other social and economic characteristics, and which household tasks account for these differences. We are particularly interested in those persons who are living independently and who are not married or cohabiting, since previous research has focused heavily on married persons and, to a lesser extent, on cohabiting couples (Shelton and John 1993; Stafford et al. 1977) and children still living at home (Benin and Edwards 1990; Berk 1985; Blair 1991; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Hilton and Haldeman 1991).

MODELS OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR

Beginning with Blood and Wolfe's (1960) classic study, sociologists have attempted to explain the division of household labor between husbands and wives and to determine whether the division is changing over time. The *re-*

source-power perspective originating in that work focuses on the economic and social contexts in which husbands and wives bring their individual resources (such as unequal earnings) to bear in bargaining over who will do which household chores. This resource-power theory has since been modified and elaborated upon in several ways, focusing on determining which resources are important and the conditions under which they are useful for bargaining. Rodman's (1967) theory of resources in cultural context and Blumberg and Coleman's (1989) theory of gender stratification (as applied to housework) suggest that there are limits on how effectively resources can be used, especially by women. Several observers suggest that wives' resources may be "discounted" by male dominance at the societal level (Aytac and Teachman 1992; Blumberg and Coleman 1989; Ferree 1991b; Gillespie 1971).

Two other perspectives are used frequently in the study of household labor. One focuses on *socialization and gender role attitudes*, suggesting that husbands and wives perform household labor in differing amounts depending upon what they have learned and have come to believe about appropriate behavior for men and women (see Goldscheider and Waite 1991). An alternative perspective, the *time availability hypothesis*, suggests that husbands and wives perform housework in amounts relative to the time left over after paid work time is subtracted. A variation on this, the *demand response capability hypothesis* (Coverman 1985), is somewhat broader and includes factors that increase the total amount of work to be done and spouses' availability to do it. The focus on time allocation as a rational process is akin to the economic perspective, most closely associated with Becker (1981; see also critique in Berk 1985). However, sociologists and economists differ in their views on this perspective: Economists assume that time allocation to housework and paid work is jointly determined and based on the relative efficiency of husbands and wives in both arenas; sociologists assume that decisions about paid work are causally prior (Godwin 1991; Spitze 1986).

The above three perspectives (power-resources, socialization-gender roles, and time availability) have guided much of the sociological research on household labor over the past 20 years (see reviews of these theories and their variations in Ferree 1991a; Godwin 1991;

Shelton 1992; Spitze 1988). However, they have produced mixed results, and, as several reviewers have pointed out, much more variance is explained by gender *per se* than by any of the other factors in these models (Ferree 1991a; Thompson and Walker 1991). Moreover, studies show that women who earn more than their husbands often do a disproportionate share of the housework, perhaps in an attempt to prevent those earnings from threatening the husband's self-esteem (Thompson and Walker 1991). While both husbands' and wives' time in paid employment does affect the time they spend doing housework (Goldscheider and Waite 1991), it is argued that the basic distribution of household labor calls for an explanation of its gendered, asymmetrical nature (Thompson and Walker 1991).

A new direction in the explanation of household labor originates in West and Zimmerman's (1987) concept of "doing gender." They argue that gender can be understood as "a routine accomplishment embedded in everyday interaction" (1987:125). Berk (1985) applied their perspective to the division of household labor, observing that the current situation among husbands and wives is neither inherently rational (as the New Home Economics had argued; see Becker 1981) nor fair. Thus, Berk concludes that more than goods and services are "produced" through household labor. She describes the marital household as a "gender factory" where, in addition to accomplishing tasks, housework "produces" gender through the everyday enactment of dominance, submission, and other behaviors symbolically linked to gender (Berk 1985; see also Hartmann 1981; Shelton and John 1993).

Ferree (1991a) elaborates on the "gender perspective" and its application to household labor and argues that it challenges three assumptions of resource theory. First, as Berk pointed out in her critique of economic analyses of housework, housework is not allocated in the most efficient manner. Second, gender is more influential than individual resources in determining the division of household labor. And third, housework is not necessarily defined as "bad" and to be avoided. On the contrary, in addition to expressing subordination, housework can also express love and care, particularly for women (Ferree 1991a). Relatedly, DeVault (1989) describes in detail how the activities surrounding the planning and prepara-

tion of meals are viewed not only as labor but also as an expression of love. In support of the general argument that housework has important symbolic meanings, Ferree (1991a) points out that "housework-like chores are imposed in other institutions to instill discipline" (p. 113), such as KP in the army.

The process of "doing gender" is not assumed to operate at a conscious level; on the contrary, Berk (1985) points out that it goes on "without much notice being taken" (p. 207). Ferree (1991a) finds it "striking how little explicit conflict there is over housework in many families" (p. 113). Hochschild's (with Machung 1989) pathbreaking study shows how gender ideologies are enacted through the performance of housework and may operate in a contradictory manner at conscious and unconscious levels. She discovers through in-depth case studies that people's ideas about gender are often "fractured and incoherent" (p. 190) and that contradictions abound between what people say they believe, what they seem to feel, and how these beliefs and feelings are reflected in their household behavior.

This developing "doing gender" approach suggests several important contrasts between couple households (especially those of married couples) and other household types. Indeed, one could argue that *only* by examining a range of household types, including those *not* formed by couples, can one determine the usefulness of this explanation for the behavior of married or cohabiting persons. If gender is being "produced," one would expect this process to be more important in heterosexual couple households than in other household types—there would be less need or opportunity for either men or women to display dominance and subordination or other gender-linked behaviors when they are not involved in conjugal relations. Berk (1985) argues that "in households where the appropriation of *another's* work is possible, in practice the expression of work and the expression of gender become inseparable" (p. 204). Of course, we recognize that gender role socialization is likely to produce gender differentials, even among unmarried persons. However, this *appropriation* seems likely to occur mainly, or perhaps only, in heterosexual couple households, particularly when the couples are married. Berk observes a sharp contrast in the housework patterns of married couples versus same-sex roommate arrange-

ments, the latter seeming "so uncomplicated" to respondents (1985:204).

If heterosexual couples indeed produce gender through performing housework, we would expect women in married-couple households to spend more time doing housework than women in any other living situation; we would expect men's time spent doing housework to be lower in married-couple households than in other household types. These expectations are net of other differences between the household types, such as the presence of children, that affect housework. We would expect women to display submission to and/or love for their husbands or male partners by performing a disproportionate share of the housework, whereas men would display their gender/dominance by avoiding housework that they might perform in other household settings—in particular female-typed housework that constitutes the vast majority of weekly housework time in households. Because a woman cannot display love for or subordination to a man through housework when no man is present, this avenue for displaying gender does not exist in one-adult households. Thus, we would predict smaller gender differences in noncouple than couple household settings once other relevant factors are controlled.

An alternative empirical outcome—one that would cast doubt on the validity of the gender perspective—would be a pattern across household type involving a more or less constant gender difference. We know that there is a gender gap in time spent doing housework between married men and women and between teenage boys and girls. We do not know, however, whether that gap is constant across other situations. If, for example, gender differences in childhood training produce standards or skill levels that vary with gender, one might argue that men and women would carry these attitudes or behaviors with them as they move among different household situations.

HOUSEWORK AND MARITAL STATUS

Housework is a major component of most people's lives, just as is paid work. It is first experienced in childhood as "chores" and continues into retirement. Yet, while housework is performed prior to marriage and after its dissolution, most studies of household labor focus

exclusively on husbands and wives. This tends to create the false impression that housework occurs only within marital households.

Our analysis of housework is based on a categorization by marital status. We focus on men and women who have *never married*, or are currently *married*, *divorced*, or *widowed*. However, because a key aspect of our theoretical argument focuses on gender relations in heterosexual households, we add a "*cohabiting*" category, which includes persons who are currently cohabiting whether or not they have ever been married, divorced, or widowed. Further, the situation of never-married persons (who are not cohabiting) varies greatly depending upon whether they are *living independently* or *living in a parental household*; thus we divide never-married persons into two groups based on living situation. In the sections below, we review studies of housework performed by persons in each of these six categories.

Never-Married Persons Living in Their Parents' Homes

The performance of household chores is one of many gender-differentiated socialization experiences gained in families of origin. A number of studies have examined housework performed by boys and girls up to the age of 18 who are living with their parents. These studies have focused on three kinds of questions: how parents define the meaning of housework (White and Brinkerhoff 1981a), how children's contributions relate to or substitute for mothers' or fathers' work (Berk 1985; Goldscheider and Waite 1991), and how housework varies by the gender of the child, mother's employment, and number of parents in the household (e.g., Benin and Edwards 1990; Blair 1991; Hilton and Haldeman 1991).

Housework done by boys and by girls mirrors that of adults, with girls doing stereotypical "female" chores and spending more time doing housework than boys (Benin and Edwards 1990; Berk 1985; Blair 1991; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Hilton and Haldeman 1991; Timmer, Eccles, and O'Brien 1985; White and Brinkerhoff 1981b). Patterns by gender and age suggest that, under certain conditions, children (particularly older girls) actually assist their parents. Gender differences increase with age, so that in the teenage years girls are spending about twice as much time per

week as boys doing housework (Timmer et al. 1985), and the gender-stereotyping of tasks is at a peak. This pattern holds even in single-father families, where one might expect less traditional gender-typed behavior (Grief 1985). Adolescent girls' housework time has been shown to substitute for that of their mothers, while boys' housework time does not (Bergen 1991; Goldscheider and Waite 1991). Differences between single-parent and two-parent families also suggest more actual reliance on girls' work: Boys in single-parent households do less housework than do boys in two-parent households, while girls in single-parent households do more (Hilton and Haldeman 1991). Similar differences have been found between single- and dual-earner two-parent families. Again, girls do more when parents' time is constrained (dual earners) while boys do less, suggesting that parents actually rely on girls to substitute for their mothers' time doing housework (Benin and Edwards 1990).

One would expect parallel differences in the behavior of young adult men and women who still live with their parents. To our knowledge, only three studies have examined housework performed by adult children living in parental households. Ward, Logan, and Spitze (1992) find that adult children living with parents perform only a small proportion of total household tasks when compared to their parents, and parents whose adult children do not live at home actually perform fewer household tasks per month than do parents whose adult children live with them. There are also major differences between adult sons and adult daughters in the amount of housework they do, with daughters performing more tasks than sons when they live in a parent's home. This holds for all parent age groups, particularly those under 65. These gender differences are consistent with results on adult children's share of household tasks reported by Goldscheider and Waite (1991). Hartung and Moore (1992) report qualitative findings that are consistent with the conclusion that adult children, especially sons, contribute little to household chores and typically add to their mothers' burdens.

Never-Married Persons Living Independently

We know of no empirical research that focuses specifically on never-married persons living independently, so we will speculate briefly

about factors affecting them. One likely consequence of experiences with housework in the parental home is that girls acquire the skills required for independent living, including shopping, cooking, cleaning, and laundry. To the extent that they have already been doing significant amounts of housework at home, girls' transitions to independent living may not create a major change in the amount or types of housework they perform. The skills boys are more likely to learn in the parental home (e.g., yard work) may be less useful, particularly if their first independent living experience is in an apartment. They may reach adulthood enjoying housework less than women, feeling less competent at household tasks, holding lower standards of performance, embracing gender-stereotyped attitudes about appropriateness of tasks, and preferring to pay for substitutes (e.g., laundry, meals eaten out). On the other hand, single men living independently (and not cohabiting) are forced, to a certain extent, to do their own housework (Goldscheider and Waite 1991), because their living situations are unlikely to provide household services. Thus, the time spent by single men doing housework should increase when they move out of parental households.

Cohabitors

Cohabiting couples share some characteristics of both married and single persons (Shelton and John 1993; Stafford et al. 1977). As Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel (1992) point out, most discussions have used married persons as the comparison group, viewing cohabitation as an alternative kind of marriage or engagement. The division of household labor between cohabiters may be closer to that of married persons, but in other areas such as fertility plans, employment, school enrollment, and home ownership, cohabiters more closely resemble single persons (Rindfuss and VandenHeuvel 1992). Thus, we would expect cohabiters to fall at an intermediate position, between never-married living independently and married persons, in the allocation of time to housework.

A few empirical studies have examined housework by heterosexual cohabiting couples. One early study (Stafford et al. 1977) uses a relative contribution measure of housework and finds cohabiting couples to be fairly

“traditional” in their division of household labor. A more recent study using an absolute measure of time expenditure in housework (Shelton and John 1993) sheds more light on the comparison between cohabiting and married couples. Adjusted means of time spent doing housework for cohabiting men are not significantly different from those for married men, but cohabiting women do less housework than do married women. These results are consistent with Blumstein and Schwartz’s (1983) comparisons of married and cohabiting men and women. Blair and Lichter (1991) find no significant differences between married and cohabiting men’s housework time, but find less task segregation by gender among cohabitants. As is true of comparisons on other dimensions (Rindfuss and Vandenhuevel 1992), studies of housework among cohabiting couples have used married persons as the comparison group, and there have been few comparisons of housework patterns in cohabiting relationships to patterns in other marital statuses.

Married Persons

Marriage often entails a number of changes that increase housework, including parenthood and home ownership, but it also might increase housework for less tangible reasons. Marriage and parenthood entail responsibility for the well-being of others, which is likely to be reflected in higher standards of cleanliness and nutrition, and thus require that more time be devoted to housework. However, the net result of this increase in total work is different for men and for women, and this gender division of household labor has been the subject of much research and theorizing in recent years. Averages tend to range widely depending on the definitions of housework used, but women generally report performing over 70 percent of total housework, even if they are employed (Bergen 1991; Ferree 1991a). One recent study reported married women (including non-employed) doing 40 hours of housework per week and men 19 hours (Shelton and John 1993), and countless studies have documented that wives’ employment has little effect on married men’s housework load (see reviews in Spitzer 1988; Thompson and Walker 1991). Clearly, wives are responsible for the vast bulk of household chores and for maintaining stan-

dards of cleanliness and health in the family. Married men have been described as doing less housework than they create (Hartmann 1981). Further, when they do contribute to household chores, men are more likely to take on those jobs which are more pleasant, leaving women with those that can be described as “unrelenting, repetitive, and routine” (Thompson and Walker 1991:86). Thus, past empirical results for married persons are consistent with the gender perspective, but comparative analyses that include persons in other marital statuses are needed.

Divorced Persons

To our knowledge there have been no studies of the time divorced persons spend doing housework except those studies focusing on children’s housework. Divorced persons (who are not cohabiting) have had the prior experience of living with a heterosexual partner. Women may experience a decrease in housework hours if in fact their partner was creating more housework than he was doing. Men’s experience, on the other hand, may be similar to that of moving out of the parental household, that is, of having to do some household tasks for themselves that were previously performed by others. Those who never lived independently before may have to do some of these chores for the first time. Gove and Shin (1989) point out that both divorced and widowed men have more difficulty carrying out their daily household routines than do their female counterparts, who are more likely to experience economic strains.

Widowed Persons

In empirical studies, housework has been identified as an important source of strain for widowed men. Widowed men reduce the time they spend doing housework as the years since widowhood pass, and they are more likely than widows to have help doing it as time goes on (Umberson, Wortman, and Kessler 1992). Of course, today’s widows and widowers came of age when the gendered division of labor in households was much more segregated than it is today and when living independently before or between marriages was much less common. While we expect widowed men today to have entered widowhood with relatively little expe-

rience in certain kinds of household chores, this may not be true in the future.

Widowed women may share some characteristics with divorced women; they may actually feel some relief from the strain of doing the bulk of household tasks for two (Umberson et al. 1992). Like widowed men, however, current cohorts of widowed women may have little experience in certain kinds of chores, in this case traditionally male chores such as yard work, car care, or financial management.

Other Factors Influencing Time Doing Housework

Men and women in different marital statuses are likely to differ on a variety of factors that can influence the performance of housework, such as their health, employment status, presence of children and other adults, and home ownership. We would expect the performance of housework to vary by marital status both because of these factors and because of the ways in which the marital status itself (or experience in a previous status) influences housework behavior. Here, we describe a model of time spent in housework that can be applied to persons in all marital situations. This model will then guide us in choosing control variables for the analysis of housework.

A person is expected to spend more time in housework as the *total amount to be done* increases. (Berk [1985] calls this the total "pie" in her study of married couple households.) We would expect the amount of housework to increase as the number of children increases, particularly when children are young, but to some extent for older children as well (Bergen 1991; Berk 1985; Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane 1992; Rexroat and Shehan 1987). The amount of work will also increase with the addition of adults to the household, although of course they may perform housework as well. Work may also increase with the size of house and the responsibilities that go with home ownership, car ownership, and presence of a yard (Bergen 1991; Berk 1985).¹

¹ While owning appliances would be expected to decrease time spent doing housework, it has had much less clear-cut effects than expected, both over time and in cross-sectional studies (Gershuny and Robinson 1988).

Note that the total housework to be done is to some extent a subjective concept. Two households with the same composition and type of home may accomplish different amounts of housework for several reasons. The standards held by the adults in the household will vary (Berk 1985) and may even vary systematically along dimensions such as education and age. Also, some households purchase more services than others, due to available income (Bergen 1991) and time constraints.

A second factor influencing the amount of housework a person does is the number of *other people* there are in the household with whom to share the work. Other people are most helpful if they are adults, and women are likely to contribute more than men. Teenagers and even grade-school-age children may be helpful, and their contribution may also vary by gender. The way that household labor is divided, and thus the amount performed by a particular man or woman, may also relate to gender-role attitudes that may vary with education, age, race, and other factors.

Third, persons with more *time and energy* will do more housework. Available time would be limited by hours spent in paid work, school enrollment status, health and disability status, and age (Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz 1992; Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane 1992; Rexroat and Shehan 1987). Concurrent roles, in addition to that of homemaker, detract from the time available to be devoted to housework.

DATA AND METHODS

Data for this study are drawn from the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a national probability sample of 13,017 adults interviewed between March of 1987 and May of 1988 (Sweet, Bumpass, and Call 1988). The NSFH includes a wide variety of questions on sociodemographic background, household composition, labor force behavior, and marital and cohabitation experiences, as well as items describing respondents' allocation of time to household tasks. The NSFH oversamples single-parent families and cohabiters (as well as minorities and recently married persons), thus facilitating comparisons of household labor among persons in different—and relatively rare—household situations. Sample weights are used throughout the

analysis to achieve the proper representation of respondents in the U.S. population.

The dependent variable, hours devoted to housework in the typical week, is derived from a series of questions asking respondents how many hours household members spend on various tasks. Respondents were provided with a chart and instructed: "Write in the approximate number of hours per week that you, your spouse/partner, or others in the household normally spend doing the following things." Nine household tasks include "preparing meals," "washing dishes and cleaning up after meals," "cleaning house," "outdoor and other household maintenance tasks (lawn and yard work, household repair, painting, etc.)," "shopping for groceries and other household goods," "washing, ironing, mending," "paying bills and keeping financial records," "automobile maintenance and repair," and "driving other household members to work, school, or other activities." This analysis uses only the number of hours that the respondents report *themselves* as spending on these tasks. To construct the dependent variable, we sum the number of hours spent on each of the nine tasks.²

We make two adjustments to this dependent variable. First, because a few respondents reported spending inordinate numbers of hours on specific tasks, we recode values above the 95th percentile for each task to the value at that percentile. This adjustment reduces skewness in the individual items and therefore in the summed variable as well. Second, so we can include respondents who omit one or two of the nine questionnaire items, we impute values for the household tasks for these respondents.³

² The research literature on housework is inconsistent regarding the inclusion of time spent in childcare. Many data sets commonly used to analyze household labor do not include childcare in their measure (e.g., Bergen 1991; Rexroat and Shehan 1987) or, as is the case here, childcare time is not included as a separate task (Coltrane and Ishii-Kuntz 1992), in part because respondents have difficulty separating time spent in childcare from leisure and from time spent in other tasks. Thus, we are not able to include childcare in our measure. This probably creates a downward bias in estimates of household labor time.

³ The NSFH assigns four different codes to the household task items for respondents who did not give a numerical reply: some unspecified amount of time spent; inapplicable; don't know; and no answer. Our imputation procedure substitutes a value

Individuals who failed to respond to more than two of the questions are excluded from the analysis. Omitting these respondents and excluding cases with missing values on the independent variables leaves 11,016 respondents available for analysis.

Given our focus on differences in housework between unmarried and married persons, it is essential that the dependent variable records the absolute number of hours devoted to housework rather than the proportional distribution of hours (or tasks) performed by various household members (e.g., Waite and Goldscheider 1992; Spitze 1986). Of course, estimates of time spent on household tasks made by respondents (as recorded in the NSFH) are likely to be less accurate than estimates from time diaries (for a review of validity studies dealing with time use, see Gershuny and Robinson 1988). Yet, estimates of the relative contribution of wives and husbands to household labor are generally comparable across different reporting methods (Warner 1986). Moreover, the effects of respondent characteristics on the time spent on housework shown here are quite similar to the effects observed in time diary studies. The size of the NSFH (approximately five times larger than the typical time-use survey), its oversampling of atypical marital statuses, and its breadth of coverage of respondent characteristics adequately compensate for the lack of time-diary data.

The key explanatory variable combines respondents' marital status with aspects of their

of 0 for those who did not answer this question (but answered at least seven of the nine items) or who said the task was inapplicable. In the former case, skipping the item most likely indicates that the respondent spent no time on that task; in the latter case, the respondent most likely could not logically spend time on that task (e.g., persons without cars could not spend any time maintaining them). For respondents who indicated spending some unspecified amount of time on a task and for those who indicated they didn't know, our imputation procedure substitutes the mean value for that task. In both of these instances, respondents presumably spent at least some time on that task. Our explorations of alternative ways of handling missing data, including omitting respondents who failed to answer one or more of the questions, treating all non-numerical responses as 0, and substituting all non-numerical responses with the mean, showed quite clearly that our substantive conclusions are unaffected by the method used to handle missing data.

living arrangements. (For stylistic convenience, we refer to this variable simply as marital status.) We distinguish six mutually exclusive statuses: never married and living in the parental household, never married (not cohabiting) and living independently, cohabiting, currently married, divorced or separated (not cohabiting), and widowed (not cohabiting). Because we are interested in the impact of a spouse or partner on respondents' time doing housework, cohabiters include divorced, separated, and widowed cohabiters as well as never-married cohabiters.

The other explanatory variables measure respondents' demographic background, socio-economic standing, household composition, concurrent roles, and disability status. As suggested above, several of these factors may help explain any differences that we observe in housework time by marital status and gender. Age is measured in years. Because housework demands are likely to peak during the middle adult years and to moderate at older ages, we also include *age squared* as an independent variable. *Education* is measured by years of school completed. *Household earnings* refers to the wage, salary, and self-employment income of all members of the household.⁴ *Home ownership* is a dummy variable scored 1 for respondents who own their own home and 0 for those who do not.

Several variables reflect the presence in the household of persons who may create or perform housework. *Children* in the household are

⁴ So as not to lose an inordinate number of cases to missing data, we substituted the mean for missing values on household earnings, and we included a dummy variable for these respondents in the regression models (coefficients not shown). One potential difficulty with this procedure is that all respondents who were not the householder or the spouse of the householder receive the mean value, because respondents were not asked the earnings of other household members. Equations estimated only with respondents who are householders revealed effects almost identical to those reported in the text, although never-married respondents living in the parental household are necessarily excluded from these equations. Given that households with adult children include more adults than other households, the household earnings of these latter respondents are likely to be higher than average, but any bias in the effect of earnings is apt to be slight. With one exception (see footnote 5), the amount of missing data on the other explanatory variables is small.

divided into the number of children younger than 5 years old, the number age 5 through 11, and the number age 12 through 18. Among the latter group, girls might be expected to create less (or perform more) housework than boys (Goldscheider and Waite 1991), and thus we include separate counts of male and female teenagers. We use several dummy variables to indicate the presence in the household of an *adult male* or *adult female* other than the respondent's spouse or cohabiting partner. Adult females are expected to reduce respondent's time devoted to housework, while adult males are expected to increase it. We further distinguish between adult household members who are the children of the respondent and those who are not.

Respondents who invest their time in activities outside the home are anticipated to devote less time to domestic labor. Employment status is measured by the usual number of *hours worked per week* in the labor force. And, whether the respondent is currently *attending school* is indicated by a dummy variable scored 1 for currently enrolled respondents and 0 for those not attending school.

Finally, *disability status* is measured by the response to the question, do you "have a physical or mental condition that limits your ability to do day-to-day household tasks?" Individuals reporting such a condition are scored 1 on this dummy variable; unimpaired respondents are scored 0.⁵

Our primary analytic strategy is to estimate OLS regression equations that examine the impact of gender, marital status, and the other explanatory variables on the time spent doing housework. Of particular importance for our theoretical model is whether marital status differences in housework time vary by gender—that is, do gender and marital status interact in affecting time spent doing housework? The "gender perspective" implies that marital status differences in housework will be more pronounced for women than for men and that the gender differences in housework will be greatest for married persons. The regression models are also used to determine the extent to which marital status differences in time doing house-

⁵ To retain the 5 percent of respondents who did not reply to the question on disability status, the regression equations also include a dummy variable for these respondents (coefficients not shown).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Hours Spent in Housework per Week and for Explanatory Variables, by Gender: U.S. Men and Women, 1987 to 1988

Variable	Women		Men	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
Housework hours per week	32.62	18.18	18.14	12.88
Marital Status ^a				
Never married/living in parental home	.06	.23	.11	.32
Never married/living independently	.10	.30	.11	.32
Cohabiting	.04	.19	.04	.20
Married	.57	.50	.63	.48
Divorced/separated	.12	.33	.08	.26
Widowed	.12	.33	.03	.17
Number of children ages 0 to 4	.26	.59	.22	.55
Number of children ages 5 to 11	.33	.70	.29	.66
Number of girls ages 12 to 18	.16	.44	.15	.43
Number of boys ages 12 to 18	.17	.45	.15	.43
Adult male child present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.10	.29	.07	.25
Adult male nonchild present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.09	.29	.18	.38
Adult female child present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.08	.27	.05	.22
Adult female nonchild present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.14	.35	.17	.38
Home ownership (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.59	.49	.58	.49
Household earnings (in \$1,000s)	28.72	37.69	31.64	36.51
Education	12.45	2.93	12.94	3.32
Age	44.30	17.99	42.24	17.07
Age squared (/100)	22.86	17.81	20.75	16.38
Hours employed per week	18.43	20.01	31.81	22.55
School enrollment (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.06	.24	.07	.26
Disabled (0 = no; 1 = yes)	.06	.24	.05	.22
Number of cases		6,764		4,252

^a May not add to 1.00 because of rounding.

work can be explained by other respondent characteristics and to assess whether the gender-specific impact of the explanatory variables holds for the general population (including unmarried people) in ways previously shown for married persons.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for all variables in the analysis. Immediately apparent is the sharp but unsurprising difference between men and women in the amount of time spent doing housework. In this sample, women report spending almost 33 hours per

week on household tasks, while men report spending slightly more than 18 hours. Both figures are roughly comparable to the findings of prior studies, although of course those studies did not include unmarried persons.

Gender differences in current marital status are relatively slight. Men are somewhat more likely than women to have never married, reflecting longstanding differences in age at marriage. And, among the never married, men are more likely than women to reside in the parental household. Women are more likely than men to be currently divorced or widowed, a probable consequence of their lower remarriage rates following divorce and men's higher

mortality. Four percent of both sexes are cohabiters.

Differences between women and men on the other explanatory variables are also generally small. The sole exception is the number of hours worked outside the home, with women averaging approximately 18 hours per week and men 32 hours.

The regression analysis of time spent on housework is shown in Table 2. In our initial equations (not shown here), we pooled the male and female respondents and regressed housework hours on the explanatory variables, including dummy variables for gender and marital status. We then added to this equation product terms representing the interaction of gender and marital status. As predicted by the theoretical model, allowing marital status and gender to interact in their effects on housework significantly increases the variance explained ($F = 67.06; p < .001$). And specifically, the difference in housework hours between married women and married men is significantly larger than the housework hours differences between women and men in each of the other marital statuses. Product terms representing the interaction of gender with the other explanatory variables also revealed that several of the effects varied significantly by gender; thus, we estimate and present the equations separately for women and for men.⁶

The first equation in Table 2 is based only on the women respondents and regresses weekly housework hours on dummy variables representing five of the six marital statuses, with married respondents serving as the reference category. Persons in all five marital statuses work significantly fewer hours around the house than do the married respondents; at the extreme, married women spend over 17 hours more per week on housework than do never-married women who reside in the parental household. As anticipated, the amount of time spent on housework by women who are never

married and living independently, cohabiting, divorced (including separated), or widowed falls between that of women who have not married (and remain in the parental home) and those who have married.

The third column of Table 2 presents the parallel equation for men. As reflected in the constant term, married men report spending almost 18 hours per week in housework, compared to almost 37 hours for their female counterparts (the constant term in column 1). More importantly, marital status differences in housework hours among men are relatively small compared to the analogous differences among women. Married men do significantly more housework than never-married men who still live with their parents and significantly less than divorced and widowed men, but most of these differences are modest. Moreover, the pattern of time spent doing housework across marital statuses differs substantially between men and women; it is greatest for men during widowhood and greatest for women during marriage.

Equation 2 in Table 2 re-estimates marital status differences in housework hours for men and women, controlling for the other explanatory variables. As shown in column 2, differences among women in these additional variables account for some, though by no means all, of the marital status differences in housework. Controlling for these variables reduces the differences between married women and other women by between 17 percent (for widows) and 66 percent (for cohabiters). Further, the difference between married women and cohabiting women is no longer statistically significant once these variables are controlled. Thus, among women a moderate proportion of the marital status differences in time spent doing housework is attributable to compositional differences. Particularly important in accounting for these marital status differences in housework hours are the number of hours the respondent works outside the home and the presence of children in the household; both variables vary significantly by marital status and are at least moderately related to time spent doing housework. We discuss these and the other effects of the explanatory variables in detail below.

For men, in contrast, controlling for the other explanatory variables does somewhat less to explain marital status differences in house-

⁶ The distribution of some of the factors that explain variation in housework hours differs by age group. For example, enrollment in school and the presence of children in the household are most prevalent for younger respondents, while disability and widowhood are more common among the aged. Yet, the correlation matrices showed little evidence of multicollinearity, and disaggregating the equations by age revealed patterns and determinants quite similar to those for the sample as a whole.

Table 2. OLS Coefficients for Regression of Hours Spent in Housework per Week on Marital Status and Other Explanatory Variables, by Gender: U.S. Men and Women, 1987 to 1988

Independent Variable	Women		Men	
	(1)	(2)	(1)	(2)
Marital Status				
Never married/living in parental home	-17.41*** (.93)	-9.73*** (1.34)	-2.90*** (.63)	-.52† (1.18)
Never married/living independently	-11.62*** (.74)	-6.45*** (.84)	1.09† (.63)	1.43† (.80)
Cohabiting	-5.54*** (1.14)	-1.86† (1.14)	1.34† (.98)	1.73† (1.03)
Married	Reference		Reference	
Divorced/separated	-5.30*** (.66)	-3.68*** (.68)	3.73*** (.75)	4.58*** (.80)
Widowed	-9.08*** (.67)	-7.51*** (.77)	5.66*** (1.16)	6.97*** (1.21)
Number of children ages 0 to 4	—	3.63*** (.38)	—	.67† (.39)
Number of children ages 5 to 11	—	3.77*** (.31)	—	.85*** (.32)
Number of girls ages 12 to 18	—	1.62*** (.46)	—	-.64† (.46)
Number of boys ages 12 to 18	—	1.88** (.47)	—	.74 (.47)
Adult male child parent (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	1.79* (.74)	—	.91 (.82)
Adult male nonchild present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	-.10 (.97)	—	-.37 (.72)
Adult female child present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	-2.46** (.80)	—	-2.93** (.92)
Adult female nonchild present (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	-1.18 (.85)	—	-1.40 (.84)
Home ownership (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	2.24** (.52)	—	-1.22* (.52)
Household earnings (in \$1,000s)	—	-.03*** (.01)	—	-.02*** (.01)
Education	—	-.44*** (.08)	—	.14** (.06)
Age	—	.40*** (.08)	—	.05† (.08)
Age squared (/100)	—	-.44*** (.08)	—	-.15† (.08)
Hours employed per week	—	-.17*** (.01)	—	-.08*** (.01)
School enrollment (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	-4.07** (.91)	—	-2.48** (.82)
Disabled (0 = no; 1 = yes)	—	-5.34** (.86)	—	-2.96** (.94)
Constant	36.67** (.28)	34.26** (2.07)	17.83** (.25)	19.87** (2.08)
Root mean squared error	17.39	16.37	12.76	12.57
R ²	.08	.19	.02	.05
Number of cases	6,764	6,764	4,252	4,252

* $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ (two-tailed tests)

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. Equations in columns 2 and 4 include dummy variables for missing values on household earnings and disabled.

† Difference in coefficients for women and men is statistically significant at $p < .05$.

work. Although the difference between never-married men living in the parental home and married men becomes statistically nonsignificant when these variables are controlled, the absolute size of the decline (about 2.5 hours per week) is small. More important, with these controls the initially larger differences between married men and both divorced and widowed men actually increase.

Most of the explanatory variables have significant effects on time spent doing housework for either the men *or* the women, and many have significant effects for both sexes. Several variables have stronger effects among one sex than the other. The presence of children in the household creates more housework, especially for women, with pre-teenagers creating slightly more work than older children. The impact of children on housework hours tends to be significantly stronger for women than for men, a finding also found in studies limited to married couples (Bergen 1991; Rexroat and Shehan 1987). The presence in the household of the respondent's adult children also significantly affects housework hours, but the direction of the effect depends on both the sex of the adult children and the respondent. For female respondents, the presence of an adult male child increases housework hours, while for both female and male respondents the presence of an adult female child significantly reduces time allocated to housework. These findings are consistent with the view that men create housework, while women perform work men would otherwise do themselves (Hartmann 1981). Adults who are *not* children of the respondent do not add or subtract significantly, on average, from the respondent's housework time. This may be because the household is a heterogeneous group, including some roommates, siblings and other relatives, and elderly parents. Some household members may be helpful and others may be a burden, and their effects may cancel out.⁷

As expected, home ownership significantly increases housework time, and it appears to do so about equally for men and women. This may

⁷ While it is possible to separate persons in heterogeneous households into a number of categories and attempt to sort out those who tend to help and those who create more work, the small number of respondents with *any* other adult present suggests that this would not be a useful refinement to the analysis.

be due to larger amounts of living space to be cleaned and to the increase in yard work and maintenance and repair chores among homeowners. Total household earnings reduce housework significantly more for women than for men, suggesting that purchased household services substitute more for women's than for men's domestic labor.⁸ Among women, education is inversely associated with housework, while for men the association is positive and significant. Educated women and men tend to hold egalitarian attitudes, which may lead to greater symmetry in their housework patterns (Huber and Spitze 1983). The hypothesized curvilinear (bell-shaped) association between age and housework emerges for women, but not for men.

As indicated by the significant effects of employment and school enrollment on time spent doing housework, investing time in nonhousehold activities significantly reduces household labor. The impact of hours employed is significantly greater for women than for men, a finding consistent with prior research (Gershuny and Robinson 1988; Rexroat and Shehan 1987). This suggests that women have less discretionary time than men, so that increased expenditures of time outside the home must necessarily divert time away from housework.⁹

⁸ The gender difference in the effect of household earnings on housework is complicated by the fact that, for couple households, wife's (or female cohabiting partner's) hours employed per week is controlled for in the women's equation, but not in the men's equation. If hours employed are deleted from both equations, the gender difference in the effect of household earnings becomes statistically nonsignificant. Hence, this difference, which is barely significant to begin with, should be interpreted cautiously.

⁹ From the perspective of the New Home Economics, the amount of time allocated to housework and to paid labor are frequently considered to be jointly determined, and thus the inclusion of employment hours as a predictor of housework has been questioned (Godwin 1991). We believe that for most persons, and particularly persons in nonmarital households, decisions regarding the allocation of time to the paid labor force are made prior to decisions about housework time (especially given that our measure of housework excludes childcare), and thus that the treatment of paid employment as an explanatory variable is justified. In any event, omitting respondent's hours employed per week from the equations does not appreciably

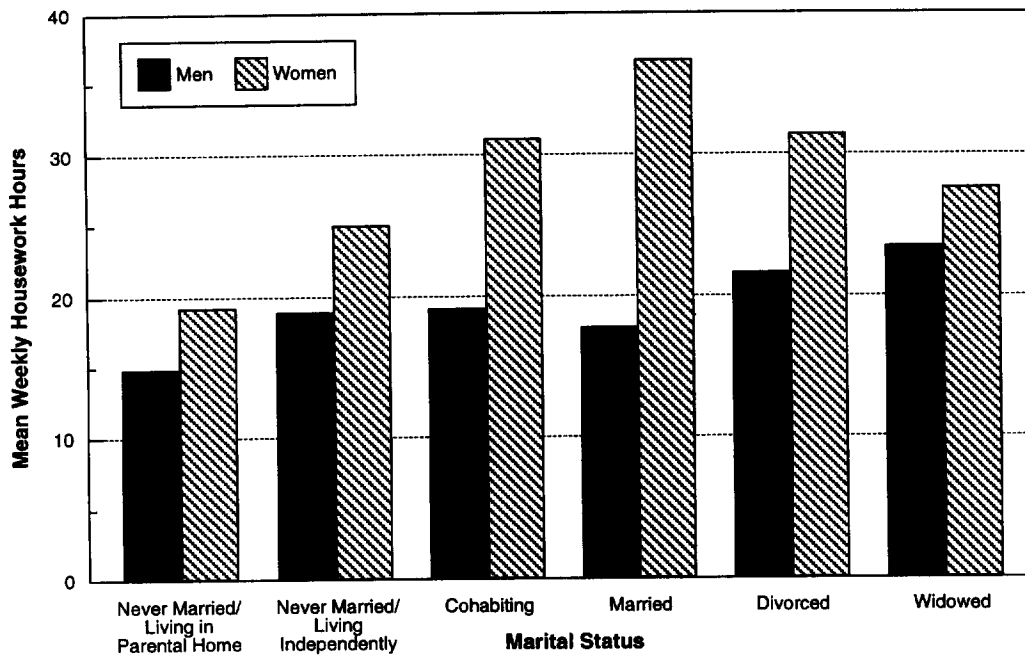


Figure 1. Mean Hours Spent Doing Housework Each Week, by Gender and Marital Status

Because the combined effects of gender and marital status are moderately complex, we present Figure 1 to help clarify the nature of their interaction. This figure graphs the (unadjusted) mean housework hours for men and women along the most common temporal sequence of marital statuses. In all marital statuses, women spend more hours than men on housework. The gender gap among never-married men and women living in the parental home is about 4 hours. Both never-married women and men who live independently do more housework than their counterparts who remain at home, but because the increase is slightly greater for women than for men (almost a 6-hour increase for women versus 4 hours for men), the gender difference in housework in this group grows to a little over 6 hours. Presumably, both men and women who live independently perform household tasks that previously had been done for them by their parents when the respondents resided in the parental homes.

alter the effects of marital status and gender that are the crux of our analysis, nor does the omission modify the impact of the other explanatory variables.

The gender difference in housework hours widens dramatically as one moves to the couple households—cohabiters and married persons. Cohabiting women do more housework than never-married women (regardless of the latter's living arrangements), while cohabiting men work about the same hours around the house as never-married men living independently. The result of these discrepant trajectories is that the gender difference among cohabiters increases to approximately 12 hours per week. The gender gap in housework hours reaches its zenith among married women and men, at approximately 19 hours per week. This disparity is primarily a consequence of married women doing substantially more housework than never-married and cohabiting women, although these differences diminish with controls, as shown in Table 2. Rather than simply maintaining a behavioral pattern established prior to forming a conjugal union, married and, to a lesser extent, cohabiting women appear to increase substantially the time they devote to housework. In contrast, the amount of housework done by married men is fairly similar to that done by never-married and cohabiting men. Hence, as the "gender perspective" would suggest, it is in marital and cohabiting unions

Table 3. Mean Hours Spent per Week in Various Household Tasks, by Marital Status and Gender: U.S. Men and Women, 1987 to 1988

Household Task ^b	Marital Status ^a					
	Never Married/ Living in Parental Home	Never Married/ Living Inde- pendently	Cohabiting	Married	Divorced	Widowed
<i>Women</i>						
Preparing meals	3.64	6.74	7.99	10.14	8.15	7.96
Washing dishes	3.92	4.38	5.51	6.11	5.14	4.73
Cleaning house	3.95	5.16	7.10	8.31	6.68	5.68
Washing/ironing	2.45	2.63	3.44	4.16	3.37	2.50
Outdoor maintenance	1.39	1.24	1.34	2.06	1.94	2.26
Shopping	1.72	2.28	2.69	2.86	2.67	2.40 ^{ns}
Paying bills	.81 ^{ns}	1.53	1.66	1.52	1.70	1.48 ^{ns}
Car maintenance	.48	.42	.28	.16	.40	.20
Driving	.90 ^{ns}	.65	1.10 ^{ns}	1.34	1.30	.38 ^{ns}
Total housework hours	19.26	25.04	31.12	36.67	31.37	27.59
Number of cases	383	649	248	3,838	829	817
<i>Men</i>						
Preparing meals	2.23	5.06	3.71	2.69	5.50	6.48
Washing dishes	1.92	2.77	2.63	2.15	3.24	3.87
Cleaning house	2.20	2.97	2.60	2.03	3.54	3.38
Washing/ironing	1.30	1.92	1.16	.70	1.75	1.67
Outdoor maintenance	3.56	1.56	3.18	4.94	2.60	3.38
Shopping	.83	1.92	1.73	1.58	1.93	2.14 ^{ns}
Paying bills	.90 ^{ns}	1.38	1.35	1.32	1.45	1.65 ^{ns}
Car maintenance	1.23	.92	1.51	1.37	.99	.52
Driving	.75 ^{ns}	.42	1.28 ^{ns}	1.04	.57	.41 ^{ns}
Total housework hours	14.93	18.92	19.16	17.83	21.56	23.49
Number of cases	477	476	181	2,668	323	127

^a All associations between marital status and time spent on household tasks are significant at the $p < .05$ level.

^b Within marital status and task type, all gender differences are significant at the $p < .05$ level with the following exceptions (marked ns): for never married in parental home—paying bills and driving; for cohabitators—driving; for widows—shopping, paying bills, and driving.

that gender differences in housework are most evident.

Among the formerly married, hours spent on housework by men and women begin to converge. Relative to their married counterparts, women who are divorced or widowed do less housework, while divorced or widowed men do more, with or without controlling for other variables. For women, this difference is perhaps best explained by a reduction in the total amount of housework required brought about by the absence of a husband in the household. For men, divorce and widowhood means doing household tasks previously done by a wife.

In general, then, patterns of time spent in housework across different marital statuses appear at least broadly consistent with the emerging "gender perspective." While there is a gender gap in housework in all marital statuses, this disparity varies dramatically and, as predicted, is widest for men and women in couple households (i.e., married or cohabiting relationships). However, to determine the extent to which these totals reflect behavior that becomes more gender-differentiated in couple households, we examine marital status differences in the completion of particular household tasks.

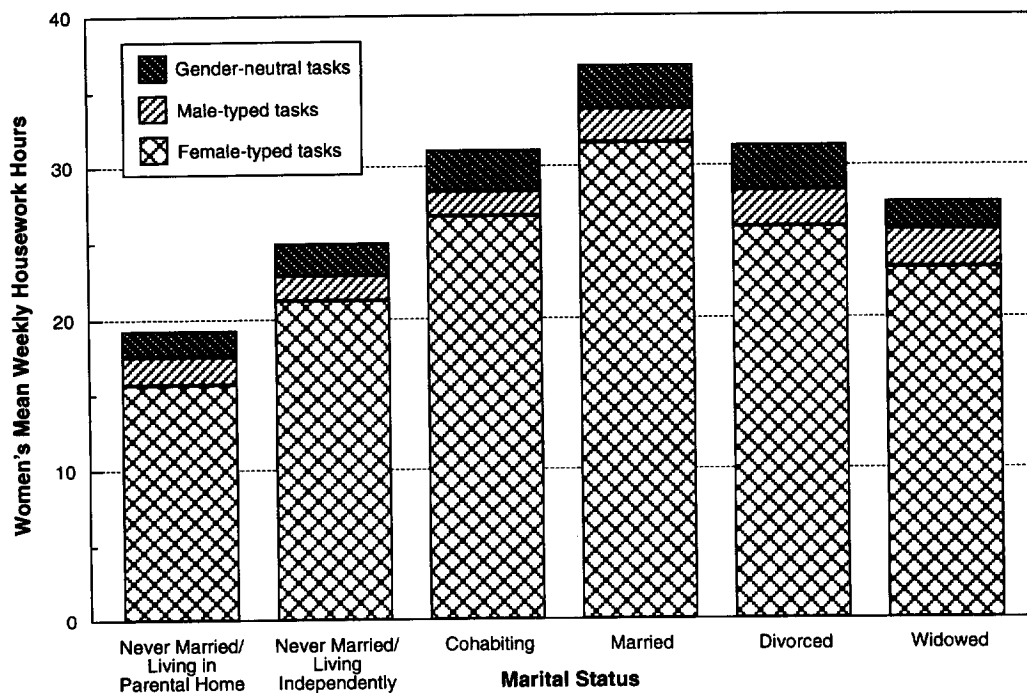


Figure 2. Mean Hours Spent by Women Doing Housework Each Week, by Sex Type of Task and Marital Status

Accordingly, Table 3 presents the mean hours spent per week in each of the individual nine household tasks, disaggregated by gender and marital status. Figures 2 and 3 summarize the information in Table 3, graphing for women and men the (unadjusted) amounts of time spent in "female-typed" tasks (preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning house, washing and ironing, and shopping), "male-typed" tasks (outdoor chores and automobile maintenance), and "gender-neutral" tasks (paying bills and driving other household members).¹⁰ Among women, the marital status differences in *total* housework hours shown in Figure 1 are replicated for the female-typed tasks, which constitute in each marital status category the vast bulk of housework hours (see Figure 2). Of the female-typed tasks, the largest differences are in the number of hours spent prepar-

¹⁰ This categorization is consistent with other analyses, including those by Ferree (1991b) and Aytac and Teachman (1992). Shelton (1992) shows shopping to be somewhat intermediate between female- and neutral-typed tasks, and others (e.g., Presser 1993) have treated it as a gender-neutral task.

ing meals and cleaning house, although all five tasks consume more time for married women than for any of the other groups (Table 3). Because in each marital status the amount of time allocated to male-typed tasks is small, *differences* by marital status in these tasks are also slight. Married women do less car maintenance than other women, but, with the exception of widows, spend slightly more time on outdoor maintenance. For women, then, marital status differences in total housework hours are largely a consequence of differences in hours spent on female-typed tasks.

Among men, however, marital status differences in gender-specific tasks do not always reflect those for housework as a whole. For example, as shown in Figure 3, although the difference in *total* housework hours between never-married men living independently and married men is small (about 1 hour), the difference is composed of several counterbalancing components. Never-married men living independently spend over 5 hours more per week than married men on female-typed tasks, but offset most of this difference by spending less time on male-typed tasks. Similarly, never-married men living independently spend al-

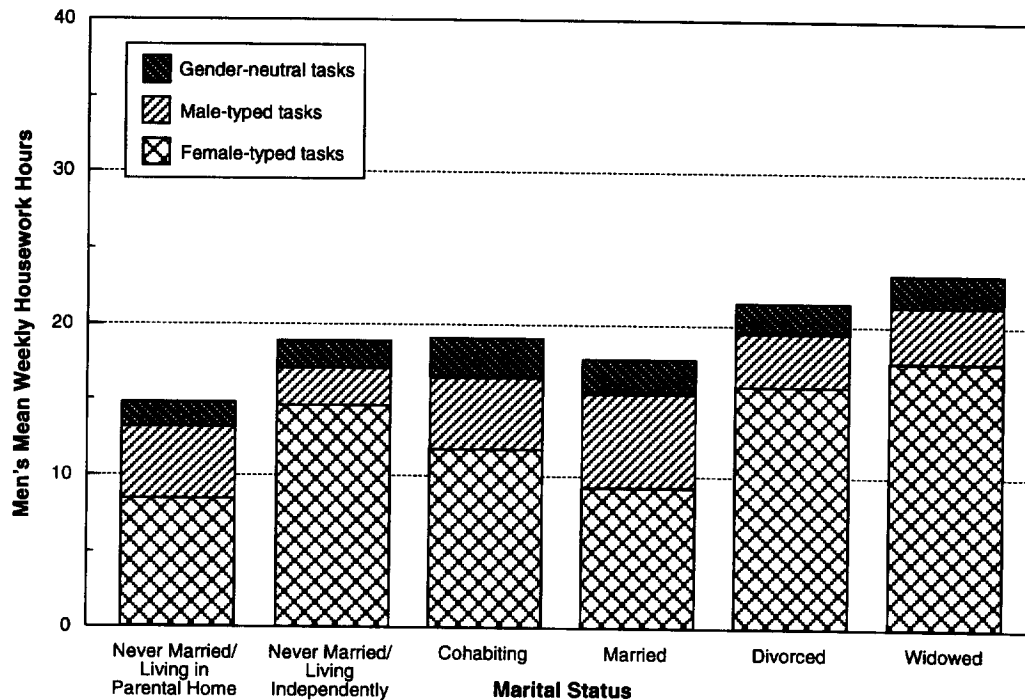


Figure 3. Mean Hours Spent by Men Doing Housework Each Week, by Sex Type of Task and Marital Status

most 3 hours per week more than cohabiting men in female-typed chores, but cohabiting men more than compensate for this difference by spending more time doing male-typed and gender-neutral tasks. Hence, to the extent that cohabiting men differ from never-married men living independently, they do so not by greater participation in female-typed chores, but by increasing their time doing stereotypically male tasks (e.g., automobile maintenance and outdoor chores) and gender-neutral tasks (e.g., driving other household members). On a smaller scale, the difference between cohabiting men and married men in total housework (about 1.3 hours per week) masks an important difference: Cohabiting men spend over 2.5 more hours per week than do married men on traditionally female chores, but married men make up over half of this difference by spending more time on outdoor maintenance. Like never-married men living independently, cohabiting men do more female-typed tasks than married men, although they do not work on outdoor maintenance tasks to the same degree as their married counterparts.

The difference in total housework hours between married men and divorced men and be-

tween married men and widowed men is also composed of counterbalancing chores. Divorced and widowed men spend 6 to 8 hours more per week than married men on female-typed tasks, but the greater time expenditures by married men on outdoor and automobile maintenance partially offset this difference. In general, the distribution of housework hours by the sex-type of task appears consistent with the gender perspective: Married and cohabiting men spend less time on female-typed tasks and more time on male-typed tasks than men in most other marital statuses.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Doing housework is a significant part of many people's lives, yet few studies have explored housework patterns and determinants across household types. Indeed, because much prior research has been motivated by concerns about marital equity, the erroneous impression may exist that housework is performed only by members of married-couple families. Clearly, this is not the case.

Our results suggest that even never-married men, who might be expected to eschew house-

work, spend almost half as much time working around the home as they do in the paid labor force. Given prior studies suggesting little contribution by adult sons who live at home (Hartung and Moore 1992; Ward et al. 1992), the amount of housework reported being done by never-married men living in parental homes may seem surprisingly high — approximately 2 hours per day. However, the largest single component of this time (approximately one-quarter of it) is spent on outdoor maintenance, and outdoor and automobile maintenance together constitute one-third of the total time spent. Further, it is likely that much of the time spent in other chores, such as cooking, cleaning, or laundry, is directed more toward self-maintenance than to the well-being of the entire household (Hartung and Moore 1992). Thus, given this context, the amount of housework reported by never-married men living in the parental home appears reasonable.

The performance of housework by men is substantially similar across marital statuses. Differences in total housework hours among never-married, cohabiting, and married men are rather small and are partly attributable to differences in other social and economic characteristics. The most noteworthy differences among men in housework hours involve the appreciable differences between divorced and widowed men and the men in other marital statuses. The number of hours married women spend doing housework approaches a typical full-time work week and is termed the “second shift” by Hochschild (1989). But women in other living situations that do not include a male partner also spend 20 to 30 hours a week doing household chores. The gender gap in housework hours is highest in marriage, but is evident in other marital statuses as well. Although social and economic differences among women in various marital situations (especially the presence of children and hours spent in paid work) account for approximately half of these differences in housework hours, marital status differences in housework among women are generally greater than the corresponding differences among men.

From these patterns and from our detailed analysis of individual household tasks, we have concluded that there is suggestive evidence for the “gender perspective.” Housework that women perform for and in the presence of men displays gender more so than the same work

performed with no man present. We find that the gender gap in housework time is greatest in married couple households relative to other households, and that much of this difference *cannot* be explained by the fact that marriage often brings children and reduced hours of paid work for women. Thus, we conclude that men and women must be “doing gender” when they live together. Moreover, relative to their unmarried counterparts, married men spend very little time in the traditionally female tasks of cooking and cleaning.

Of course, there are also significant gender gaps among persons in nonmarital households, implying that the dynamics of doing gender are not entirely absent in other household situations. However, we view our analysis and the patterns displayed in couple and noncouple households to be suggestive evidence that these dynamics operate differentially across household types. Perhaps our analysis and tentative interpretation will encourage those theorists working in the new gender perspective to further specify the conditions under which these processes operate so that future empirical tests can be more precise.

Analysis across household type and marital status may also have implications for the application of equity theory to the allocation of household labor. While most analyses of equity in household labor have used a comparison between husbands and wives as the implicit or explicit base for judging fairness, several recent discussions have raised the possibility that other standards may be used as well. Thompson (1991) discusses the issue of comparison referents and points out that husbands may compare themselves with *other husbands* and wives with *other wives*, while both Ferree (1990) and Kollock, Blumstein, and Schwartz (1988) present empirical comparisons between the predictive value of intracouple and intragender standards. To our knowledge, however, the idea that spouses may compare themselves to *their own past or projected experiences in another marital status*, or even to others who are not currently married, has not been discussed in the empirical literature on housework equity, although fear of divorce was certainly a potent factor in the ideological and behavioral choices of Hochschild's (1989) female respondents. Although this is necessarily speculative, we suggest that married men might use their experience prior to marriage as a reference

point for both negotiating and evaluating their own contribution to household labor within marriage. People are spending increasing amounts of time in nonmarital statuses, particularly never-married, cohabiting, and divorced. During their lives, they often go through transitions which include a sequence from being never married to cohabiting to married to divorced or widowed. By examining the time men and women spend doing housework in each of these living situations we may be better able to understand what occurs when people negotiate how housework will be divided within marriage.

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