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Introduction

The performance of household labor has generally been regarded as an undesired, yet nonetheless necessary, activity within most households. On any given day in a typical household, meals must be prepared, laundry must be washed, floors and bathrooms need to be cleaned, and trash has to be carried out to the curb for pickup. Simply, no household can survive for long without having someone step in and perform the necessary chores. Of course, if the chores are assumed to be onerous and unpleasant, most individuals might be reluctant to take on the responsibility of performing them. Herein lies the dilemma within most households: who will do the chores?

In the United States, and around the globe, a considerable amount of research has been directed toward the ways household members go about assigning, allocating, or sharing particular chores. For the most part, this division of housework occurs among adult couples, although certainly children, and particularly older offspring, also enter into the allocation processes. In terms of couples' division of chores, the general pattern noted by researchers has been one of relative intransigence of gender inequality, wherein women continue to perform

considerably more household labor than men. Regardless of the particular characteristics of the households or individuals examined, the gender-based division of household labor has changed relatively little over the past several decades. For example, Coverman and Sheley (1986), in an examination of men's contributions of household labor from 1965 to 1975, conclude that there were no significant changes at all over that time. They also posited that despite the increase in paid labor force participation rates among women, the allocation of time to household chores by men did not increase. There was generally a lack of male response to the added work burdens of females. This trend of high variation in female labor and allocation of time to tasks, while the contributions of time devoted to household labor time by males is lower and varies only slightly, appears to have continued into the 1980s (see Gershuny & Robinson, 1988). More recently, researchers have noted that, while the overall time spent by women in household labor has declined, at the same time, men's contributions have increased slightly (e.g., Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). In sum, while the relative shares of housework performed by men and women have changed, it is mostly due to women decreasing their time on household labor, rather men increasing their contribution (See Sayer, 2005 for a review of this).

In addition to the total amounts of household labor, several studies have also concluded that males and females tend to "specialize" in certain chores. Berk (1985) reported that wives assume the most responsibility for what are perceived to

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be “traditional” female tasks. Wives, by their own reports, perform over 96% of making beds, and 94% of diapering of children. Husbands report that they spend the majority of their time on household chores defined as masculine tasks. Husbands do over 86% of the household repairs, 80% of the disciplining of children, 75% of the grass cutting, and 77% of the snow shoveling. In an examination of the segregation of household chores, Blair and Lichter (1991) find that couples tend to exhibit a high degree of specialization, such that males would have to reallocate over 60% of their family work time before sex-based equality in the division of household labor could be achieved.

The nature of the gender-linked tasks performed by women and men is also quite different. Based on existing patterns of chore allocation, certain tasks, such as cooking, cleaning, or child-care tasks tend to be performed primarily by women. These particular tasks, though, do not have either a well-defined beginning or end. Tasks such as automotive care, yard work, or house repairs, on the other hand, tend to be performed primarily by males. These particular tasks, however, are qualitatively distinct. Indeed, “male tasks” tend to have the following qualities: (1) a well-defined beginning and end, (2) personal discretion as to when the task should be performed (lack of a solid time frame), and (3) a leisure component (Meissner, 1977). Females, however, spend the majority of their time in tasks which contain the opposite qualities. Washing dishes, cooking, and child care are tasks which must be performed daily, at specific times, and do not allow for much discretion as to when the tasks should be done. Hence, the qualities of women’s typical chores are in sharp contrast to those chores commonly performed by males, such that women’s chores tend to be routinized, repetitive, boring, and dirty (see also Lennon & Rosenfield, 1994).

Researchers have also noted that the household labor demands placed on couples and families shift over time and over the course of the family’s development. Rexroat and Shehan (1987), who approach the study of division of labor from a gender role perspective, posit that the changes in the responsibilities of the family members over

time also affect the degree to which members accept or reject traditional gender roles. They find that husbands were more likely to share tasks or take on additional chores at points in the family life cycle when there were fewer demands placed upon their time, specifically during the first few years of marriage and after they retired from the paid labor force (see Pittman & Blanchard, 1996). Yet even during these periods, women still bear most of the responsibility for the various household tasks. Even with the presence of young children, which increases the overall need for labor, husbands’ contributions actually decrease as a proportion of the total labor within the household (Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009). In fact, Rexroat and Shehan (1987) state that “. . . up to the retirement stage, women who work full-time contribute 75–85% of the time that couples allocate to household work each week” (p. 747).

Hence, the division of household labor can be viewed as having three relatively static qualities. First, males and females perform quantitatively different amounts of labor. Specifically, females perform approximately twice as much household labor as males. Second, males and females perform qualitatively different types of labor. Household labor has been shown to represent both “feminine” and “masculine” spheres or domains of chores. And third, these first two qualities of the division of household labor have been shown to have remained relatively consistent or intransigent to change over the past several decades. Yet the questions of how and why household labor is differentially allocated to women and men remain.

Part of the dilemma in attempting to discern patterns of chore allocation lies in the need to firmly define what precisely is household labor. While researchers have utilized a variety of measures, few actually provide a basic definition of housework itself. Shelton and John (1996) posit that household labor refers to any unpaid work which contributes to the well-being of household members and helps to maintain the home itself. While this definition can obviously include such labor as the care of small children or tending to the emotional needs of family members, most researchers have focused more precisely on physical labor directed toward attending to the

instrumental needs of families and couples (Coltrane, 2000). Obviously, this approach overlooks the considerable amounts of time which are exerted attending to other forms of labor in the home, and considers only a limited range of chores which have more traditionally been labeled as household chores.

Researchers have used a variety of assessment techniques in the measurement and analysis of the division of household labor. Numerous studies have utilized large, nationally representative surveys, such as the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Such surveys typically provide a clear set of chores, and ask respondents to indicate how much time they or their partner spends performing a given task in the home. Research using survey techniques in the United States have often concluded that women spend approximately twice as much time performing household chores, as compared to men (e.g., Coltrane, 2000; Greenstein, 2000). Other researchers have approached the study of the division of household labor by using time diaries, wherein respondents are asked to maintain a detailed account of their activities over a period of time (e.g., a day, a week)(see Harvey, 1993). No matter whether surveys, time diaries, or other methods are used, there are often questions concerning the reliability and validity of responses. Some researchers focus on measures of how many hours respondents spend on particular tasks (e.g., Greenstein, 1996), while others ask respondents to indicate who spends the most time in a particular chore (e.g., Huber & Spitze, 1983). Other researchers have even measured of the division of household labor by assessing the segregation of chores (e.g., Blair & Lichter, 1991). The variety of measures and methodological techniques, understandably, can make the analysis of the division of housework rather complicated.

Explaining the Division of Household Labor

Given the wide range of disciplines represented in recent research on the division of household labor, it is understandable that the range of theoretical

perspectives applied to it is also extensive. Generally, theories of the division of household labor can be classified into three basic categories: (1) gender role/socialization, (2) power or relative resources, and (3) time availability (see Coltrane, 2000; Kroska, 2004). Variations of these exist, and with the inclusion of recently proposed theories, the efficacy of each is somewhat unclear due to the lack of consensus across, as well as within, theoretical perspectives. Changes in how household labor and the allocation of chores are assessed have brought about recognition for the need to provide more applicable theoretical perspectives in this field of study.

Gender role/socialization (or sex role) explanations of the division of household labor view the behaviors and attitudes of adults living within the household as the direct result of their socialization experiences throughout their lives. Simply, they have been exposed to, taught, and subsequently internalized gender-appropriate values and behaviors. Within this perspective, women who are exposed to and internalized traditional values and attitudes presumably are more likely than other women to believe that chores within the home are primarily their responsibility. Likewise, men who have internalized more traditional gender role expectations assume the role of primary earner for the household, and do not feel inclined to include household tasks on their daily agenda of required duties. Women and men who have internalized nontraditional gender role attitudes are expected to maintain a more egalitarian division of labor within their family. Hiller (1984) recognizes the importance of socialization as a determinant of adult behaviors within the family, stating “The more deeply one or both partners has internalized a traditional sex role, the more likely the wife will be solely responsible for family work” (p. 1005).

Within the gender ideology/socialization perspective is the assumption that individuals perform particular chores in an effort to demonstrate or affirm their gendered self. In essence, the performance of household labor allows them the opportunity to conform to what they perceive is expected of themselves in regard to gender identity (Ferree, 1991). Researchers have noted that

the gender attitudes of partners do, in fact, significantly affect the allocation of chores in the home. Huber and Spitze (1983) find, for example, that husbands' gender attitudes are a significant predictor of the allocation of chores. Other studies have noted that the gender attitudes of wives and husbands may interact, and thereby influence the extent to which husbands will take on tasks which were traditionally regarded as "feminine" (Greenstein, 1996). Some researchers, however, find that gender ideology has only a weak effect, if any, on the allocation of chores (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997).

Central to the issue of gender role/socialization explanations is the source of the role types to which individuals are exposed during the process of socialization. Stafford, Backman, and DiBona (1977) point out that the sources of gender role ideologies are not clearly known: "The origins of this nonconscious ideology are obscure but presumably begin with imitation of parental marital roles with reinforcement by peers, schools, and mass media" (p. 46). While this would seem a logical explanation of the sources of gender role ideologies, other researchers have arrived at very different conclusions. Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989) propose that the origins of gender role ideologies are found within the economy of American society, offering a Marxist-feminist perspective instead (see also Hartmann, 1981). They argue that the division of labor within the household results from the ideologies promoted by the division of labor outside the home, one where males have maintained a clear advantage over females in access to better paying, more prestigious, and more powerful jobs. Females are seen as having to settle for lower paying positions in the occupational structure, and have little chance of advancement or promotion. Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989) state: "...this relation of dominance and dependence promotes a cultural norm that operates to reduce the wife's power in the marriage, permits the exploitation of her household labor, and justifies the inequitable distribution of household labor" (p. 256).

While gender role/socialization theories are used in approximately one-third of all studies on the division of household labor, they are by no

means uniform or exhaustive. Most studies have been content to use single measures of gender-role ideologies or, even more problematic, to use proxies such as income or educational attainment as measures of ideologies (see Coltrane, 2000; Greenstein, 1996; Kroska, 2004). Given the dilemmas frequently involved in attempting to link ideologies directly to behavior, however, the multitude of approaches in assessing gender ideologies is often fraught with problems. However, recent research suggests that attitudes concerning the actual performance of housework (in terms of enjoyment of chore performance and perceptions of gender appropriateness) do, in fact, influence both men's and women's participation in the performance of household labor (Poortman & Van der Lippe, 2009).

Gender role theories typically are not offered as a sole explanation, but rather are often coupled with what is known as power theory (also sometimes referred to as relative resource theory). Within this perspective, females with the most marital power do the least housework and tasks are less likely to be allotted along traditional gender-role lines. Power is usually proxied by the relative status of each spouse in regards to their occupations, incomes, attachments to the marriage, or other related aspects which could be used as leverage to coerce or force the other spouse to do as they desire. In studies of household labor, this implies that the spouse wielding the most power may require, either explicitly or implicitly, that the other spouse do the less enjoyable tasks and/or the majority of household work (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). When referred to as resource theory, this theoretical perspective emphasizes the actual resources held by either spouse, and then proposes how these resources can be used to hold and maintain power within the relationship. Hiller (1984), who offers this perspective under the title of relative resources, states that "Power has typically been conceptualized as dominance in decision making, and resources have most often been considered to be education, occupation, and income" (p. 1006).

Power or resources may also be derived from less obvious sources. For instance, under this theoretical perspective, a husband with a college

education will maintain greater power in the marriage, even if each spouse earns an equal income. In such an example, power theory would posit that the husband has greater power since his higher education affords him more opportunities outside the marriage. These opportunities could include such things as seeking divorce, explicitly preferring another woman to his current spouse, choosing another job, moving the family to another area solely as a result of his choice, and so forth. As such, he would be viewed as having less attachment to the marital union, and would therefore hold an enhanced advantage over the wife, who would be seen as having a greater attachment to the marriage. Although attachment to the union has been presented in some theoretical arguments, it has not been included in the testing of power theories (Hiller, 1984). Power theory implies that the spouse with the greater power will usually dictate who will do what and when. Huber and Spitze (1983) concur, stating that "Housework ... may generally be described as routine domestic service performed by a less powerful for a more powerful person" (p. 78).

Earnings and income have provided the basic criteria for determining marital power in the majority of theories in the study of household labor. A standard strategy is to use the relative income of each spouse as a measure of their respective and relative power in their relationship. The influence of income on the allocation of chores has been demonstrated by researchers (see Kroska, 2004), with most studies indicating that a smaller difference between men's and women's earnings generally yields a greater sharing of household chores. Maret and Finlay (1984) propose that wives' income is indeed crucial in determining her power within the family, but they also argue that other factors must be considered, such as the types of occupations, educational attainments, and attitudinal stances of each spouse. Maret and Finlay find that the income levels of each spouse have the strongest effect on the division of labor within the home. They state that "...as husband's income increases, controlling for wife's income and other factors, wife's home responsibilities increase; but as wife's income increases, controlling for husband's income and

other factors, the opposite effect is seen" (Maret & Finlay, 1984, p. 362). However, this is not always the case, as other studies have suggested that partners' incomes do not yield a substantial effect upon the division of household chores (e.g., Pleck, 1985).

The notion of personal resources (human capital) affecting the allocation of chores, while logical, has not always been given support by researchers. Greenstein (2000), for example, finds that husbands who are financially dependent upon their wives actually perform fewer hours of household labor, as compared to husbands whose incomes are about the same as those of their wives. Extending the assessment of personal resources (as sources of power) beyond income creates additional quandaries. Hardesty and Bokemeier (1989), in examining the effect of educational attainment on the division of chores, posit that while higher levels of education may be associated with more egalitarian gender role attitudes, educational attainment itself does not necessarily provide leverage or power within the decision-making processes themselves regarding chores.

A third perspective, time availability explanations of the division of household labor, proposes a simple hypothesis: that the spouse with the greatest amount of available time (time not spent in paid labor) will be the one to perform the most work in the home. The central assumption is that the division of household labor results from a rational decision-making process, and is not influenced by other non-time-relevant factors (e.g., gender role attitudes). Here, the couple is viewed as having established a division of household labor through some type of negotiation, yet this assumption carries with it the assertion that if all other factors were equal, then the division of household chores would follow suit. Hence, if a rational basis of chore allocation is used, then wives and husbands who are employed equally outside the home should perform the same amounts of household labor time inside the home. Research using this theoretical approach, though, has shown that such an equal division of labor rarely results, even in instances in which husband and wife work equivalent numbers of hours outside the home (see Blair, 1998; Pleck, 1985).

For example, recent research by Gager and Yabiku (2010) directly contradicts the time availability perspective, finding that time spent on housework is associated with more time spent in other activities, including paid work and sexual frequency. This research explicates a new “multiple spheres” hypothesis (see also Marks, 1977; Hyde, DeLamater, & Hewitt, 1998) that argues that some married couples possess an underlying trait for being high energy, go-getters who work hard and play hard. Thus, rather than viewing time on housework as a zero sum game, this research provides support that individuals meet time demands across the spheres of families and work.

Participation in the paid labor force is usually seen as the primary determinant of available time (Coltrane, 2000; Kamo, 1988; Hiller, 1984), although other sources of time requirements have been offered, such as the time devoted to children and child care (see Kroska, 2004). Despite the fact that this theoretical perspective has been dismissed by many researchers as overlooking essential elements of the marital relationship, its primary advantage is in its simplistic assessment of time allocation. Before other variables can be accounted for, such as the gender role orientation or power balance of the spouses, the absolute amount of time available puts constraints on each spouse’s ability to do household chores. Hence, while this approach by itself does not offer a clear explanation of the division of labor, it provides a proper beginning context in which to apply the other perspectives.

Consequences of the Division of Household Labor

Understandably, given the rather skewed division of household labor found in most families, it is not unexpected to find that these patterns of chore allocation yield some undesirable consequences for both the individuals involved and their relationships. In terms of individuals’ mental and physical well-being, researchers have noted a variety of deleterious effects of the division of household labor, most of which have a decidedly negative impact upon the well-being of women.

Bird and Fremont (1991), for example, find that women who perform longer hours of household labor have poorer overall health, as compared to women who perform fewer hours of housework. The paid labor of wives is also a contributing factor, as Ross, Mirowsky, and Huber (1983) report that wives’ psychological distress is greater among wives who prefer to be employed, but whose husbands do not contribute appreciably to household labor in the home.

Interestingly, it is not only the actual division of household labor which has an impact upon women’s well-being; rather, even the perceptions of equity or fairness in the allocation of chores can have a significant effect. Lennon and Rosenfield (1994) find that women who perceive division of household labor to be unfair tend to experience a significantly lower level of psychological well-being. Similarly, Claffey and Michelson (2009) conclude that perceived unfairness (or inequity) serves to mediate the effect of the division of household labor on employed mothers’ personal distress. Hence, the subjective nature of the division of chores, along with each partners’ perceptions of the allocation of housework, can affect well-being in both direct and indirect manners (Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999).

The very nature of household labor may even be related to the sense of identity and self-esteem of individuals. Caplan and Schooler (2006) conclude that the performance of more complex household chores by women is associated with increases in intellectual flexibility, increases in self-confidence, and decreases in self-deprecation. Among men, on the other hand, the performance of more complex household chores is associated with decreases in self-confidence. Given the gendered nature of traditional spousal roles, it is assumed that participation in household labor is less necessary for men, and more necessary for women, particularly as it affects self-esteem and general psychological well-being (see Baxter, 2000; Greenstein, 1996). While women’s and men’s roles are not necessarily so neatly divided, Caplan and Schooler (2006) posit that “performing challenging tasks in a domain that is considered to be in some sense inappropriate for members of one’s gender may actually be

detrimental to one's self-confidence" (p. 898). This gender difference in the effects of household labor on well-being has been noted by other researchers. Bird (1999) finds that men tend to have lower levels of depression when their contributions to household labor are smaller, while women's well-being, on the other hand, appears to benefit from a moderate level of household labor performance.

Given the substantial impact of the division of household labor on individuals' well-being, it is hardly surprising that researchers have consistently noted the effects of chore allocation on the relationship quality of both married and cohabiting partners. Coltrane (2000) notes that marital discord is significantly higher among couples when the division of housework is considered to be unequal. As might be expected, the lower levels of husbands' household labor contributions are also shown to be associated with lower levels of marital satisfaction (Rogers & Amato, 2000). The lower levels of marital satisfaction associated with the division of household labor, however, are more often reported by women, rather than men. Kluwer, Heesink, and Van de Vliert (1996), for example, report that marital conflict and arguments revolve primarily around the performance of housework, as compared to paid labor. The extent of couples' conflict about the allocation of chores, though, is solely associated with wives' dissatisfaction, and appears to be tied to both wives' and husbands' respective levels of chore performance (Kluwer et al., 1996).

The perception of fairness in the division of chores plays an integral role in affecting marital satisfaction and marital quality, yet the perception of inequity in the division of household labor seems to bring about change in wives' assessments of marital quality, while husbands' assessment go largely unaffected (Blair, 1998). This pattern is not found in all studies, as some researchers have noted that, among dual-earner couples, both women and men report lower levels of marital quality when they perceive the division of chores to be unfair to themselves (Frisco & Williams, 2003). Seemingly, husbands are content with an unequal or unfair division of household labor, until they themselves feel that they are

performing too much housework, or until their wives become openly dissatisfied. Indeed, Frisco and Williams (2003) find that dissatisfaction with the division of household labor is significantly associated with a higher consideration of divorce among women, but not among men. Additional research investigating the effect of unfairness on divorce documents that the odds of divorce are lower for couples in which the husband perceives unfairness to the wife and the wife does not, as compared to couples in which both perceive fairness in the division of labor (Gager & Sanchez, 2003). This suggests that couples who are on the "same page" when evaluating fairness tend to do better within their marriage itself.

The gendered nature of dissatisfaction with the division of household labor is somewhat tied to the respective gender role attitudes and expectations which women and men bring into their relationships. Botkin, Weeks, and Morris (2000) posit that there has been a steady shift away from traditional expectations concerning women's and men's roles within marriage. Whereas men may have once been regarded as the "provider" and women as the "caretaker," these expectations have declined substantially as a result of increases in women's paid labor roles, increases in women's educational attainment, and other such status changes which have brought about more similarity between men's and women's roles. Over the last several decades, researchers have noted a substantial decline in the amount of time spent in housework by women, whereas men have increased their contributions (e.g., Coltrane, 2000). However, other researchers have also noted that, as women's attitudes become more egalitarian, their perceptions of marital quality tend to decrease (see Amato & Booth, 1995). Mickelson, Claffey, and Williams (2006) find that both men's and women's respective gender ideologies have a moderating effect on the relationship between the division of household labor and perceptions of marital quality, although the relative impact of gender ideology has been shown to be comparatively weak in other studies (e.g., Blair & Johnson, 1992; Greenstein, 1996). The effect of the division of labor on perceptions of marital quality encompasses even more than

simply the sheer amounts of work performed by each spouse. Lavee and Katz (2002) find that the segregation of chores is also a factor, but one which depends upon the respective gender ideologies of each partner. They report that, among women with egalitarian gender attitudes, a greater segregation of individual chores is associated with a lower perception of marital quality. However, this moderating effect of gender ideology is only found among women, and not among men.

Although the empirical results are mixed, some researchers have asserted that there is a connection between the division of household labor and women's experiences in the paid labor force. Using Becker's (1985) theory of allocation of effort, the contention is that the supply of an individual's available effort is limited, and can only be expended in one area at the loss of effort being expended in another area. In terms of the relationship between the division of household labor and participation in paid labor, this perspective posits that individuals who exert considerable effort in one arena (either the home or the workplace) will not be successful in their efforts in the other arena. Some studies have demonstrated that, for women, there is, indeed, such a connection between the performance of household labor and performance in the paid labor force. Hersch and Stratton (1997) find that, among married women, greater participation in the performance of household labor is significantly associated with lower wages in the paid labor force.

The time allocation perspective, however, is based upon a contention that women, on average (due to their greater contributions to household labor), will exert fewer hours to paid labor. Bielby and Bielby (1988) find that this is not necessarily the case, as their results show that women allocate more effort to their paid labor roles than do men (see also McLennan, 2000). Interestingly, they also find that husbands who spend less time in the paid labor force than their wives actually perform *less* household labor. Shelton and Firestone (1989) find that women's lower earnings in the paid labor force are only partially attributable to their greater allocation of time spent on household chores. However, women's paid labor roles can potentially

be affected by the division of household labor in many different ways. Women, more so than men, may feel a greater emotional responsibility for the performance of chores, they may choose particular occupations which allow their greater flexibility in their schedules to attend to household chores, and the traditional expectation that women should have the primary responsibility for chores may negatively impact their chances of promotions or raises in the paid labor force (Shelton & Firestone, 1989). Noonan (2001) concludes that the segregation of chores also influences women's wages in the paid labor force. When greater time is spent in traditionally "feminine" chores (e.g., cooking, cleaning, laundry), a more negative effect of household labor is shown to impact paid labor wages. Of course, given the segregated nature of chore allocation in the average household, women are more likely to be found performing such chores; hence, the hidden costs of household labor will typically impact women's paid labor experiences more substantially than their male counterparts.

Perceptions of Fairness in the Division of Household Labor

As noted previously, researchers have long noted that, despite the changes in women's paid labor roles, the relative domestic roles of men and women have changed little, and particularly so in regard to their participation in household labor. What is most interesting, though, is the seeming indifference of wives to the skewed division of household labor (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Thompson, 1991). In a sample of dual-earner couples, Blair and Johnson (1992) find that approximately 13% of husbands perceive the division of household labor to be unfair, while 29% of wives feel likewise. Using an international sample, Braun, Lewin-Epstein, Stier, and Baumgartner (2008) find that approximately 45% of women perceive the division of labor to be fair to themselves, suggesting that a minority of women regard the allocation of chores to be unfair or unjust (see also Mikula, 1998). Similarly, Baxter (2000) finds that 59% of Australian

women regard the division of household labor to be fair, despite the fact that they perform the overwhelming majority of chores. The apparent contentment of couples with this pattern of inequality is quite odd, given the variety of negative consequences which are brought to bear on both the individuals and their relationship quality (Claffey & Michelson, 2009).

No matter whether couples are married or cohabiting, the respective roles of women and men, by their very nature, represent gendered roles within society (Mikula, Freudenthaler, Brennacher-Kroll, & Brunschko, 1997). As such, the perceptions of fairness concerning the allocation of roles within the home will likely vary between women and men. It is logical to assume, then, that gender (and, more specifically, gender differences) will be a major determinant in each partners' respective perceptions of fairness within those roles (see Benin & Agostinelli, 1988; Blair, 1998). Most studies in this area have suggested that men and women are not merely trying to reduce their workload or increase that of their partner; rather, each partner considers their own workload to have symbolic meaning (Ferree, 1991; Thompson, 1991; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Indeed, just as the division of labor has consequences for partners and their relationships, the perceptions of fairness themselves have a distinct impact, as well (Blair, 1998; Greenstein, 1996).

Much of the research on justice principles and fairness within marriage has focused on the sense of unfairness which arises when partners feel that their relative shares of household labor are unequal. Thompson (1991) has offered an exposition on this matter, proposing that the distributive justice paradigm has particular relevance on the perceptions of fairness maintained by partners. The distributive justice framework pertains to (1) the distribution of outcomes, (2) the choice of comparison referents, and (3) the justifications offered therein. Each of these factors should play a major role in determining the extent to which partners feel that their circumstances are unfair.

The outcome values of this perspective refer to the returns that partners seek from a particular situation or from their relationship. These include such returns as the sense of family unity which

might arise from the women providing more care to individual family members. This can be rather complicated, as Thompson (1991) posits that women may perceive household labor as a form of family care, and thereby regard housework as a way of expressing love toward their family. Comparison referents refer to the standards by which partners evaluate their own outcomes. If, for example, women perceive that their partners' contributions to household labor are less than their own, then they are likely to judge their circumstance as unfair. Justifications refer to the standards by which partners evaluate whether the processes that brought about their current outcomes are appropriate. Women may, for example, perceive that the division of household labor is unfair, yet believe that it is acceptable, given that their partners contribute greater earnings to the family (i.e., higher incomes).

Several researchers have demonstrated significant gender differences in how men and women evaluate fairness. More specifically, gender variation is found in the valued outcomes, justifications, and comparison referents and justice principles used in making these fairness evaluations (Gager & Hohmann-Marriott, 2006; Gager, 2008). For example, Gager and Hohmann-Marriott conclude that wives are more likely to compare themselves with their husbands and to take into account the hours they spend in paid labor and household labor, whereas husbands are more likely to compare themselves with other husbands, and are more likely to only consider time spent on housework.

While the overall amount of chores certainly influences perceptions of fairness in the division of household labor, Baxter (2000) finds that women's perceptions of fairness also depend significantly upon the types of chores which their male partners perform. Within a distributive justice framework, this suggests that it is *what* partners do, and not necessarily *how much* which serves to shape particular perceptions of fairness in the allocation of chores. The demonstration of concern by males in their performance of particular chores (e.g., washing dishes, doing laundry) may represent a symbolic value to females which leads them to displace the fact that males are still

performing fewer hours of chores (Blair & Johnson, 1992). Additionally, the perceptions of fairness in the allocation of chores by women may be tempered by whether they enjoy performing chores in the home (Grote, Naylor, & Clark, 2002). The comparative assessments of who performs housework may also be more complicated than they appear, as partners may not necessarily compare their performance to one another, but also to other same-sex individuals with whom they are familiar (Gager, 1998; Grote et al., 2002). Gager (1998) concludes that “most women did not have to look far to find a female comparison referent in similar unfair circumstances” (p. 13).

Just as the division of household labor has consequences for individuals and their relationships, so too, do the perceptions of fairness within the division of chores. Researchers have demonstrated that women’s perceptions of fairness may mediate the impact of the division of household labor on psychological distress (e.g., Voydanoff & Donnelly, 1999). Using a sample from Israel, Lavee and Katz (2002) find that perceptions of fairness in the division of housework affect the marital quality of women, but not men (see also Claffey & Michelson, 2009). Frisco and Williams (2003) find that perceptions of unfairness in the division of chores not only decrease both wives’ and husbands’ sense of marital quality, but also significantly increase wives’ consideration of divorce. The effects of perceptions of fairness, therefore, appear to be distinct for each sex, suggesting that both the actual labor and the perceptions of fairness within the chore allocations of women and men can bring about differential personal and relationship consequences.

International Division of Household Labor

Although much of the research literature on the division of household labor utilizes data drawn from samples in the United States, it is important to recognize that the study of the allocation of household chores has been performed in numerous countries around the globe. In such studies, many of the same theoretical perspectives are

used (e.g., power/relative resources, socialization/gender ideology, time availability), and much of the analyses focuses on the core issue of women’s and men’s respective roles within the context of marriage and family life. Of course, the very nature of gender and gender roles depends greatly upon the culture of a particular country. These culture-specific (and country-specific) studies, then, can provide yet another dimension of understanding both how and why the division of household labor occurs (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Davis & Greenstein, 2004).

Among Scandinavian countries, for example, Fuwa and Cohen (2006) contend that more egalitarian gender roles in the home can be attributed to the greater government implementation of affirmative action policies concerning women’s employment. While Scandinavian countries are typically regarded as woman-friendly welfare states, Kitterod and Pettersen (2006) find that Norwegian fathers tend to increase their contributions to household labor most often when the mother is employed for relatively few hours outside the home. When Norwegian mothers are employed full-time, fathers’ contributions do not significantly increase. In a similar set of results, Dribe and Stanfors (2009) find that Swedish fathers do not increase their household labor performance with the birth of a child; rather, the traditional division of chores between mothers and fathers appears to reinforce traditional gender role expectations. In contrast, Thomas and Hildingsson (2009) find that Swedish fathers’ contributions do increase in terms of both household labor and child care, but primarily as a consequence of wives’ return to full-time paid employment. The presence of more traditional gender expectations can be seen in recent surveys, which show that Swedish women perform over 15 h per week of housework, as compared to only about 5 h per week being performed by men (Evertsson & Neramo, 2004).

Among European nations, there has been considerable social and political change over the past two decades, much of which has resulted in change in men’s and women’s respective labor roles, both inside and outside the home. In Germany, the reunification of the former East and

West did not necessarily bring about a uniform set of gender role expectations, as Cooke (2007) finds that West German husbands perform about 12 h per week of housework, while East German husbands perform over 16 h per week. Interestingly, there is no substantial difference in wives' household labor contributions from either former side of Germany (both contribute approximately 26 h per week). This disparity between the household labor contributions of German men and women is not without consequences, however, as researchers have also posited that the greater housework time spent by German wives significantly detracts from their ability to obtain and hold onto better paying jobs outside the home (e.g., Geist, 2005).

Throughout most European nations, the combination of increased female labor force participation rates and the modernization of household appliances has led to a substantial decline in both men's and women's time spent in household labor. Despite these changes, though, the difference between wives' and husbands' contributions remains fairly unchanged. In the Netherlands, for example, only 19.9% of women state that they perceive the division of chores to be equally shared between themselves and their spouse (Wunderink & Niehoff, 1997). More egalitarian gender role ideologies among spouses do appear to lead to a more equal division of household labor, yet it also seems to increase the amount of discontent among Dutch wives over the allocation of chores (Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, & Siero, 2000). Given the relative lack of assistance from husbands, many Dutch households choose to "outsource" (i.e., hire domestic help) chores, and thereby "replace" many of the chore contributions which may have been performed by husbands (Van der Lippe, Tudens, & De Ruijter, 2004). In Switzerland, the relative earnings of spouses is shown to yield little influence on the division of household labor, although the respective gender role ideologies do have a slight effect on husbands' contributions (Charles & Hopflinger, 1992). The steady movement toward more egalitarian attitudes concerning the division of household labor is not found everywhere, as Bjarnason and Hjalmsdottir (2008) find that both female and

male adolescents from Iceland appear to prefer a more traditional allocation of chores by sex.

In Russia, a similar pattern of chore allocation is also found. In an examination of residents from Pskov, Karakhanova (2002) reports that Russian women spent approximately 31 h per week on household chores, while Russian men spent slightly better than 24 h per week. When considering only those men and women who worked outside the home, however, the weekly contributions of women were almost 27 h, as compared to only 16 h per week for men. The inequity of this division of housework is not without consequences among Russian couples. Cubbins and Vannoy (2004), using a sample of couples from Moscow, demonstrate that the allocation of chores substantially influences wives' and, to a lesser extent, husbands' marital discontent. Hence, although the cultural context of families certainly varies around the globe, it nonetheless appears that the division of household labor is commonly a source of disagreement and contention among couples.

In many Middle Eastern countries, there is a continuing pattern of patriarchal authority within families, which results in a rather skewed division of household labor. In an examination of several communities around Beirut (Lebanon), Habib, Nuwayhid, and Yeretizian (2006) find that Lebanese women perform the vast majority of both household labor and care giving tasks within families. Interestingly, women who are employed outside the home do appear to perform significantly fewer chores in the home, as compared to unemployed women. As is the case in many countries, though, a greater level of performance of household labor by Lebanese husbands has been shown to reduce wives' psychological distress, marital dissatisfaction, and overall unhappiness (Khawaja & Habib, 2007). The relative influence of women's employment outside the home, such that it tends to result in a more equal division of household chores, is also found in studies of Israeli couples. Stier and Lewin-Epstein (2000), for example, find that while part-time employment of wives does not appreciably affect the allocation of chores in the home, full-time employment of wives brings about more

gender equity. Although wives' employment is clearly associated with a more balanced division of labor among Israeli couples, other research concludes that both more egalitarian gender ideologies and higher wives' educational attainment are pertinent factors in bringing about a greater sharing of chores in the home (Lewin-Epstein, Stier, & Braun, 2006).

Among Asian countries, there is a considerably diverse range of gender roles within families. Understandably, these variations also bring about a varied division of household labor. In Japan, for example, women have long been expected to bear responsibility for both care giving and household labor within the family. Strober and Chan (1998) surveyed a sample of graduates from a Japanese university approximately 10 years after their graduation, and found that only 12% of the women and 8% of the men reported that they had an egalitarian allocation of chores in their home. In an examination of dual-earner Japanese couples, Iwama (2005) finds that although wives do perform more household labor than husbands, both the time constraints (related to employment) and spouses' gender ideologies affect the allocation of chores. In particular, when Japanese wives are employed in professions, their husbands tend to perform more labor.

In China, the roles of women are even more complex, given the nature of the culture. Chinese women, as compared to those from other Asian countries, are actively encouraged to work outside the home, yet their roles within the family reflect a very traditional set of gender role expectations (see Chen, 2005). Zuo and Bian (2001), in an examination of urban Chinese couples, find that wives perform a substantially greater share of household labor. Interestingly, however, Chinese wives do not tend to perceive the allocation of chores to be unfair; rather, the performance of most chores is viewed as the appropriate fulfillment of a culturally prescribed gender role. Pimentel (2006), though, notes that Chinese wives' expectations for more egalitarianism within marriage tend to be greater among younger women. Among younger couples, Chinese husbands appear to be performing more housework than their older counterparts, suggesting that generational change

may slowly be occurring. Like wives in many other countries, the perceptions of marital quality by younger Chinese wives are shown to be significantly associated with the division of household labor. Although China has become modernized quite rapidly in terms of its economy, there are still strong patriarchal elements within its culture that serve to create a contradiction of sorts for wives, where they are welcomed as equals in the workplace, yet are expected to maintain very traditional roles inside the home.

In Australia, the relative gender roles of wives and husbands are very Westernized and exhibit relational behaviors that are similar to those of American couples. In an examination of married and cohabiting couples, Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes (2008) find that Australian women perform approximately three times the amount of housework, as compared to men. Within this sample, the birth of a child appears to bring about the greatest shift in the allocation of chores, with women's contributions increasing substantially after childbirth, while the contributions of men remain relatively constant. The persistence of the gendered division of household labor in Australian culture is quite perplexing, given that the vast majority of women are employed outside the home and have approximately the same levels of educational attainment as men. Much of this persistence, though, may be attributed to gender socialization. In an examination of adolescents' expectations for marital roles, Popock (2005) finds that almost a third of Australian males expect their eventual wives to perform all of the housework, while a small minority openly expect to share chores equally. As is the case in many societies around the globe, change in the division of household labor and the respective gender roles of wives and husbands is something which changes very slowly over time.

Children and Household Labor

Investigations of household labor have typically focused on the contributions and division of labor among the adult members of the household. One overlooked group of contributors to household

chores, however, is children. Children have been shown to consistently perform chores within the home (Blair, 1992a; Cogle & Tasker, 1982), and these chores do represent a significant portion of the total amount of household labor performed by all persons in the home (Gager, Cooney, & Call, 1999; Peters & Haldeman, 1987). The vast majority of children in American households perform some type of housework as a part of their daily routine. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) found that approximately 86% of boys and 81% of girls between the ages of 2 and 17 were regularly required to do chores in the home. All of the chores were of a decidedly domestic nature, such as cleaning bathrooms, doing laundry, cleaning dishes, mowing lawns, and so forth. Cogle and Tasker (1982) report similar results, with 88% of the children in their sample, aged 6–17, performing at least one household chore on a regular basis. Here again, children spend the majority of the housework time in cleaning or maintenance tasks, such as housecleaning, food preparation, or dishwashing (Cogle & Tasker, 1982). Bianchi and Robinson (1997), using a sample of children under 12 years of age, find that approximately 40% of children report performing household labor, and among those who do, they perform almost 1 h per day of chores.

The overall amount of time spent by children in household chores varies considerably from one study to the next. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) reported that the median number of hours spent per week on housework was four. Cogle and Tasker (1982) reported an average of 3.5 h per week. Meanwhile, Sanik (1981) reported that children in 1977 performed an average of 8.4 h per week of housework, up from a figure of 6.3 for children in 1967. More recently, Gager, Sanchez, and DeMaris (2009) have reported that children contribute approximately 7.3 h of housework per week. Yet no matter which figure is considered, it is apparent that children perform a sizable amount of labor within the home, and this participation is deserving of greater investigation. In regard to the rationale for their performance of household chores, two primary arguments have been made. Both contain within them the necessary assumption that children are assigned to

tasks or are, at the very minimum, supervised in their household duties by their parents. Quite simply, children are not looked upon as performing housework for altruistic or individual reasons beyond the desire to comply with the parents or to satisfy them in a direct fashion.

The first explanation, from socialization literature, emphasizes the commitment of the parents to the growth and development of their children. This particular explanation is largely related to the general concept of children and childhood in the United States. As Zelizer (1985) describes, there has been a significant shift in the view taken towards children over the past century. Children have moved from being seen as “economically useful” to “emotionally priceless.” In the past, children were looked upon as a viable resource to the family, particularly as a labor source, both inside and outside the home. Prior to the turn of the twentieth century, it was not uncommon for rural children to be used extensively as workers on the family farm, and for urban children to be employed in a job outside the home.

However, with the introduction of child labor laws and a changing conception of the value of children which also arose due to the changing definition of the housewife role during the 1930s and 1940s, children were sentimentalized to a large extent (Zelizer, 1985). As Zelizer points out, this change can be seen as exhibited in the proliferation of media images of children and such social changes as the creation and increase in child life insurance. With this change in the definition and value of children, parents were, as of approximately 1930, still just as likely to regard children as a source of labor in the home, yet the rationale and justification was quite different. At this point, given the “priceless child” imagery, it became more likely that parents would look upon children’s assistance with the chores in the home as being an essential part of their development. Housework performed by children thus became more of an instructional or educational tool for parents (Zelizer, 1985, p. 98). Through this first explanation of the usage of children for household labor purposes, then, the primary motivation would be to enhance the development of personal qualities in children, such as a sense

of responsibility, self-worth, or autonomy. Or more simply, parental commitment to the socialization of their children would serve as the primary motivator to use children in the home as a labor source.

Several researchers have indeed found this type of justification by parents whose children perform housework to be not uncommon. White and Brinkerhoff (1987), in a query of parents as to why their children work in the home, obtained such responses as: "Work gives them a sense of responsibility. Makes them appreciate what they have. I think it helps them grow into responsible adults" (p. 209). In fact, parents replied with a developmental reason in approximately 72% of the cases surveyed. This would seem to indicate that perhaps parents see children's household duties as being beneficial to the maturation of their child, especially in shaping character and moral development.

The competing explanation for children's contribution to household labor approaches the issue from its more pragmatic dimensions. This approach centers around those family/structural variables which might alter the demand for household labor. Specifically, the second explanation for the use of children proposes that they are used as a source of labor in the home when the household labor requirements exceed the available or preferred time of the adult members of the home. Or to state this more simply, children will tend to be used when the time available to parents becomes constrained or limited.

This approach to understanding children's labor usage has attracted the majority of the limited research in this area (e.g., Gager et al., 1999). Nonetheless, many of the more obvious factors which might somehow limit or alter the time available to parents do appear to have a significant impact upon the use of children. As well, parents are also likely to realize the potential of children in this regard. White and Brinkerhoff (1987) report that approximately 23% of parents surveyed stated that their children assisted them around the home because they (the parents) needed the help.

A wide variety of such factors have been shown to influence the overall use of children as

a labor source in the home. The employment status of the mother is by far the most extensively researched, yet it has yielded mixed results. Several studies have shown that there is a significant increase in children's labor in the home when the mother works outside the home (Blair, 1992a, 1992b; Gager et al., 2009). Other studies show more ambiguous findings. Cogle and Tasker (1982) find that children whose mothers are employed only part-time in the paid labor force may actually perform the least chores, while children of traditional housewives perform slightly more, with children of mothers employed full-time in the paid labor force performing the greatest overall amounts of housework. However, there remains an obvious link between the time constraints placed upon the adult female, who traditionally performs the greatest share of all housework (Blair & Lichter, 1991), and the amount of labor time performed by the children. Indeed, Hedges and Barnett (1972) conclude that "when a mother takes a job, a portion of her chores are shifted to her children rather than to her husband" (p. 11). Hence, children may represent a greater resource for mothers rather than for fathers. Cunningham (2001) concludes that the employment of mothers does, in fact, lead to greater chore participation by children. Peters and Haldeman (1987) find that the employment of the adults in the home actually has no significant relation to the amount of labor spent by children on specific tasks. They do find, however, that employment of adults in the family does lead to an increase in the children's share of the total work load in the household. This would seem to indicate that parents do not, in fact, use children as a resource, but rather, that if adults should not have enough time to perform their usual chores they will simply not perform them.

Children's participation in household labor also increases with the size of the family (Gager et al., 1999). White and Brinkerhoff (1987) report this finding, yet also note that the distribution of household chores is not entirely equitable. Specifically, they find that the older children are, the more work they will be assigned, and that this is more evident among girls than boys. Cogle and Tasker (1982) also find that older children are

more likely to perform household labor and that girls are also likely to perform greater overall amounts of labor than boys.

Even the social environment of the family has been linked with children's participation in household labor. Lawrence and Wozniak (1987) find that rural children are still used as a labor source in the family, and that even the season of the year has a significant impact upon the level of their usage. Further, White and Brinkerhoff (1981) find that the rural/urban status of families does affect children's participation rates, such that rural children exhibit higher levels of involvement in housework. This, perhaps, may be related to the types of work which the children actually perform, given that it will vary considerably from a rural environment to an urban one.

As might be expected, some studies have shown that there is a substantial extent of gender-typing in the allocation of chores to children. For example, Zill and Peterson (1982) report that girls tend to perform those tasks typically associated with mothers' household labor. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) report that girls and boys differ in regards to both total inputs and types of household chores performed. Among children aged 14–17, girls perform approximately 5.7 h per week, while boys averaged 3.6 h. While this indicates some differentiation by sex, children also differed in terms of the types of chores performed. Girls are considerably more likely to clean the house, work in the kitchen, and babysit their younger siblings. Boys, on the other hand, are more likely to perform outside chores (e.g., mowing, raking leaves) and to take out the garbage (Blair, 1992b). Overall, teenage girls' chore responsibilities are consistently greater than those of teenage boys (Blair, 1992b; Gager et al., 1999).

The degree of segregation of tasks by sex among children thus seems quite similar to that found among adults (see Blair & Lichter, 1991; Blair, 1992b). That is, females (1) are more likely to perform greater total amounts of labor and (2) perform qualitatively different types of chores. These conclusions have been supported by several researchers. Lawrence and Wozniak (1987) find that girls perform significantly more labor than boys, with girls averaging 77 min per day in

total household work, as compared to an average of 55 min per day among boys. Girls were also found to spend more time overall than boys in the areas of shopping, house cleaning, food preparation, dishwashing, clothing care, and clothing construction. In fact, the only labor area in which boys outperformed girls was in the maintenance of the home and yard (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1987). Cogle and Tasker (1982) provide further support for these findings, reporting that girls were twice as likely to wash dishes and four times as likely to perform clothing-related chores (e.g., washing, ironing) (see also Cunningham, 2001).

Finally, Cogle and Tasker (1982) report that the extent of sex-typing of children's household chores tends to increase with the age of the child. They find that young children (aged 6–11) were less likely to occupy sex-typed task assignments than were older children. In particular, Cogle and Tasker find this trend to be stronger among girls than boys. In support of these conclusions, White and Brinkerhoff (1981) find that between the ages of 6 and 9, 33% of boys and 61% of girls assist their parents in meal preparation; however, between the ages of 14 and 17, only 22% of boys perform kitchen-oriented chores, while the same percentage for girls increases to 72%. Clearly, the age of children has a strong effect on the extent of sex-typing in their household chores.

Duncan and Duncan (1978) find that mothers are less likely than fathers to sex-type children's tasks. This may be related to the fact that adult females perform the majority of household labor. That is, mothers may be less likely to sex-type chores because they would then be left with fewer potential sources of labor (in the form of their children) if they chose to specialize children's chores. Cunningham (2001) posits that there is indeed a relationship between adults' sex role attitudes and their subsequent assignment of chores to children (see also Anderson & Robson, 2006). Lackey (1989) finds that males, more than females, prefer to assign their children to traditional, sex-typed chores.

The division of labor among children may also be associated with the relative compensation of boys and girls. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) find that boys more often receive money for

performing chores outside the home. Girls, on the other hand, typically perform chores in the home without receiving an equivalent level of monetary returns for their efforts. Goodnow (1988) proposes that this difference may serve to further socialize children into accepting a given sex-based role in society. Goodnow (1988) states: "Mothers do not get paid in money, and their daughters seem to be socialized into a similar pattern of work that is 'for love'" (p. 15).

Further, it is shown that there is a relative consistency between adult sex role attitudes and their interactions with their children, thus indicating the possibility of intergenerational continuity of the division of household labor. In fact, Thrall (1978) concludes that children's exposure to the sex-based division of labor among their parents is significantly linked to their own preferences for a division of household labor in adulthood (see also Cunningham, 2001). In an examination of young adult males, Anderson and Robson (2006) find time spent performing specific chores in childhood has a significant impact upon the preference for chores and gender role attitudes in adulthood, thereby continuing childhood chores patterns into the adult years.

Variations in the Division of Household Labor among Types of Couples

The vast majority of research on the division of household labor has focused on married couples. Of course, housework needs to be done in all varieties of households, and the patterns by which the chores are allocated can be as diverse and different as the types of households themselves. One type of household which has received the attention of researchers interested in the division of household labor is that of cohabiting couples. In the United States, as is the case in many other countries, rates of cohabitation have risen dramatically over the past few decades. Most current evidence indicates that cohabiting partners and married partners share many qualities, yet are, nonetheless, quite distinct. Although they live together, share resources, and raise children in

essentially the same manners, their perspectives on the meanings of their unions can be rather unique. Cohabitors obviously have chosen not to marry, but may do so for many different reasons. Some cohabitors may regard their union type as a better alternative to marriage, while other cohabitors may be living together as a means of "testing" their relationship before choosing to marry. Other cohabitors may live together for the sake of financial or sexual convenience. It is understandable, then, that cohabitors may be expected to display different patterns in their respective allocation of household chores (see also Smock, Manning, & Porter, 2005).

In an examination of Australian cohabiting and married partners, Baxter (2005) finds that while women in both types of unions perform significantly more household labor than their male partners, married couples tend to display the most traditional patterns of chore allocation. Married women perform an average of 25 h per week of household labor, while married men perform slightly less than 9 h per week. Among cohabitors, women perform an average of 19 h per week, while their male partners contribute only 8.5 h. Interestingly, cohabiting men do appear to concentrate more of their weekly household labor time in "indoor" activities, as compared to married men. As well, married couples who cohabited prior to marriage tend to display a more egalitarian, or equitable, allocation of chores, as compared to those married couples who did not previously cohabit.

These findings have been reported by other researchers, as well. Davis, Greenstein, and Marks (2007), using data from 28 different countries, also find that cohabiting men tend to perform more household labor than their married counterparts. Likewise, cohabiting women tend to perform fewer hours of housework than do married women. Although it seems plausible to assume that cohabiting and married couples have substantially different orientations to gender roles and gender expectations, this is not necessarily the case. Cubbins and Vannoy (2004), in an examination of married and cohabiting Russian couples, find that gender attitudes have no significant impact on the allocation of household chores.

Shelton and John (1993), though, posit that the smaller difference in the housework contributions of cohabitators does not necessarily indicate that cohabitation is a substantially more egalitarian union. Instead, they point out that the differences between cohabiting men's and married men's household labor contributions are relatively small (i.e., men's housework contributions do not vary by union type). Among women, those who are married perform substantially more housework than do cohabiting women, thereby suggesting that it is marriage itself which brings about a greater household labor workload for women.

The respective roles of cohabiting partners and married partners have been shown to differ in regard to their employment outside the home, as cohabiting women spend significantly more hours in the paid labor force and make greater contributions to household income, as compared to married women (Shelton & John, 1993). Given the tenet of power/relative resource theory, it would therefore seem that cohabiting women wield greater authority within their relationships, and are perhaps in a better position to negotiate the division of household labor with their partners. Of course, cohabiting couples' desire to stay out of traditional marriage also implies that their gender attitudes may also play a role in their division of household chores. South and Spitz (1994) posit that the performance of household labor represents one of the primary ways by which gender roles are embodied and maintained within households. The traditional nature and expectations within marriage, then, appear to prompt an adherence to more conservative and traditional roles for married women, in particular. Gupta (1999), in an examination of the effect of marital transitions on the division of household labor, finds that men's time spent performing housework declines significantly when they enter into a cohabiting relationship, while women's household labor time increases substantially. The same pattern is evident when individuals become married, such that men reduce their household labor contributions, while women increase theirs dramatically. Most telling, however, is that women substantially reduce their household labor

performance when they leave either type of union. In essence, becoming a partner, whether cohabiting or married, seems to prompt women, in particular, to conform to more traditional gender role expectations in regard to the performance of household labor.

Another variation of couple type which has received attention from researchers interested in the division of household labor is that of older couples. Aging and older couples do present a unique form of household for the study of chore allocation patterns. Among older couples, for example, their perceptions of appropriate gender roles and gendered behaviors may be more representative of those which were more popular in the larger culture several decades earlier. Older couples are more likely to have completed childbearing and childrearing, and are commonly living in a home with just themselves. For many older individuals, they may have already reached retirement, and may even have health concerns which inhibit their ability to perform household chores. Simply, older couples' unique attributes would seem to bring about a distinct division of household chores, as compared to the larger population.

Interestingly, research on older couples' division of labor does not provide a clear and consistent understanding of their chore allocation processes. In regard to retirement, for example, some researchers have concluded that older men do not appreciably change their chore performance after retiring (e.g., Keith & Schafer, 1986), while others have found that older men tend to increase their household labor contributions following their retirement from the paid labor force (e.g., Rexroat & Shehan, 1987). Researchers have demonstrated that older women may tend to decrease their chore performance following retirement (e.g., Dorfman & Heckert, 1988), while others report that older women actually increase their time spent in household labor following their retirement (Szinovacz, 2000).

The dynamics of older couples' relationships have some similarities to those of younger couples, yet are also distinct in many ways. For example, older wives' subjective views about the allocation of chores have been shown to be just as influential as those of younger wives (Coltrane,

2000). Keith and Schafer (1986), however, find that older wives report greater spousal disagreements and also higher rates of depression when their husbands participate more in the performance of household labor. The researchers posit that among older wives, the increased participation of chores by husbands may represent the violation of gendered territory, particularly if older husbands begin to perform chores which were previously the exclusive responsibility of the wives. While this conclusion does not necessarily apply to all older couples (see Szinovacz, 2000), it does suggest that the division of household labor among older couples requires a slightly different perspective and interpretation, given their unique characteristics.

The overwhelming majority of research on the division of household labor has focused on heterosexual couples, and has commonly pursued the notion of a sex-based division of chores. This approach overlooks the presence of gay and lesbian couples, who, of course, have to somehow allocate household tasks within their own homes. Over the past decade, a growing number of studies have sought to examine the division of chores within gay and lesbian households. In a direct comparison of gay and lesbian couples, Kurdek (2007) reports that there are no differences in the relative amounts of household labor performed, although lesbian partners do report a higher level of task sharing, as compared to gay partners. Among gay couples, partners tend to specialize in the performance of particular tasks to a greater extent. Couples within the sample also reported that dissatisfaction with the division of household chores did significantly detract from their perceptions of relationship quality, which is directly comparable to the same associations found among heterosexual couples.

Lesbian couples have attracted a greater amount of research on their division of household labor, with much of it focusing upon how the arrival or presence of children affects their allocation of chores (e.g., Goldberg & Perry-Jenkins, 2007). One often-made assumption is that the introduction of a child into a lesbian household may bring a shift toward more traditional roles, resulting in one partner becoming the “mother”

(whether by birth or adoption) and thereby taking on the traditionally larger share of household chores. This assumption does not find much support, however, as the overwhelming majority of lesbian couples report an equitable sharing of chores within the home, both during and after the transition into parenthood (Reimann, 1997).

Overall, it would appear that while the division of labor among gay and lesbian couples may not be completely equitable, they do appear to desire and attain a greater balance in terms of chore allocation, as compared to heterosexual couples. Additionally, just like heterosexual couples, gay and lesbian partners also appear to become more specialized in particular chore performance (i.e., chore segregation) as their relationship continues over time (Kurdek, 2007). Hence, while the division of chores is not based on the sex of the partners, gay and lesbian couples seem to exhibit many of the same characteristics of chore allocation as do heterosexual couples, particularly in regard to how the division of household labor affects their relationships and the quality thereof. For example, Moore (2008), in an examination of Black lesbian stepfamilies, found that the biological mother tended to take on a greater share of the household chores. However, this greater workload was regarded as a means of securing greater power within the lesbian couples' relationships. This is quite contrary to prevailing assumptions concerning the division of household chores among heterosexual couples, and clearly indicates the need for both closer study of the division of labor among gay and lesbian couples, as well as a re-evaluation of the existing concepts, theories, and measures used by researchers in the study of the allocation of chores.

Conclusion

While the last several decades have revealed decreases in women's overall performance of household labor, and also shown slight increases in men's performance of housework, women still bear the burden for performing the majority of chores in the home. Researchers have shown the patterns of chore allocation to be influenced by

gender role attitudes, employment, earnings, the presence of children, the stage of the family life cycle, sexual orientation, and a variety of behavioral, attitudinal, and contextual characteristics. These patterns of chore allocation, however, have been shown to have substantial consequences for the well-being of both women and men, as well as for the quality of their relationships. The variety of theoretical perspectives used in the examination of household labor has increased somewhat, yet researchers still tend to focus on a select few in order to explain why the sex-based division of household labor remains relatively intransigent. This continuing pattern, particularly when considered in conjunction with the similarity between adults' division of housework and those same patterns shown in the chores performed by children, underscores the need to give greater consideration to the question of why these intergenerational patterns of household chore allocation persist. Given that the theoretical perspectives and methodological techniques used in the study of the division of household labor come from several different disciplines, an interdisciplinary approach may perhaps yield a greater understanding of why the sex-based division of chores continues with so little change.

The past several decades have witnessed a peculiar pattern in how researchers are approaching the study of the division of household chores. During the 1980s, many researchers relied heavily upon small, nonrepresentative samples, and examined the allocation of chores from a largely qualitative approach. In the late 1980s and into the 1990s, researchers took advantage of nationally representative samples, such as the NSFH, and the study of the division of household labor was approached primarily from a quantitative perspective. Since the turn of the century, the past decade has seen researchers in this area once again turning to smaller, more qualitative studies of the division of chores. This seemingly cyclical pattern suggests that there is an "ebb and flow" to both methodological and theoretical approaches to examining the division of household labor. This is evident in other areas of family study and, to a great extent, is to be expected within most science disciplines.

Researchers who examine the division of household labor in the future need to be aware of

the increasingly varied structures and behaviors within families. Just as the past several decades have yielded changes in researchers' approaches to understanding and explaining the allocation of household chores, the families themselves continue to change, as well. The number of stepfamilies, for example, continues to increase, bringing about more complex familial relationships. Our theoretical and conceptual approaches to explaining how parents influence the household chore performance of children need to recognize the complex nature of parenthood itself (e.g., resident/nonresident, biological/step), as well as the influence of the variety of extended kin within such families. Likewise, the percentage of single mother households continues to rise in the United States, necessitating that researchers deal with not only parental socialization influences upon children, but also how single mothers perform the housework themselves, or perhaps turns to others (e.g., friends, relatives, neighbors). Cohabitation is very much increasing in prominence, and this change certainly requires that researchers develop more appropriate conceptual models which can address the substantial attitudinal and behavioral differences across the various types of cohabitators themselves (e.g., younger vs. older couples; cohabitators with children vs. childless cohabitators). Over the coming years, it is the varied forms and behaviors of families which will present the greatest challenge to researchers interested in examining the allocation of chores. Ultimately, the "traditional" conceptual, theoretical, and methodological approaches which have been consistently applied by family researchers over the years will need to be reformulated in order to better understand and explain the division of household labor among an increasingly varied population of families.

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