

Housework Revisited : A Cross-National Comparison of Cohabiting and Married Parents

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Extended Abstract

In this paper I examine time use data from four countries – the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany and Norway – to investigate the impact of relationship type on household labor among parents. Cross-national work has shown that women in numerous countries spend more time in housework than do men (Batalova and Cohen 2002). However, women in many Western nations, including the United States, have decreased the number of hours spent in household labor since the 1960s due to increases in labor force participation (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer and Robinson 2000). Previous research has shown that cohabitators spend more time in household labor than do single persons but less than married persons (South and Spitze 1994). Additionally, men tend to spend less time in household labor upon entering into marriage or cohabitation while women increase household labor time when forming such households (Gupta 1999).

I focus on the implication of relationship status for gender equality among households with children. Presence of children in the household increases time spent in household labor for both men and women, but previous analyses have been limited to married couples (South and Spitze 1994). Nearly 40% of all births in the United States now occur outside of marriage (Martin et al. 2006) with roughly half of these births taking place within cohabiting unions (McLanahan, Garfinkel, Reichman and Teitler 2000). I address potential differences in time spent on housework between married and cohabiting parents. I hypothesize that number of minutes spent on household labor will vary by relationship among parents. Additionally, the relationship between time spent on housework and relationship status will vary by respondent sex and national context.

Data

The data used in my analyses are from four time use surveys conducted in the early 2000s. For the United States, I use the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) 2003 conducted by the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Respondents reconstructed the previous day using computer assisted telephone interviewing. Only one adult in the household constructed a diary and only main activities were recorded. The other three datasets followed the Harmonised European Time Use Survey guidelines with some small variations. In contrast to the ATUS, the others used paper diaries that respondents completed throughout the day. The diaries contained 10-minute time slots and provided space to record secondary activities. Germany's Time Use Survey 2001-2002, conducted by the Federal Statistical Office, collected diaries from all household members for three days. Norway's Time Use Survey 2000-2001, conducted by Statistics Norway, collected diaries for two days from one adult. The United Kingdom's National Survey of Time Use 2000-2001, conducted a research company commissioned by the Office for National Statistics, collected diaries from all household members for two days.

I restrict the sample to partnered and employed parents residing with children under the age of fourteen (social, not necessarily biological, parents). The resulting sample sizes are listed in Table 1. Note that in Germany and Norway respondents may provide two cases to a regression, particularly on weekdays, because studies gathered multiple diary days. Also, note that I have the most statistical power in the United States and Germany, less in the United Kingdom, and the least in Norway.

Measures

The dependent variable used in my analyses is the number of minutes spent on housework by the respondent on the diary day. Variables are the lowest common denominator available in all datasets. I show descriptive statistics in Table 1. I focus on the implication of

relationship status for gender equality among households with children. Individuals living in a cohabitational household are coded as 1. Sociodemographic controls include age, sex and level of education. To account for the additional housework burden created by multiple children, I control for number of children in the household. As young children are also likely to create extra need for time to be spent on housework, I control for the presence of a child in the household under the age of 6. As time is a finite resource, minutes spent in other activities such as employment are expected to limit the number of minutes spent on housework. Therefore, I control for the respondent's employment status and whether the respondent worked on his or her diary day. Furthermore, respondents with an unemployed partner may limit their time in household labor due to increased task specialization, so I also control for employment status of the respondent's partner.

Analyses

Multivariate analyses focus on differences across countries in the effects of variables on time spent on housework among parents. I begin by modeling parents' housework time in each country. All analyses are weighted using the weights provided in each dataset, which account for sampling design, day of the week, and non-response. I cluster standard errors by respondent in order to account for multiple diaries per person (non-independence).

Most time use variables have a significant amount of zeros, creating an irregular distribution. Because this irregularity violates assumptions of normality, some fear that OLS estimates will be biased and instead utilize Tobit models for censored data. However, others have argued that because Tobit models assume that some zeros represent unobserved negative values, they are inappropriate for time use data as respondents cannot spend fewer than zero minutes in an activity. Unlike Tobit, OLS coefficients sum to zero and the intercepts sum to 24 hours.

Additionally, coefficients generated through OLS models remain stable whether generated from a single diary day or a weekly average (Gerhsuny & Egerton, 2006). Therefore, I use OLS models for the multivariate analysis.

Results

By examining the effect of union type on division of household labor among parents, I provide evidence that gendered divisions of labor persist across union type. My first hypothesis addressed the impact of relationship type on household labor among parents. I show results by country in Table 2. In all countries, cohabiting parents spend fewer minutes in housework than do married parents. Married mothers spend the greatest number of minutes in household labor followed by cohabiting mothers. However among cohabiting parents, women still spend more time in household labor than do men. Cohabiting parents spend fewer minutes in housework in the US and Germany than do married parents. No link between cohabitation and housework in Norway, and a slight positive but nonsignificant relationship between cohabitation and housework in UK.

In Table 3, I show results which address hypotheses 2 and 3, i.e. does the impact of relationship type on household labor vary by gender and national context? I eliminate results for Norway from this table due to the nonsignificance of coefficients (available upon request). Predicted number of minutes spent on housework are also shown by gender according to mean age for married (age 36) and cohabiting respondents (age 31) as well as whether the respondent worked on his or her diary day. Cohabiting mothers in all countries spend fewer minutes in housework than do married mothers, both on days worked and days off. Comparing countries, German mothers spend more time on housework than do women in the United States or the United Kingdom. Cohabiting fathers in the United States spend the least amount of time in

housework compared to other groups. Countries with less gender equality and lower amounts of publicly funded child care (US and Germany) show more gendered divisions of time spent in household labor. Countries with greater gender equality and publicly funded child care show nonsignificant results.

Tables

Table 1. Dependent and Independent Variables: Descriptive Statistics, Weighted (N=7,304 diaries)

Variable	United States			United Kingdom			Germany			Norway						
	Mean	SD	Max	Mean	SD	Max	Mean	SD	Max	Mean	SD	Max				
Number of Minutes Spent in Housework	116.67	137.09	0	930	134.28	122.63	0	740	139.53	128.39	0	800	116.81	99.96	0	610
Age	35.78	7.41	16	75	35.62	6.94	17	72	38.33	6.33	21	75	35.19	6.64	20	68
R is Female	52%		0	1	52%		0	1	49%		0	1	48%		0	1
Cohabiting Household	4%		0	1	13%		0	1	3%		0	1	31%		0	1
R has College Degree	47%		0	1	30%		0	1	43%		0	1	39%		0	1
Number of Children in Household	2.01	0.89	1	8	1.83	0.82	1	5	2.00	0.90	1	6	1.96	0.82	1	5
Youngest Child < 6	60%		0	1	62%		0	1	47%		0	1	67%		0	1
Diary on Weekend Day	29%		0	1	28%		0	1	32%		0	1	30%		0	1
Employment Status	0.90	0.58	0	2	1.04	0.68	0	2	0.95	0.67	0	2	1.15	0.56	0	2
Partner's Employment Status	0.94	0.62	0	2	1.27	0.63	0	2	1.06	0.69	0	2	1.15	0.59	0	2
R Worked on Diary Day	54%		0	1	52%		0	1	45%		0	1	53%		0	1
N (diaries)	4609				2836				7304				1253			
N (individuals)	4609				1418				2435				627			

Table 2. Linear Regression Predicting Number of Minutes Spent on Housework, by Country, Weighted

	United States		United Kingdom		Germany		Norway	
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se
Cohabiting Household	-26.36	**	3.52	5.8	14.34	*	0.41	5.87
Age	1.91	***	2.06	0.33	1.28	***	1.58	0.47
R is Female	51.97	***	77.54	4.16	81.67	***	38.04	5.85
R has College Degree	-17.31	***	-11.4	4.18	11.28	***	-5.63	5.32
Number of Children in Household	13.44	***	8.62	2.36	9.22	***	15.88	3.22
Youngest Child < 6	-1.3		-1.87	4.45	-4.07		2.88	6.53
Diary on Weekend Day	-4.23		-10.11	4.59	17.58	***	-3.06	6.24
Employment Status	-0.68		1.57	3.02	5.69	**	15.74	4.81
Partner's Employment Status	6.56	*	4.83	3.07	-1.25		5.34	4.45
R Worked on Diary Day	-104.03	***	-104.73	4.55	92.74	***	-69.51	6.03
Constant	55.57	***	58.69	15.47	82.78	***	25.09	22.54
r ²	0.23		0.33		0.28		0.2	
N (diaries)	4609		2836		7304		1253	
N (individuals)	4609		1418		2435		627	

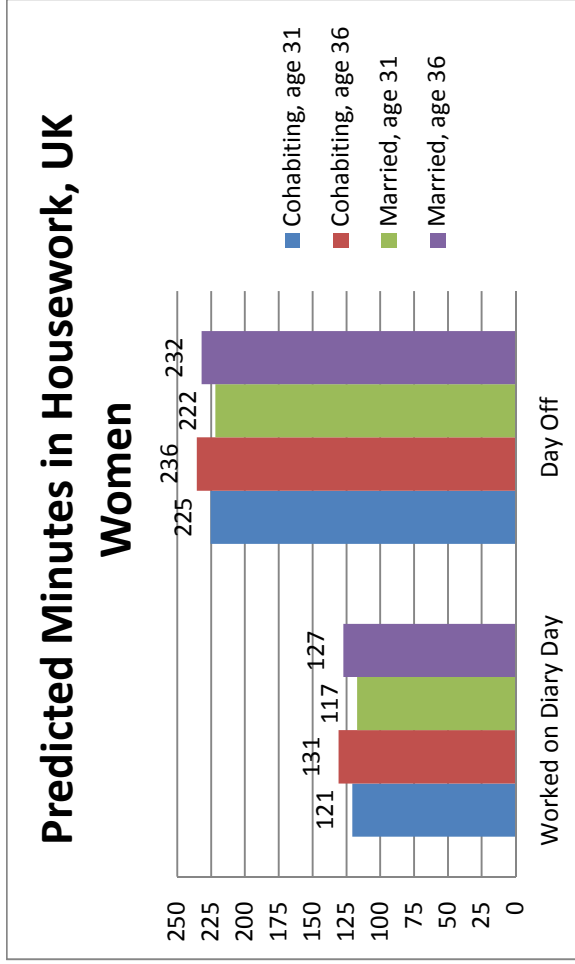
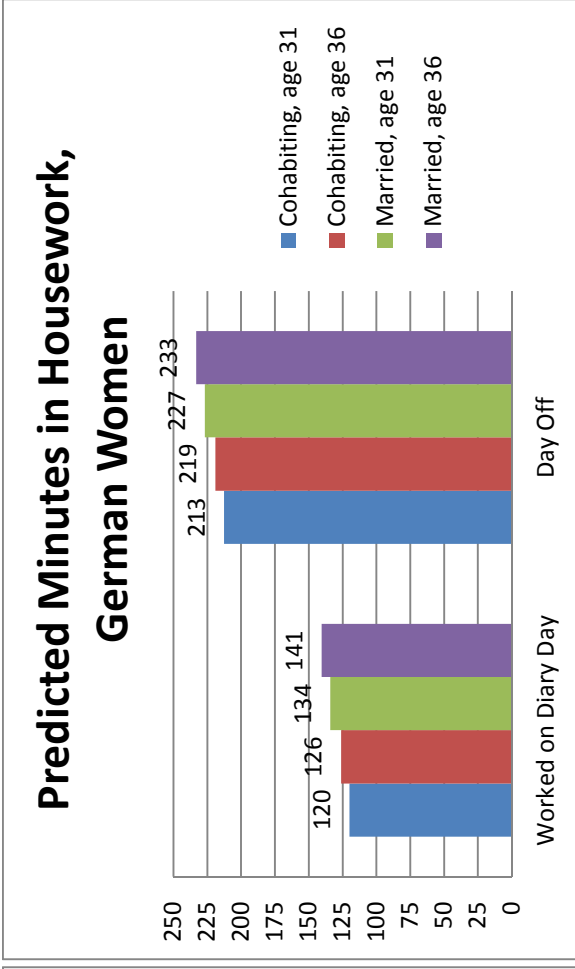
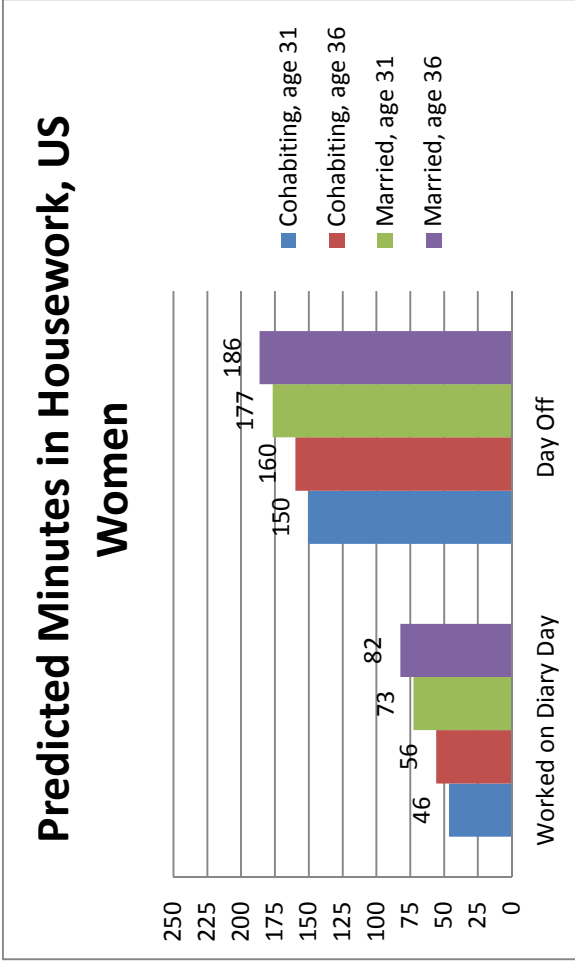
Note: *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001.

Table 3. Linear Regression Predicting Number of Minutes Spent on Housework, by Country and Sex, Weighted

	United States		United Kingdom		Germany	
	Males	Females	Males	Females	Males	Females
	b	se	b	se	b	se
Cohabiting Household	-22.2	16.7	16.5	8.57	-8.07	9.64
Age	1.37	0.4	2.51	0.43	-0.04	0.3
R has College Degree	-2.35	5.22	-2.97	6.02	-10.4	3.38
Number of Children in Household	5.39	2.87	-1.8	3.38	1.43	1.94
Youngest Child < 6	0.47	5.79	7.54	6.26	2.02	3.86
Diary on Weekend Day	2.62	6.36	6.98	6.93	-9.02	4.42
Employment Status	18.7	8.42	2.87	7.82	11.4	5.33
Partner's Employment Status	3.37	3.24	1.75	3.69	-1.64	1.86
R Worked on Diary Day	-108	6.37	-94.6	6.68	-98.2	4.4
Constant	68.8	19.9	42.6	21.9	143	14.1
r ²	0.17	0.18	0.21	0.23	0.17	0.14
N (diaries)	2112	2497	1315	1521	3646	3658
N (individuals)	2112	2497	658	761	1215	1219

Note: †p<.07, *p<.05 **p<.01 ***p<.001.

Predicted Minutes Spent in Housework for Cohabiting and Married Women, by Country



Predicted Minutes Spent in Housework for Cohabiting and Married Men, by Country

