

The Division of Labor in Same and Different-Gender Couples During the COVID-19 Pandemic

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COVID-19 has had a dramatic impact on families' work-family interface in the United States. In fact, a study completed during the pandemic shows that 70% of parents changed work situations (Goldberg, McCormick, and Virginia 2021). With the implementation of social distancing, closure of day care centers and schools, and other measures aimed at minimizing contact with others, employed individuals found themselves spending an increasing part of their days at home. For many, home became a sphere not only for unpaid work but also for paid work.

Home is also where gender inequality had persisted since long before the pandemic. On top of their workplace responsibilities, working women are expected to perform more housework than men, which Arlie Hochschild famously termed the "second shift" (Hochschild 1989). Although dual-earning families have become more prevalent over the past several decades, women still perform the lion's share of household labor (Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). Considering that working adults spent more of their time at home during the pandemic, women may have still performed more housework than men. How families updated their household division of work during COVID-19 is thus a question of great interest and would shed insight into the current state of gender inequality in the institution of the family.

Little research has been done on US families' housework sharing practices during the pandemic. The only study looking at the division of housework in the context of the US and COVID-19 reports that couples have overall exhibited a more egalitarian share of unpaid labor compared to pre-pandemic level based on survey data, and increases in father's participation in household labor might have been the major determinant (Carlson, Petts, and Pepin 2020). Furthermore, even less is known about how the household dynamic looked in same-gender families. Studies completed prior to the outbreak of COVID-19 posit that same-gender couples exhibit a more gender egalitarian approach to housework (Goldberg, Smith, and Perry-Jenkins 2012; Perlesz et al. 2010). Individual characteristics other than gender ideology, such as income, tend to have greater role in the negotiation of housework in same-gender families (Goldberg et al. 2012; Sutphin 2010). Additionally, same-gender couples often express that there is an expectation or pressure on them to diverge from traditional gender specializations and behave in a gender egalitarian manner (Gabb 2005). Given our understanding of the division of housework from existing literature, we hypothesize that 1) women in different-gender relationships performed a greater share of housework than men during the pandemic and 2) same-gender couples shared housework more equally than different-gender couples during the pandemic.

Women's paid work also took a hit during the pandemic. A study completed during the pandemic shows that mothers reduced their work hours more than fathers due to the increased demand of childcare arising from the closure of day care centers and schools and the gendered expectation that attaches the role of a primary caregiver to women (Collins et al. 2021). This observation was being made at a point in time when scholars had already been arguing for a "stalled revolution"—suggesting that the progress made towards gender equality had stalled (Blau and Kahn 2013; England, Levine, and Mishel 2020; Meagher and Shu 2019). Limiting our sample to those employed full-time, we hypothesize that 1) women in different-gender relationships worked less than men during the pandemic, and 2) same-gender couples worked more similar hours during the pandemic compared to different-gender couples.

Data and Method

Survey and time diary data come from the National Couples' Health and Time Study (NCHAT), which entered the field on September 1, 2020, and data collection was completed in April 2021. NCHAT is a nationally representative study of same- and different-gender couples in the United States. NCHAT respondents are part of the Gallup Panel consisting of 110,000 individuals who have been recruited since 2008 as part of the Gallup Daily Tracking Survey (Gallup 2021). To be included in the study, the main respondent must have been between 20 and 60 years old, living with a spouse/partner, and able to read English or Spanish. The survey took approximately 40 minutes to complete on Qualtrics. After completing the survey, respondents were asked to invite their partners to signal their interest in participating by providing their own email address. Partners who provided an email address were invited within three hours and followed the same protocol as main respondents. Next, respondents were randomly assigned a time-diary day to account for variation due to the day of the week (i.e., Monday vs. Friday). Time diaries were modeled after the American Time Use Survey (US Bureau of Labor Statistics 2020). On the time-diary day, respondents reported their activities beginning at 4 AM and concluding 24 hours later. At 8 AM, noon, 4 PM, 8 PM, and 8 AM the following day, respondents were prompted to enter their activities and follow-up questions (e.g., who they were with). Time-diary categories included but were not limited to sleeping, personal care, eating food, working, childcare activities, household/repair, pet/animal care, traveling, socializing, relaxing, and leisure, shopping/running errands, smoking/vaping/drugs, education, providing care for an adult, exercising/other physical activity, volunteering. 3,642 main respondents completed the survey and 2,179 completed the time diary. There were 1,515 partners who completed the survey and 987 completed the time diary.

The current analyses include survey and preliminary time diary data from 1,356 main respondents. To be included in the current analyses time diaries had to add to a total of 1,440 minutes and report at least one instance of eating. Respondents who identified as non-binary were dropped from analyses due to sample size ($n = 44$). Respondents reported an average of 14 activities throughout their day. Approximately half of respondents identified as women (51%; $n = 670$). Less than 1% identified as a trans man or trans woman and they were recoded to the appropriate gender category (i.e., trans man was coded as man and trans woman was coded as woman). The majority of respondents were in different-gender couples (73%), and most were married (75%). Most respondents (63%) did not have household children under the age of 18 living in their households. The majority of the sample identified as non-Latinx white ($n = 810$), followed by Latinx ($n = 217$), non-Latinx Black ($n = 109$), non-Latinx Asian ($n = 89$), non-Latinx Multirace ($n = 64$), or another race ($n = 23$). The average age of respondents was 44 years. Ten percent of respondents were born outside of the U.S. Just over half of the sample had earned a Bachelor's degree or more (59%), followed by some college or technical training (24%), and 17% had a high school degree or less. Most respondents worked full-time (68%), approximately one quarter (23%) were furloughed or unemployed, and 9% worked part-time.

Measures

Housework. Time spent in housework was created by summing together primary and secondary activities including cleaning/doing laundry, doing home improvement or vehicle maintenance, paying bills, and scheduling appointments.

Paid Work. Time spent in paid work was created by summing together primary and secondary activities including working, attending a work event, and checking work emails or messages.

Independent Variables. Couple Gender Composition. Respondents reported their own and their spouse/partner's gender identity. Respondents were coded as being in a same-gender couple if their gender identities matched. *Gender.* Respondents reported their gender identity from five categories including, man, women, trans man, trans women, and non-binary. Respondents who identified as a woman or trans woman were coded as a 1 and respondents who identified as a man or trans man were coded as a 0. *Parental Status.* Respondents reported the ages of all children living in their households most of the time. Respondents were coded as a 1 if they reported a household child under the age of 18 living in their household.

Demographic controls. Race was coded as Non-Latinx white, Non-Latinx Black, Non-Latinx Asian, Latinx, and Non-Latinx Multiracial, and Non-Latinx Other Race. *Educational Attainment.* Educational attainment was coded as high school degree or less, some college or technical training, and Bachelor's degree or more. *Age* was coded as a continuous variable calculated from month and year of birth to the month and year the respondent completed the survey. *Marital status* was coded as a dichotomous variable (0 = cohabiting; 1 = married). *Foreign Born.* Respondents reported the country they were born in and were coded as a 1 if they reported a country other than the United States. Respondents reported their current *employment status*, including full-time, part-time, and unemployed. *Survey month* was coded as a continuous variable ranging from 1 (September 2020) to 8 (April 2021).

Preliminary Results

We performed preliminary ordinary least square regressions in STATA 16.0 to predict time spent in housework and paid work. Only respondents who worked full-time were included in models predicting paid work. Results are shown in Table 1.

Time spent doing housework. In Model 1, preliminary results suggest that women spent significantly more time performing housework than men. There were no significant associations between couple gender composition and time spent doing housework. Parents spent more time doing housework than respondents without children. Older respondents spent more time doing housework. Respondents with some college reported doing more housework than respondents with high school or less education. Respondents who worked part-time or were furloughed or unemployed reported doing more housework than respondents who work full-time. Next, in Model 2, we examined an interaction between gender and couple gender composition. Women in different-gender couples reported significantly more housework than men in different-gender couples. There were no significant differences in housework time between women and men in same-gender couples and men in different-gender couples.

Time spent doing paid work. In Model 3, women who were working full-time spent significantly less time doing paid work than men who were working full-time. There were no significant associations between couple gender composition and time spent doing paid work. Respondents who reported a non-Latinx Other racial identity reported significantly more time spent doing paid work than Non-Latinx white respondents. Next, we tested an interaction between gender and couple gender composition, shown in Model 4. Women in different-gender relationships who were working full-time reported significantly less time doing paid work than men in different gender relationships who were working full-time. There were no significant

differences in paid work between women and men in same-gender couples and men in different-gender couples.

Conclusion and Next Steps

Our preliminary analyses suggest that during the pandemic, gender continued to be an important predictor of time spent doing housework and paid work, especially in different-gender couples. Consistent with the literature from before the pandemic, gender differences did not emerge among men and women in same-gender couples. We have several next steps planned for our analyses. First, we plan to finish cleaning the time diary data. Our preliminary analyses dropped 484 time diaries that were not yet cleaned. This additional sample will increase our power. Further, we plan to clean the partner data and use that data as well; we are now comparing main respondents with other main respondents, rather than comparing main respondents with their actual partners. We also plan to expand our analyses to include time spent doing childcare. We will also include controls for day of the week and weekend/weekday. The NCHAT team is currently working with Gallup to construct weights specific to the time diary sample, and we will present weighted analyses at PAA 2022 if accepted.

Table 1. Logistic Regressions Predicting Time Spent in Housework and Paid Work

	Housework				Paid Work			
	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE	B	SE
Couple Gender Composition (Different)								
Same-gender couple	-7.84	(10.01)	-	-	15.08	(29.03)	-	-
Gender (Man)								
Woman	37.82***	(7.99)	-	-	-65.01**	(22.99)	-	-
Couple Gender Composition*Gender (Different-gender couple*man)								
Different-gender couple*woman	-	-	45.54***	(9.44)	-	-	-90.46***	(27.16)
Same-gender couple*man	-	-	4.96	(13.05)	-	-	-25.69	(37.16)
Same-gender couple*woman	-	-	23.40	(14.42)	-	-	-28.31	(41.16)
Parental Status	17.41*	(8.50)	18.51*	(8.53)	8.96	(24.45)	5.42	(24.51)
Race (Non-Latinx white)								
Non-Latinx Black	2.25	(14.57)	1.69	(14.57)	41.18	(40.21)	43.13	(40.17)
Non-Latinx Asian	22.99	(19.07)	22.83	(19.06)	-28.58	(53.92)	-27.46	(53.86)
Latinx	19.83	(11.16)	19.22	(11.16)	-28.66	(32.74)	-25.53	(32.74)
Non-Latinx Multirace	0.78	(18.83)	0.09	(18.83)	-40.71	(57.40)	-37.87	(57.35)
Non-Latinx Other	25.72	(28.84)	25.62	(28.82)	214.93*	(90.92)	216.89*	(90.81)
Married (cohabiting)	8.96	(9.43)	10.24	(9.46)	-6.44	(27.48)	-12.15	(27.63)
Age	1.26**	(0.40)	1.28**	(0.40)	-1.66	(1.17)	-1.65	(1.17)
Foreign Born	-7.27	(13.78)	-7.08	(13.77)	29.51	(39.32)	29.82	(39.27)
Education (Highschool or less)								
Some College	29.27*	(12.59)	29.13*	(12.58)	-8.25	(38.88)	-6.79	(38.84)
Bachelor's Degree +	16.99	(12.17)	16.32	(12.17)	-56.95	(37.24)	-54.20	(37.23)
Employment (Full-time)								
Part-time	41.77**	(13.40)	40.27**	(13.43)	-	-	-	-
Furloughed/Unemployed	72.81***	(9.49)	70.58***	(9.60)	-	-	-	-
Constant	-47.99	(24.71)	-16.26	(22.07)	624.92***	(71.62)	577.80***	(64.61)
Observations	1289		1289		868		868	
F	6.91***		6.72***		2.01**		2.06***	
R ²	0.11		0.11		0.02		0.05	

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

Reference category listed in parentheses. Survey month was included but not shown.

Source: National Couples' Health and Time Study

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