Babies and Broomsticks: Cross-National Effects of Parental Role Models, Time Constraints and Income on Men’s and Women’s Contributions to Family Care and Household work

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Abstract

Women across the world have increasingly entered the paid workforce, but the parallel increase in men’s contributions to unpaid work within households lags behind. Women’s entrenched responsibilities for family care and household work in the private sphere constrain their choices in the public sphere (Clare & Crompton 2014). Men also bear costs from the unequal distribution of household responsibilities; gendered practices and norms in public and private spheres act as barriers to men who want to take on bigger roles at home (Croft et al., 2015). Collectively, families, employers and governments strive to resolve the conundrum of gender inequality in household labor.

Negotiations at home provide “potential turning points in social situations where the social order gets deconstructed, debated, and reformed” (McFarland, 2004, p. 1251). Yet studies suggest that women’s ability to effectively negotiate the division of labor may be limited by cultural level variables such as economic development, female labor-force participation, gender norms, and welfare regimes (Fuwa, 2004). While time and income, and the relative share of these in two-earner households, are predicted to affect the allocation of tasks within households, there is some evidence that the “degendering of housework is thwarted by institutional-, interactive-, and individual-level processes” (Miklya, Legerski & Cornwall, 2010, p. abstract). For example, Bittman et. al.’s (2003) investigation of allocations of household work in Australia and the U.S. found a curvilinear relationship between women’s earnings and their level of household work in Australia, but not in the U.S.; gender trumps in Australia while money trumps in the U.S. Women who earned more money than their spouses “do gender” at home in Australia by increasing their contributions to household labor, while the parallel set of primary income earners in the US show linear decreases in their hours of household labor as their incomes rise. This example highlights how the dynamics underlying the division of household labor are embedded within a series of “nested” units, ranging from households to communities, countries and cultures (Olivetti, Patacchini & Zenou 2013; Breen & Cook, 2005; Fuwa, 2004; Coltrane, 2000).

Previous scholarship presents three primary explanations for persistent gender inequality in household labor. The first highlights constraints: hours spent in paid work outside the home constrain the hours available for labor at home. The second points to relative resources and their role in intra-household bargaining: whoever earns more outside the home can bargain for less work inside the home. The third is grounded in the social construction of gender: gendered attitudes support men’s contributions in the market economy and women’s contributions in the home. In our study, we control for individual and cultural-level gender attitudes, and examine the effects of parental role models in the social construction of gender. We explore whether non-traditional gender role models provide alternatives to societal norms around work inside homes. We predict that being raised by a mother who works outside the home will moderate the effects of constraints and resources on women’s and men’s approaches to household labor, and that these effects will vary across different gender ideologies at the societal level.

Using ISSP Gender and Attitude Surveys from 2002 and 2012, we examine how men’s and women’s contributions to household labor vary with time constraints, income, and parental role models. We separately examine effects on hours of housework and hours spent in caring for family members. Classifying through k-means clustering algorithm, the 24 countries we study fall into three clusters based on historical levels and trends in gender attitudes across society. In countries within the "Liberalizing Egalitarians" cluster, gender attitudes were already egalitarian in 2002 and became increasingly so over the decade between 2002 and 2012 (Denmark, Finland, Norway, Sweden, France, Germany & Slovenia). In countries within the "Stagnating Moderates" cluster, gender attitudes leaned slightly toward egalitarian in
2002 and remained stagnant in the following decade (Israel, USA, Great Britain, Spain, Australia, Czech Republic, Poland, Slovakia, Switzerland, Austria, Japan and Taiwan). In countries within the "Stagnating Conservatives" cluster, gender attitudes leaned slightly or heavily toward conservative in 2002 and remained unchanged in the following decade (Chile, Latvia, Mexico, Philippines, and Russia).

Results from mixed level analyses suggest that all three play unique roles in men’s and women’s unpaid work at home, that the effects differ between household work and family care, and that these results vary with trends in the cultural attitudes toward gender. For men, being raised by a working mom has a direct effect on contributions at home; for women, the role modeling effects of being raised by a working mom interact with the woman's income and hours spent in paid work.

Our analyses offer four contributions. First, by examining factors influencing men’s and women’s unpaid domestic work in 24 countries, the analyses reveal the intersection of micro- and macro-level gender dynamics. Second, we disentangle family care from household work and reveal distinct patterns of influence in each arena. Third, we contrast the factors on which men’s and women’s responses covary from those on which men’s and women’s responses diverge. Finally, we expose working mothers as critical to their children’s work-family choices as adults.