
10. Gender inequality, households, and work*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The division of labor between household partners is a core topic in family sociology. Although rising divorce rates, closing gender gaps in education, family policies for fathers, and increases in female labor force participation have levelled the playing field for men and women, we observe consistent and stubborn patterns of unequal divisions of labor within heterosexual couples across the globe. In fact, this is an example of a well-established empirical regularity that rigorous sociology aims to explain (see Jackson's chapter on sociology as a population science in this *Handbook* on such regularities as well as the chapter by Raub, De Graaf & Gërkhani on rigorous sociology for a more general discussion). When it comes to achieving gender equality between male and female household partners, progress has been painstakingly slow. Women's financial independence is hindered when they specialize in household duties. They still spend considerably more time on unpaid labor, and men spend more time in the labor market throughout the world (Fuwa 2004; McMunn et al. 2020). Minimal differences at the onset of a relationship may, over time, lead to strong divisions between partners (Grunow et al. 2012; Rothstein 2012; Vink 2020). Unpaid labor comprises both domestic duties and childcare. For domestic duties such as cleaning and washing, patterns have been much more stubborn than for childcare (Treas & Drobnič 2010). Fathers increased their time in childcare significantly over the last few decades, but mothers hardly decreased theirs (Craig et al. 2014). Women on average have less leisure time than men, and their total combined work hours often exceed those of men. Due to their further responsibilities and associated time pressure, women also tend to experience a lower quality of leisure than men (Henderson & Gibson 2013; Yerkes et al. 2020, but see Bittman & Wajcman 2000 for a different perspective).

In this chapter, we provide an overview of the explanations that have been offered to understand the unequal division of labor; that is, the differences not in total time, but in time spent in paid and unpaid labor. We start with an overview of the three main theoretical mechanisms, and empirical findings on the micro-level in the section on micro-level

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explanations, before we turn to the contextual level in the section on contextual explanations. We pay particular attention to different key mechanisms that could be driving the division of labor, and how contextual level influences relate to these mechanisms. In doing so, we adopt the general perspective on micro-macro links in rigorous sociology.

Despite a huge amount of research on these topics, however, we seem only marginally closer to understanding the division of labor. In the section on new directions we therefore discuss recent theoretical and empirical progress that has been made by studying atypical heterosexual couples and same-sex couples. Analyzing these couples may provide a new perspective and better insight in mechanisms underlying the division of labor overall. Finally, we consider pressing open questions in relation to understanding the division of labor as well as avenues for future rigorous research.

2. EXISTING EXPLANATIONS

2.1 Micro-level Explanations

Individuals and couples have to make choices about the way in which they divide their time. We assume that these choices are affected by individuals' own preferences, opportunities and restrictions, as well as by their partner's (see, for example, Diekmann's chapter on rational choice sociology). These preferences, opportunities and restrictions, in the most commonly used theories, take the form of socio-economic resources and (internalized) norms of behaviors prescribed for men and women. At the micro-level, three major theories have been proposed to explain the division of labor within households. Two of these consider the socio-economic status of both partners. The first, new home economics, in a sense, takes an altruistic starting point. The second, bargaining or relative resource models, acknowledges power differences within the couple. Third, we turn to explanations that depart from a gender roles perspective.

2.1.1 New home economics

Socio-economic factors have been the most frequent object of study in explaining the division of labor. Gender inequality in housework has been linked to gender-neutral and rational considerations, described in the literature on housework as the 'time availability' explanation (Shelton 1992). The partner with more unrestricted time will do more of the unpaid work in the house, including the care for children. In practice, this translates to the person who works fewer hours for pay. This is also in line with Becker's 'theory of the allocation of time' (1965), which states that whichever partner is less efficient at market work will spend more time on domestic activities. Another argument often used, is that it is more efficient for the partner with lower socio-economic resources to specialize in unpaid work (Becker 1991), as the one with higher resources will extract higher wages from paid labor.

Although in principle, Becker's 'new home economics' (NHE) model is considered gender-neutral, he recognized that women – partly due to socialization, partly due to gender discrimination in the labor market – would typically have fewer marketable resources than men. In his perspective, specialization is the most efficient way to organize household duties, resulting in the highest possible production and partners would

rationally decide on which division would benefit the entire household most. New home economics builds on a mathematical model that presupposes an altruistic main provider who justly distributes financial resources to others in the family. According to this model, initial and possibly minor differences in marketable resources may translate into benefits of complete specialization over time. Due to economies of scale, a two-person household, all else being equal, entails less housework than two single-person households. If the household labor was equally split between the partners, both men and women would perform less once they start living together. However, the effects of economies of scale and specialization work in opposite directions. The common assumption is that the incentives for specialization are stronger than economies of scale-effects. This implies that a partnered woman will spend more time on housework than a woman who is single, and that for partnered and single men the expectation is the opposite. The greater share of the burden of housework is taken by women, at the expense of paid employment, whereas partnered men will perform more paid work and will have fewer domestic responsibilities (Gupta 1999; Pepin et al. 2018).

In the 1970s and 1980s, in general, it was indeed the wife whose market work efficiency suffered from her having less job experience (Van der Lippe & Van Doorne-Huiskes 1995), but female employment grew rapidly since then in many countries (Harkness 2003; Goldin & Mitchell 2017). Over time, women's educational investments have increased considerably, and it is no longer reasonable to believe, as Becker suggests, that women invest less in education due to their planned childrearing behavior. Women's rising labor force participation also diminished their unrestricted time, available for domestic activities, which led to less time spent on household chores. Furthermore, for higher educated couples, it can be more rational to outsource domestic duties and market both partners' earnings potential (cf. Gupta et al. 2015), and when public childcare is affordable and/or subsidized, the benefits of specialization decrease also for lower educated couples (Evertsson et al. 2009). Research suggests that the assumption of an altruistic main earner dividing resources equally within the family can be problematic (England & Budig 1998). There is some experimental evidence that women, but not men, display altruistic behavior in resources allocation with their own partner, but not with men unknown to them (Beblo et al. 2015). In addition, Kenney (2008) found that children were less likely to experience food insecurity when parents' pooled income was controlled by the mother rather than the father.

2.1.2 Power and bargaining

A second class of socio-economic models to explain the division of labor between partners takes on a power perspective. This line of reasoning departs from the assumption that housework (but not childcare) is tedious and disliked by men and women alike, who would both rather take on paid labor outside the house or have more leisure (Blood & Wolfe 1960). Consequently, partners engage in 'bargaining' to divide household labor. The partner with fewer economic resources, such as income or market potential, has less power and is therefore less likely to win negotiations about who does (most of the) household chores (Brines 1993; Lundberg & Pollak 1994). Partners with more resources can make the argument that their paid labor brings in higher gains, and time devoted to domestic labor by this partner, instead of the partner with fewer marketable resources, would be a waste of time and money. In negotiations over who does the housework, a 'relative resource' disadvantage works against whichever partner has fewer resources (e.g.

Evertsson & Neremo 2004; Kan 2008). The ultimate threat if negotiations fail is that the person with the higher resources may leave the relationship, and it ends in divorce (Lundberg & Pollak 1994). Worth noting is that the relative resource perspective takes on a short-term perspective and no weight is paid to future labor market prospects and income or pensions for instance. As with the socio-economic model of new home economics, the relative resource/power perspective also assumes that decisions about the division of labor are in principle gender neutral, rational, and driven by constraints. Whereas the new home economics builds on the assumption of maximizing the best collective outcome, the relative resource/bargaining approach acknowledges power differences, an aversion of household duties, and a general liking of paid labor. In practice though, as women typically hold fewer resources, the power perspective also predicts that women will take on the less preferred domestic duties, which is also in line with the perspective that women have more altruistic attitudes.

From a socio-economic point of view, children further reduce the number of hours women work for pay (Musick et al. 2020; Nylin et al. 2021). Having children means that more time has to be spent on household labor, which now includes childcare responsibilities. Since women, including higher educated women, usually earn less than their spouses do, they are usually the ones who will take care of the children, and will spend less time on paid employment (Grunow et al. 2012; Van der Lippe 2000). Women also increase their time spent on household labor when they have children (Baxter et al. 2008). The presence of children is thus associated with fewer hours of paid employment by women, and more hours of paid employment by men.

2.1.3 Gender roles

A rather different line of explanations for the gendered division of labor starts from societal gender roles that prescribe appropriate, yet different, behaviors for men and women. Theories of gender propose that household labor is intertwined with beliefs about certain behaviors being typically male or female (L.E. Berk 1985; DeVault 1991). Gender theory focuses on how social structures carry gender value and give gender advantages (Connell 1987). The construction of gender in society as ‘masculinity’ and ‘femininity’ are outings of stereotypes concerning male dominance and female subordination. In the gendered view that results, paid work, which is categorized as masculine, is regarded as more valuable than unpaid labor or domestic tasks, which are considered feminine (Downing & Goldberg 2011). Repetitive household chores, such as vacuuming or doing the laundry are considered typically female tasks, whereas incidental home maintenance chores are viewed as male tasks. These theories of gender argue that gendered norms and the ‘doing of gender’ (West & Zimmerman 1987), by performing typically feminine and masculine tasks, drive individuals’ and couples’ behavior. Individuals are evaluated based on gender and those not doing gender according to expectations can be criticized or met with sanctions from others (Huber & Spitze 1981; Shelton & John 1996). To illustrate such pressures, Thébaud et al. (2019) employ an experimental design to test to what extent men and women differ in attitudes towards domestic labor and gender norms linked to it. Using photos of a relatively clean or messy room, with clear clues to the occupant being either a man or a woman, they find that men and women respondents do not differ in their perceptions of messiness or how urgent it is to clean up. However, the gender of the room occupant has strong and significant effects. When looking at pictures of rooms, female

occupants are held to higher standards of cleanliness, and are deemed more responsible for housework. On the other hand, messy rooms activate negative stereotypes about men. In essence, this means that performing paid work for men, and unpaid work for women, comes with an additional ‘pay’ or social reward of meeting normative expectations.

Although egalitarian attitudes about the division of labor are increasing in the western world, most strongly so among women, this does not translate directly into greater equality. Women are found to do most of the housework and care in the household, often resulting in reduced work hours and periods of leave from work, despite their uptake of contemporary egalitarian gender ideologies (Evertsson 2014; Shelton & John 1996). Women in many places are still being socialized to take on a caring role and household tasks, whereas men are socialized to take on the ‘breadwinner’ role (Blumstein & Schwartz 1983; Williams 2009). Pressures to conform to whatever normative gender expectations prevail, are persuasive. Individuals internalize gendered expectations from their parents, media, policies and peers. As an example, research shows that children are more likely to do the same chores around the house that their parent of the same gender does (Evertsson 2006; Platt & Polavieja 2016). Gender role theory is thus, contrary to socio-economic theories, arguing that not only do socio-economic resources differ between men and women per se, but that women and men are socialized and normatively pressured to do different kinds of work, either paid or unpaid/care work. Within couples, both partners may confirm their gender by doing or not doing housework, referred to in the literature as the ‘doing gender’ or ‘doing difference’ perspective. Notably, this has changed and is changing in especially Western countries, although of course, socialization and the doing of gender still plays a role.

Some experiments have shown that women’s internalized gender norms lead them to contribute more to the overall household good than men (Greig & Bohnet 2009). However, contrary to theories that ascribe specialization to internalized norms, Cochard et al. (2016) observe, in an experimental design, no differences between coupled men and women in their contributions to the household collective when they are in either an advantaged or disadvantaged resource position. They conclude that labor specialization between spouses, is driven by differences in net benefits from labor market activity. If individuals or couples have more egalitarian attitudes, they might be able to realize equality in the division of paid labor, at least partly (Evertsson 2014).

From a gender role perspective as well, children are expected to reinforce the gendered division of labor, as they offer parents new opportunities to show gendered behavior as either provider or caretaker. In particular, mothers are penalized in more traditional contexts when their behavior is inconsistent with motherhood ideal types (Kaufman & Bair 2021; Okimoto & Heilman 2012), such as working full time or working out of choice. A study by Benard & Correll (2010) shows that women (not men) are more prone to perceive a highly successful mother as less warm and less likable than similar workers who are not mothers. In other words, motherhood norms and ideals about the ‘good’ mother are strong and may lead mothers to show gatekeeping behavior by being reluctant to relinquish responsibility over family matters and setting rigid standards for childcare tasks. Fathers on the other hand, can be reluctant to take over feminine childcare tasks and may be inhibited to increase their care-taker role by mothers (Allen & Hawkins 1999).

Summarizing, of the three main theories, NHE assumes that couples act to maximize collective efficiency, whereas bargaining models assume a universal preference for paid

labor rather than housework. Gender roles theory assumes that women and men confirm and 'do' gender by doing different chores. The two socio-economic models argue that division of labor thus must result from differences in available socio-economic resources, whereas the gender model assumes that performing tasks that are congruent with one's gender come with additional pay-offs. The three sets of theories nonetheless predict the same empirical regularity that is indeed observed: men perform more paid labor, whereas women spend more time relatively on domestic and care duties.

2.2 Contextual Explanations

In line with a focus on micro-macro links that is characteristic for many strands of rigorous sociology, we now consider how macro-conditions relate to mechanisms underlying household division of labor. Although the general patterns we observe are, as argued above, almost universal, variation exists in the extent to which the division of labor is unequal across national or institutional contexts. Starting from the micro-level assumptions of the economic and gendered models, we can expect that macro-level economic circumstances, policies, culture and general gender equality in a country influence how couples divide their tasks (see the discussion on macro-micro links in the chapter by Raub, De Graaf & Gërkhani). For instance, bargaining power for women in heterosexual relationships may be larger in countries or labor market sectors in which the gender pay gap is smaller, leading to a more equal division of unpaid labor as well. Our impression of the literature is that internationally comparative work in this area tends to focus on how to explain female labor market participation, while contextual predictors for male participation in domestic labor are studied much less (Mandel & Lazarus, 2021). This is partly due to the fact that an increase in female labor force participation is viewed as an indicator of gender equality, but also because there is less variation in domestic labor between men and women because the institutional context is often assumed, at least implicitly, to be less important for tasks happening in the household. We start with conditions that might shape opportunities for women's paid work (not men's), and next discuss conditions that might shape preferences.

2.2.1 Economic circumstances: different opportunities for female labor market participation

In general, in countries with highly developed economies, men and women are both incentivized to spend time on the labor market, since this pays out more in terms of status, careers and income. In other words, these countries have incentives for women – and men alike – to perform more paid labor. On the other hand, greater prosperity and higher wages also make it more likely that a sole breadwinner can support a family, at least in countries prioritizing the breadwinner model, e.g. via joint taxation (see below). In less developed economies, low wage levels mean that average living standards have been premised on families with both spouses as full-time earners. However, equality has rarely spilled over into the home and women's responsibility for childcare and domestic tasks remains unchallenged in low-income countries as well. Countries also differ in the amount to which they offer part-time employment, which can increase labor force participation of women as it is more compatible with household duties. In an early analysis, Pampel & Tanaka (1986) conclude that development initially forces women out of the labor market, but at

advanced levels it increases female employment. More recently, Bussemakers et al. (2017) show that other economic factors also play a role: in countries where service sector jobs are relatively scarce, higher educated women push lower educated women out of the labor market, thus decreasing overall female labor force participation rates. On the other hand, in countries where public sector and service sector jobs make up a larger share of all jobs, lower educated women's gainful employment is facilitated, resulting in overall higher women's labor force participation (Evertsson et al. 2009). To some extent, the division of paid labor has followed the expectations that derive from the higher labor market potential of women. When we take a longer time period into consideration, women have increased the time spent in paid labor, although men have hardly decreased theirs. From the 1960s onward, women have also reduced their hours spent on domestic labor, largely due to technological innovation, while men have slightly increased theirs. Overall, the total amount of time spent on domestic duties has declined (Carlson & Lynch 2017; Geist & Cohen 2011). However, women continue to do more housework than men, especially the tedious tasks labeled feminine (Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel 2020).

2.2.2 Welfare regimes and their policies: different restrictions to female labor market participation

Theories on the influence of the institutional context on couples' division of labor depend heavily on a typology of welfare regimes. Different types of welfare states supposedly have different features that more or less exclude one another. The original typology is that of Esping-Andersen (1990, 1998), according to which countries can be classified into degree of decommodification and the way in which solidarity takes shape. Decommodification signifies the extent to which social insurances are in place that enables workers to survive during periods when they are unable to sell their labor (as a commodity) in the market. Other typologies base their classification of different institutional contexts on the degree of gender equality in paid and unpaid labor (Lewis 1992; Misra et al. 2007; Orloff 1993) or on the basis of culture (Hakim 2003). Referring to the concept of defamilialization, Lister (1994) highlighted the importance of analyzing the extent to which individuals, and in particular women, can uphold a socially acceptable standard of living independently of family relationships, either through paid work or social security provision (Lister 1994, p. 37). Many women would actually like to be commodified, she argued, and thereby have access to paid employment that frees them from the unpaid work and from the economic dependency on a spouse (see also Orloff 1993).

In the original categorization, three types of welfare regimes were identified (Esping-Andersen 1990). Scandinavian countries belong to the social-democratic cluster that is characterized by widespread government services, policies aimed at stimulating men's and women's employment, such as individual taxation, and support against adversity that financially sustains individuals during periods when they – temporarily – may be unable to provide for themselves through paid work. The large size of the service sector enables households to outsource domestic duties such as childcare, so women face fewer restrictions in allocating their time to the labor market. In other words, defamilialization is high. The conservative cluster originally contains a group of Western European countries, such as Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany. In this type of welfare state, the breadwinner ideology is central, and families are supposed to deal with misfortune themselves. Tax incentives are aimed at stimulating a male breadwinner and female homemaker model

(e.g. joint taxation), the costs for women to participate in paid labor are usually high, and the outsourcing of childcare is more expensive compared with the social-democratic regime, where childcare costs often are subsidized. It is worth noting that the conservative cluster does not fully account for the different countries that used to belong to this regime cluster and the traditional breadwinner ideology is not common in Western European countries anymore. The third type of welfare state is liberal, such as the Anglo-Saxon world: the duties of men and women are the same, but the government is passive when it comes to facilitating women's paid labor as well as their care (parental leaves are short and low paid, childcare often expensive). Other clusters have been distinguished as well (Blossfeld & Drobnič 2001): a Mediterranean cluster that is strongly family-oriented and where there is little government intervention, and the Eastern European and Central European clusters (Laužadytė et al. 2018). The Central European cluster is close to the Mediterranean cluster, and the Eastern European cluster is very different from all other models with lower labor market flexibility and less gender equality.

Research has shown that the division of labor between men and women in social-democratic regimes is more equal than in the other regimes (Evertsson et al. 2009). In conservative and even more so in Mediterranean countries, men spend less time on household duties compared with the other regimes, and women less time on the labor market. In previously communist countries, both men and women used to spend more time on paid work than in the other regimes (Van der Lippe et al. 2011). However, although cross-national comparisons of the division of labor have shown that variation exists, and may be related to institutional forces shaping either preferences or opportunities and restrictions, the complex nature of these welfare regimes makes it hard to tease out fully how different conditions impact different key mechanisms.

Empirically, the main driving force behind the cross-national differences in the division of labor appears to be the social expenditures on childcare in a country (Jaumotte 2003). This social policy facilitates female labor market participation the most. Childcare programs that increase women's time in paid work might also decrease housework time, because more income is available to outsource certain domestic tasks. We are referring specifically to public childcare facilities (Müller & Wrohlich 2020). The high quality public childcare in Sweden for example has been found to encourage labor market activity of women with pre-schoolers (Gustafsson & Stafford 1992). Private childcare arrangements, on the other hand, reflect individual strategies in reaction to minimal government support, and are mainly available to higher income couples. In countries where public expenditures on childcare are large, women will generally perform more paid labor, and the division of labor will consequently be more equal, as mothers' time spent on childcare will diminish (Korpi et al. 2013). Hence, with fewer hours needed for childcare, women face fewer restrictions to spend time on the labor market, which in turn would increase their relative resources and power vis-à-vis their spouse. Child benefits directed to families do not positively contribute to female labor force participation. Instead, it facilitates for mothers to spend more time on care rather than paid work. This can be expected, as child benefits do not alter the individual resources available to women, but rather increase the total household income (Kooreman 2000). Hence, women's bargaining power is not strengthened in these contexts and couples. Taxation might also be a key mechanism influencing couples' relative resource/power division. For instance, in tax systems that take households as the primary unit of taxation, the altruistic model of new home

economics is reinforced by the state. In other words, joint taxation is beneficial for single or one-and-a-half earner families when the breadwinner is taxed less if the partner has no or a small income. Conversely, in countries with individual taxation, the bargaining perspective gains more strength and the within-couple division of power is more equal due to the need for both partners to work and earn an income.

2.2.3 Culture: normative restrictions to equal divisions of labor

A more equal division of paid work and housework between men and women is more encouraged in some countries than in others. Apart from economic circumstances and government policies, countries differ in their general level of gender equality, or gender culture. Hofstede (2001) categorizes countries in terms of the valuing of roles that should be assigned to men and women. The ‘masculinity-femininity’ dimension can be described as the degree to which gender roles are clearly present in society: masculinity denotes men are required to be assertive, tough, and geared towards material success, while women should rather be modest, friendly, and oriented towards quality of life. At the other extreme, male and female roles overlap fully when society is more feminine. Fuwa (2004) is among the first to show that couples in less gender egalitarian countries divide tasks more traditionally. Uunk et al. (2005) find that egalitarian gender role values at the aggregate level play a mixed role. They influence labor market participation of women positively, but do not condition the influence of childcare on mothers’ working hours. Breen & Cooke (2005) show that major changes in overall male acceptance of household labor are needed to change divisions of labor significantly. Religion also plays a role in the division of work (Voicu et al. 2009), both at individual and country level. The type of religious culture has a significant influence on the division, with people living in Catholic & Orthodox countries being more inclined to support an inegalitarian pattern.

Clearly, economic circumstances, family policies and egalitarian cultures are interdependent, and therefore causality is difficult to determine (see Breen’s chapter on causal inference). Whether childcare facilities are available is partly dependent on the family friendly culture in a country (Van der Lippe & Van Dijk 2002). Moreover, gender culture might become more egalitarian over time due to the existence of childcare facilities. Connell (2005) adds that although new patterns of gender relations in society affect men as profoundly as women, this has been less discussed and seldom studied. Moreover, macro- and micro-conditions interact. For instance, economic development impacts individual resources. The emancipating effect of a highly developed economy on female labor force participation would apply strongly to women without children and to a lesser degree to women with children. To make real progress in unravelling the circular model, we need to move to more careful theorizing on how specific policies target specific mechanisms and how to test this properly (see the chapter by Raub, De Graaf & Gërkhani for a more general discussion).

3. NEW DIRECTIONS: ATYPICAL DIFFERENT-SEX COUPLES AND SAME-SEX COUPLES

Despite an impressive body of research on the division of labor, the field remains crippled by the existence of three distinct micro-level theories, which all predict a gendered

division of labor in heterosexual couples. Studies seem to have stalled, with ‘believers’ on each side. Turning to contextual circumstances is not the (only) answer, as it proves hard to distinguish between interrelated contextual characteristics that affect decisions on the household level. Furthermore, the research is heavily skewed towards traditional, middle-class and white couples who, for instance, can afford not to both work full-time. A next step in both theories and findings is to move beyond these typical heterosexual couples and turn to atypical different-sex couples and same-sex couples (for a methodological discussion, see Breen’s chapter as well as Gangl’s chapter on longitudinal designs). In this section we discuss what has been learned from studying atypical different-sex couples, as well as from studying same-sex couples. However, it is worth noting that many of these atypical couples also come from relatively wealthy and white populations.

3.1 Gender Atypical Incomes and Occupations, and Unemployment Effects

An innovation that allows for more stringent tests on theories, comes from studies on heterosexual couples that do not conform to gender stereotypes or gendered regularities in one area, usually the labor market. These studies empirically look at couples with unemployed husbands, or wives that are the household’s primary earners. Economic models predict that men will perform more household labor in these couples, whereas gender models predict that a threat to gender identity in one realm will lead to gender deviance neutralizing behaviors in the other sphere (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000). According to the ‘gender production’ theory, household and paid labor are a means to ‘produce’, ‘display’, and ‘confirm’ gender identities (S.F. Berk 1985; Coltrane 2000; Evertsson & Neramo 2004; Poortman & Van der Lippe 2009). When socio-economic gender identities are threatened, people might resort to gender deviance neutralization at home. A pivotal work in this respect is Brines’ (1994) article, which found that the more a husband relies on his wife for economic support, the less housework he does. His reluctance to do household labor was interpreted as an expression of doing masculinity.

Based on a large volume of studies into gender deviance neutralization, the evidence does not always confirm the neutralization hypothesis. Schneider (2012) studied men and women in gender-atypical occupations – arguing that men who do ‘women’s work’ and women who do ‘men’s work’ in the labor market may seek to neutralize their gender deviance by doing gender at home. Although his analysis suggests that this was indeed the case, his work was later criticized for a misspecification of the statistical models (McClintock 2018). Other work also failed to find clear evidence. Hook (2017) uses variation by the day of week – comparing weekdays with weekends – to reconsider three main explanations for variation in women’s housework time. She predicts that although evidence of gender deviance neutralization should be evident across the days of the week, evidence of time constraints and absolute earnings should be most apparent on weekdays. However, empirical evidence suggests that none of the three measures of resources and constraints – relative earnings, absolute earnings, and employment hours – predict women’s housework on weekends or weekdays. Hence, evidence for gender deviance neutralization or doing gender at home is thus scarce.

Syrda (2020) takes a new approach by investigating the relationship between wife’s relative income and husband’s psychological distress and finds it to be significantly U-shaped. Predicted male psychological distress reaches a minimum at a point where

wives make 40 percent of total household income and proceeds to increase, to reach the highest level when men are entirely economically dependent on their wives. These results reflect both the stress associated with being the sole breadwinner, and, more significantly, with gender norm deviance due to husbands being out-earned by their wives. Interestingly, the relationship between wife's relative income and husband's psychological distress was not found among couples where wives out-earned husbands already at the beginning of their marriage, pointing to the importance of marital selection. Finally, patterns reported by wives were not as pronouncedly U-shaped as those reported by husbands.

While one could argue that working in gender atypical occupations or being in a couple with a woman breadwinner may reflect differences in initial preferences or gender ideologies, the same does not hold for unemployment. It is unlikely that only men and women with either very traditional or very egalitarian preferences would lose their jobs. Studying couples with an unemployed spouse might thus give a clearer evaluation of mechanisms of gender deviance neutralization. Empirical research on the consequences of unemployment has typically focused on paid work or quality of life while neglecting unpaid work outcomes. However, studying the relationship between unemployment and housework might shed light on general mechanisms shaping housework as well. The partner who is unemployed will, almost by definition, have more unconstrained time to spend on household chores, so the gender-neutral rational consideration would be that whoever is unemployed takes on most household tasks. In contrast to gender-neutral expectations, however, gender models would argue that unemployed women will take on more additional housework than will unemployed men. Unemployed men who cannot meet male gender norms may compensate masculinity by avoiding chores that are considered feminine. Indeed, women in partnerships where they earn more than their male partner are sometimes shown to do more housework than otherwise (Evertsson & Neramo 2004; Lyonette 2015).

As indicated above, arguments on gender also predict women will increase housework more than men in response to unemployment. However, empirical evidence is mixed (England 2011; Sullivan 2011; Van der Lippe et al. 2011, 2018). There are indications that additional housework will not be divided gender neutrally based on time availability (see also Evertsson & Neramo 2007; Gush et al. 2015). First, because men experience more psychological distress by unemployment (Luhmann et al. 2014; Van der Meer 2014), which might interfere with them taking up domestic chores. Second, men may not have the household skills because of a lack of socialization in this domain, which means women still must perform more household duties, especially when a high level of economizing is called for (Treas 2008). Studies on the US are consistent with these gendered arguments. Unemployed women do more additional housework than do unemployed men (Gough & Killewald 2011; Ström 2002). In a Great Recession trend analysis, Berik & Kongar (2013) report that women, in response to having more paid work hours, spend less of their time in housework. But men took on no more household labor when their work hours were reduced. In addition, French mothers who were out of work were more likely than fathers who lost their jobs to increase time spent on childcare (Pailhe & Solaz 2008). Finally, Fauser (2019) finds that both men and women increase their time spent on housework as a reaction to unemployment in German couples. However, women increase their time spent on typical female tasks, whereas men perform more masculine-type household chores. Thus, the empirical evidence shows that men and women differ in their reactions to unemployment.

3.2 LGBT+ Couples

Studies on women breadwinners have been scrutinized for basing conclusions on very few couples wherein women out-earn men. Another case that has been receiving increasing scholarly attention is that of same-sex couples. Individuals in same-sex relationships offer a unique case to test the relative explanatory power of socio-economic and gender models, not least when same-sex can be compared to different-sex couples. Empirical outcomes indicate that being in a same-sex relationship is a more important predictor of an equal division of labor than having similar incomes (Shechory & Ziv 2007; Solomon et al. 2005) and specialization is rare (Aldén et al. 2015). An often quoted rationale is that same-sex couples more strongly adhere to equity norms and are therefore more committed to dividing tasks equally (Ciano-Boyce & Shelley-Sireci 2003; Downing & Goldberg 2011; Kurdek 2007; Patterson 1995). However, this explanation falls short in two respects. First, it does not explain where the increased equity values would come from. Second, it cannot explain why there might be differences *between* male and female couples in labor market and household work. For instance, Jaspers & Verbakel (2013), show that Dutch male couples opt most of all couples for dual full-time work, whereas female couples choose dual part-time arrangements the most. Hence, one could say that they copy classical gender roles. Some findings indicate that relative resources shape housework in same-sex couples as well. For instance, Goldberg et al. (2012) found that especially feminine tasks are more often performed by the lowest income partner in same-sex female couples. Hence, although partners in same-sex couples face similar constraints and gendered socialization, gender may not be irrelevant to their division of labor.

When same-sex couples have children, this should also result in similarities in how parenthood is enacted. Both women in a same-sex couple will identify with the motherhood role and behave in ways that confirm and establish this identity. In different-sex couples, the parents take on partly different roles by enacting the primary carer and motherhood identity, or the secondary carer/provider, fatherhood identity. Hence, they do gender by doing motherhood/fatherhood and by doing difference. In a survey among same-sex couples, gay and lesbian respondents expected new (lesbian) mothers to spend fewer hours on the labor market than new (gay) fathers. Even though the difference in expectations for male and female parents was less pronounced than for heterosexual couples, there still appeared to be gendered expectations when comparing male and female couples (Roeters et al. 2017).

Trying to disentangle the mechanisms contributing to (un)equal divisions of paid work and care, Evertsson & Boye (2018) study the division of parental leave in female same-sex and different-sex couples. They compare and test the relevance of *specialization* theory, according to which the partners should specialize in either paid work or unpaid work and care, the *doing of gender* (West & Zimmerman 1987) which would result in more unequal divisions of parental leave in different-sex couples than in same-sex couples, and *identity formation* according to which they expect birth-giving mothers (in both same-sex and different-sex couples) to take the first and the longest leave. The latter reasoning builds on the assumption that the motherhood identity will be more salient and more strongly linked to the primary-carer ideal for the mother who gave birth to the child in a same-sex couple (cf. Stryker & Burke 2000). This will influence the birth mother's identity as well

as her partner's and contribute to the birth mother taking the first and the longest leave with the child. Such behavior is also supported by motherhood norms and the expected importance of (birth) mother-child bonding and breastfeeding. The findings are in line with these assumptions; Evertsson & Boye (2018) find that the mothers who gave birth take the first and the longest leave in both same-sex and different-sex couples. The non-birth giving mother in a same-sex couple uses more leave than the father in a different-sex couple. Hence, identity theory and the 'doing gender'-'doing difference' perspective receives support. The theory on specialization (or the new home economics approach) does not gain support and there is no evidence that female same-sex couples find the benefits of letting one partner specialize in paid work to be greater than that of having both combining paid work with childcare.

Taking the test of specialization theory one step further, Boye & Evertsson (2020) study which female same-sex couples become parents and who is the birth mother in longitudinal analyses of registered partnered/married couples' transition to parenthood. Their results show that it is more common that higher educated and higher income couples become parents than other married couples. Among those that do become parents, there is no difference in the likelihood that a partner will carry the couples' first child when it comes to earned income. When couples have two children, it was more common to switch birth mother for the second child (compared with the first) for higher educated couples who were in their upper thirties. Boye & Evertsson argue that this is evidence of the weaknesses of the short-term family utility perspective suggested by Becker (1985) and instead point to advantages of a long-term family utility and fairness perspective, beneficial not least to those who would lose the most from long career breaks.

Combined, studying non-standard couples leads to the conclusion that gender roles continue to play a role in understanding the consistent gendered pattern in household labor. Still, other mechanisms matter as well, and among them are norms linked to birth motherhood and identity formation. When it comes to paid labor, a woman's participation is influenced by rational considerations, such as her absolute labor market potential or the relative resources within the couple. However, male participation in domestic duties is still poorly explained by socio-economic models alone.

4. THE FUTURE OF RIGOROUS FAMILY SOCIOLOGY

As we have argued above, despite a huge volume of studies, much work on rigorously distinguishing key mechanisms that affect the division of labor remains to be done. Below, we sketch what we believe are important areas in which progress could be made. We start by addressing the population that has been studied, and how this shapes our theorizing. Second, we argue for new perspectives that might help us to sort out the key mechanisms more convincingly.

4.1 Research Populations

First, many studies rely on cross-sectional data, and knowledge about gender convergence in housework time is often confined to changes studied across repeated cross-sections of data. We need longitudinal data and a dynamic view if we want to better understand how

and why the division of labor changes within couples. A good example can be found in the work of Leopold et al. (2018), in which they show that the gender gap in domestic labor converged across the life course, narrowing by more than 50 percent from age 35 until age 70. Women's housework time peaked in younger adulthood and declined thereafter, whereas men's housework time remained stable and low for decades, increasing only in older age. The longitudinal studies comparing the degree of specialization, division of parental leave and income developments in different-sex and same-sex couples matched on (or controlling for) important background characteristics are also good contributions here (Aldén et al. 2015; Andresen & Nix 2019; Evertsson & Boye 2018).

Second, it is worth noting that research is heavily skewed towards middle class Western couples, which impacts the mechanisms we find to be important. For instance, bargaining processes are likely to play out differently when domestic duties can be outsourced due to financial resources. It is therefore important that we move beyond research on western countries and middle-class couples, examples of which can be found in the work of Urbina (2020), and Simister (2013). Usdansky & Parker (2011) found that relative resources of female partners in a couple only predicted labor market behavior for lower educated women with children. For other women, own absolute earnings matter more for housework, as they can be used to buy their way out of it (Gupta 2007; Sullivan 2011). Research has shown that domestic outsourcing increases women's labor market supply, and more so for women in the upper half of the earnings distribution than for others (Halldén & Stenberg 2018). However, it is still debated whether outsourcing domestic work to lower class women (often of color), affects the division of unpaid labor in the middle-class households that can afford to do so. Instead, it could merely be a way for men to reduce the pressures they face in increasing their domestic production, leaving the traditional division of labor intact (Bianchi et al. 2012).

4.2 New Perspectives

Finally, apart from more inclusive populations and longitudinal studies, there is also a need for more experimental designs and more rigorous testing of mechanisms (see the chapters by Breen and by Gangl as well as the chapter by Gërkhani & Miller on experimental sociology). Recent approaches that study the behavior of real-life couples in the division of labor in laboratory settings, and compare them to stranger couples of two persons who have never met before, increase our understanding of how coupling might increase altruistic motives for the division of labor. Inferences regarding causality can be sustained more convincingly than when survey data are used. Experimental designs also allow us to test very specific mechanisms. For example, using a vignette experiment, Van Breeschoten et al. (2018) find that men consider the income of their partner and career consequences most important in decisions on working hours, while women focus mainly on partner income and collegial support. Experimental designs that have same-sex couples as participants are thus far completely missing. Even though experiments are fruitful to disentangle different mechanisms, the decision situation in experiments is often highly abstract, which makes it difficult to generalize the findings to other contexts and populations.

In addition, important progress can be made in further expanding two perspectives. First, we need to specify much more rigorously how institutional forces shape preferences and opportunities for all societal groups, i.e. not only for middle class couples. Second,

instead of theorizing how one's own gender affects preferences and restrictions, the literature on same-sex and different-sex couples could be much better integrated if we start considering how one's partner's gender affects both own preferences as well as restrictions (cf. Evertsson & Boye 2018).

The current Covid-19 pandemic offers unparalleled opportunities to study the mechanisms behind gendered divisions of labor in a close to experimental setting. As institutional arrangements often changed overnight (for example, closing of schools), couples had to revisit their division of labor immediately. As there is plenty of variation in exact measures implemented at various locations at various times, we expect a fruitful new line of studies in the near future. Essential in these studies, if they want to hold up to the rigorous standards of sociological science, are clearly derived hypotheses on the implications these concrete measures have. Hank & Steinbach (2021) find heterogeneous responses to the Covid-19 pandemic. Particularly in previously more egalitarian households, women are more likely to be primarily responsible for the care of the children and housework during the Covid-19 pandemic. If male partners in different-sex couples increased their relative contribution to housework and childcare, they rarely moved beyond the threshold of an equal split. However, this study is purely descriptive, and does not attempt to identify the mechanisms at work. Valuable in its own right, future studies should expand this finding by comparing outcomes across multiple national and institutional contexts.

Further, the literature on different-sex and same-sex couples could be further integrated if researchers continue to argue from a partner's perspective. As recent studies discussed above indicated: our behavior may not only be informed by our own preferences and opportunities, but also by the expectations of our partners. For instance, women might face expectations to have higher domestic standards from their partners, irrespective of the partner's gender. Van der Vleuten et al. (2020) argue that female same-sex couples have more equal divisions of domestic labor as both women are expected to take on household duties, whereas in same-sex male couples, partners do not expect this from each other. In male couples, partners might have other expectations, allowing them to divide domestic tasks based solely on wages, skills or interests. Indeed, men in this study show much larger variation in their division of domestic work than do women. By carefully reasoning what a partner expects, we might shed further light on the mechanisms at play in both same-sex and different-sex households.

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