Earnings and Expenditures on Household Services in Married and Cohabiting Unions

Despite the rise in women’s paid employment, little is known about how women and their partners allocate money to outsource domestic tasks, especially in unmarried unions. Tobit analyses of 6,170 married and cohabiting couples in the 1998 Consumer Expenditure Survey test hypotheses that recognize gender inequality between partners, gender typing of household tasks, and differences between cohabitation and marriage. Women’s earned income is more important than men’s for spending on female tasks. Men’s earnings are not more important for male tasks, but the earnings of married men are more strongly linked to expenditures on female tasks than are the earnings of cohabiting men. The research indicates that working women leverage their earnings to reduce their domestic burden through outsourcing.

Married women are spending more time in the labor force, but husbands have not shown a comparable increase in time spent in housework. Men are doing somewhat more around the house, but women are doing considerably less (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Sociologists speculate that couples are purchasing domestic help to make up this deficit in household labor. Because couples are increasingly likely to be unmarried (Casper & Cohen, 2000), an important question is whether men’s and women’s earnings have the same implications for domestic outsourcing in cohabitation as in marriage.

Given research on gender and the division of household labor, men and women are assumed to differ in motivations to outsource male and female tasks. Disaggregating total earned income into female and male earnings, we test competing hypotheses regarding shared preferences for spending versus individual preferences on the basis of self-interest. As men and women have a different stake in spending to lighten household labor, we consider how the partners’ earnings relate to outsourcing of own-gender and other-gender chores. Lastly, we examine how the nature of the union—cohabitation versus marriage—mutes or amplifies the associations of male and female earnings with spending on own-gender and other-gender chores.

Background on Outsourcing Expenditures

The higher the household income, the more domestic services are purchased (Bittman, Matheson,
& Meagher, 1999; Cohen, 1998; de Ruijter, Treas, & Cohen, 2005). Compared to single-
earner couples, dual earners dine out more often
(Bittman et al.; Yen, 1993). The wife’s income is
more important for expenditures on child care
( Brayfield & Hofferth, 1995) and housekeeping
(Cohen; Oropesa, 1993) but not meals out
(Cohen). Controlling for income, women’s
employment hours have no effect on house-
keeping expenditures ( Cohen; Oropesa), but
total work hours of household members remain
significant (de Ruijter et al., 2005).

Research emphasizes the housework done by
women to the neglect of male chores. Because
tasks are gender typed (Blair & Lichter, 1991;
Twiggs et al., 1999), how much money men and
women spend to outsource may depend on the
particular chore. Compared to single women, sin-
gle men spend more money to outsource female
tasks (and less on male ones; de Ruijter et al.,
2005). If outsourcing “woman’s work” reduces
women’s domestic burden, we still need to know
about male tasks to evaluate whether domestic
spending favors one partner or the other.

Outsourcing studies focus on married people,
even as unmarried unions have increased (Casper
& Cohen, 2000; Smock, 2000). Cohabiting cou-
ples, too, face dirty plates and dripping faucets, but
they often resemble dating couples more than
married ones (Heuveline & Timberlake, 2004;
Rindfuss & Vandenhuevel, 1990). Selective of
liberal sex role attitudes, cohabitions are more
egalitarian than marriages (Blumstein & Schwartz,
1983; Clarkberg, Stolzenberg, & Waite, 1995), but
female cohabiters still do more housework than
men (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Nock, 1995).

Informed by research on outsourcing and
household labor allocation, this paper draws on
several theoretical frameworks. Following ratio-
nal choice approaches, we assume that behavior
is motivated by a degree of self-interest, but fem-
inist theory reminds us that gender affects house-
work (Coltrane, 2000). Gender norms and
identities determine where one’s self-interest lies.
In terms of time saving, women benefit more than
men from spending on chores that are gender
typed as “woman’s work.” Exchange and depen-
dency theories predict that the interests of the
partner with the greater relative resources are
more likely to be served (Baxter & Kane, 1995;
Brines, 1994), but feminist theory points to an
integrated system of gender inequality that
places women at a resource disadvantage: Not
only do women have fewer resources, but their
resources may be less consequential for house-
hold bargaining (Blumberg, 1984).

Hypotheses and Rationale

What determines household outsourcing expen-
ditures? If there is a single household preference
function (Becker, 1981), which partner supplies
the income is irrelevant—the association of per-
sonal income and domestic spending will be the
same for both partners (Hypothesis 1). Outsourc-
ing, however, replaces gender-typed tasks (Blair
& Lichter, 1991; Twiggs et al., 1999). If self-
interested, individuals will outsource their own
chores more than their partner’s. Own income
increases influence on household spending, as
argued by power, exchange, and dependency the-
ories (Baxter & Kane, 1995; Blood & Wolfe,
1960; Brines, 1994). Thus, personal income will be
more strongly associated with spending on
own-gender tasks than other-gender tasks
(Hypothesis 2).

Women’s income will matter less than men’s
if women are not as successful in translating their
resources into power in the relationship. Wom-
’s income will count for less in spending deci-
sions if their microlevel resources are discounted
because of their lack of power at the macrolevel
(Blumberg, 1984; Fuwa, 2004) or if their sense of
personal responsibility, gratification, and high
housekeeping standards make them reluctant to
outsource domestic tasks (Allen & Hawkins,
1999; DeVault, 1991; Robinson &Milkie,
1998). If so, women’s income will be less
strongly associated with expenditures on own-
gender tasks than will men’s income (DeVault;
Robinson & Milkie; Hypothesis 3).

Alternately, women may be more motivated
than men to outsource their chores. Female tasks
are more demanding. Women’s cleaning is un-
pleasant, time consuming, and unrelenting.
Men’s occasional home repairs offer flexibility,
creative challenge, and recreational value (Dex,
2004). Core housework (cooking, meal clean up,
housecleaning, laundry) may be distinguished from
discretionary tasks (outdoor chores, repairs,
garden care, animal care, bill paying). Women
retreated from core housework from 1965 to
1995 (Bianchi et al., 2000). Men increased their
time in discretionary chores, which are generally
male typed. This suggests women’s income will be
more strongly associated with spending on
own-gender tasks than will men’s income
(Hypothesis 4).
Cohabitors do not differ from married persons on outsourcing (de Ruijter et al., 2005), but does cohabitation promote self-interest in domestic spending? Cohabitors are more likely than married couples to keep separate purses that increase individual control over spending (Oropesa, Landale, & Kenkre, 2003; Treat & Widmer, 2000). Inclined to break-ups (Smock, 2000), cohabitors resist short-run inequality, because things may not balance out between partners in the long run (Brines & Joyner, 1999). Cohabitors hold more egalitarian values (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983; Clarkberg et al., 1995), but women still do more housework (Batalova & Cohen, 2002). Given this contradiction, personal income will be more strongly associated with expenditures on own-gender female tasks for cohabiting than married women (Hypothesis 5) but more strongly associated with other-gender female tasks for cohabiting than married men (Hypothesis 6).

On the other hand, women’s income may be discounted more in cohabitations if their bargaining power, undercut by societal gender inequality, is further undermined by lesser commitment and lower exit costs for unmarried unions (Nock, 1995) and by a lack of legal protection for the lower income partner (usually the woman) if the cohabitation ends (Mahoney, 2002). If women’s income is discounted more in unmarried than married unions, personal income will be less strongly associated with expenditures on own-gender tasks for cohabiting than for married women (Hypothesis 7), as well as less strongly associated with expenditures on female tasks for cohabiting than for married men (Hypothesis 8).

Further extrapolating from research on the household division of labor, we hypothesize that outsourcing of own- and other-gender tasks will reflect influences on the demand for housework, such as the presence of children or the size of the dwelling (Coltrane, 2000). As with incomes, partners’ educations are a relative resource that may affect bargaining as well as shaping tastes (Coltrane, 2000). Being associated with physical limitations, advancing age may also affect the need for outside help. Results for meals out indicate non-Hispanic Whites are more likely to outsource (Cohen, 1998).

METHOD
The Consumer Expenditure Survey 1998 is a representative household probability sample (U.S. Department of Labor, 1998). The survey period covered five quarters. Each household was interviewed four times on expenditures and household characteristics for the prior 3 months. An analysis focused on married and cohabiting heterosexual couples interviewed during 1998 and having a reference person no older than 65 years. The 7,720 couples made up 56% of the 13,712 consumer units, defined as people who live together and share expenses. Because of missing data on the dependent variable expenditure items or on nonearnings control variables, we lost 1,550 cases (20%) of the couples, resulting in an effective sample size of 6,170. As cases missing data on one variable were usually missing on others, imputation was not feasible for these variables.

Dependent Variables
We summed service expenditures on three female tasks (laundry, housekeeping, meals out) to measure a market basket that includes the bulk of domestic work performed by women. We also constructed a measure of spending on two male tasks (home maintenance, gardening). Men do perform “women’s work” and vice versa, but U.S. time diaries for 1995 confirm that married mothers devoted 4.8 times more hours than married fathers to housecleaning, laundry, and meal preparation and clean up whereas married fathers spent 2.6 times more hours than married mothers on repairs, outdoor chores, and garden and animal care (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milke, 2006).

From the consumer unit’s quarterly expenses, we constructed annual expenditures for the packages of male and of female tasks. Expenses for the months in 1998 are summed, divided by the number of months of data for the consumer unit, and multiplied by 12. Given a rotating panel design, some consumer units had fewer than 12 months of data, leading to zero spending on seasonal tasks (e.g., gardening). Controls for number of interview months and the time of the interview did not change our findings.

So that expenditures did not just reflect household size and composition, we divided annual expenditures by the household value on the same equivalence scale that was developed and validated for the U.S. poverty line (Citro & Michael, 1995). The measure recognizes that each child consumes only a portion of what an adult consumes and that each additional adult (or adult-equivalent child) consumes a declining function
of what the previous adult household member consumes because of economies of scale:

\[ \text{Scale value} = (A + PK)^{.65} \]
\[ \text{Scale value} = (A + .70K)^{.65} \]

where \( A \) is the number of adults in the household, \( K \) is the number of children younger than 18 (each treated as a proportion \( P \) of an adult), and \( F \) is the scale economy factor.

**Earned Income**

Besides total employment income in dollars for the couple, we calculated the personal earned incomes of the female partner and the male partner. Missing earnings for one or both partners were imputed on the basis of education, working hours, and cohabitation status for 2,304 cases. Sensitivity tests (e.g., excluding cases with missing earnings data and including a dummy variable for imputation) did not indicate that earnings results are driven by our treatment of missing data.

**Cohabitation**

A dummy variable distinguished married and cohabiting heterosexual couples. The Partners of the Opposite Sex Sharing Living Quarters (POSSLQ) measure captured almost all self-identified cohabiters (Casper & Cohen, 2000). A POSSLQ household contains a reference person, one other opposite-sex adult (age 16 or older) not related to the reference person, and no other adults (age 16 or older), except the children or other relatives of the reference person. POSSLQ excludes homosexuals and cannot distinguish, say, short-term liaisons from stable quasi marital unions.

**Hours of Work**

The weekly hours of paid employment worked by the male partner and by the female partner measured time available to do housework.

**Control Variables**

A dummy variable, whether a household owns its home, measured demand for male home and yard tasks. The number of rooms measured housework demands. Dummy variables identified the presence of children younger than 6 as well as children 6 – 17, an age distinction that is not captured by the equivalence scale. Each partner’s education had eight categories (never attended school to professional or doctorate degree) and was treated as interval level. The reference person’s age and a dummy variable for non-White status were also included. Summary statistics for independent variables are shown in Table 1.

Tobit models estimated the relation of earned income with dollar expenditures on female and male tasks (Tobin, 1958). Expenditures have a lower bound of zero. The maximum likelihood procedure in Tobit models corrects for this limited dependent variable, accounting for the distinction between the probability of any spending and the amount spent by those who do spend. Given expenditures as a dependent variable, Tobit results differ somewhat from the OLS results, which are biased and inconsistent.

**RESULTS**

As shown in Table 2, 95% of couples spent something on female tasks during the year, but only 25% reported expenditures on male tasks. The fact of zero spenders, especially on male tasks, justifies the Tobit specification. For those with such expenditures, the mean on female tasks amounted to $1,122, with the standard deviation indicating considerable dispersion. Most couples spent on meals out (92%), a majority used

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple earnings</td>
<td>55,470.81</td>
<td>40,372.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s earnings</td>
<td>17,971.75</td>
<td>19,735.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s earnings</td>
<td>37,499.06</td>
<td>32,035.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s work hours</td>
<td>27.74</td>
<td>19.47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s work hours</td>
<td>40.40</td>
<td>16.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>0.74</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td>6.26</td>
<td>2.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;6</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 6 – 17</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s education</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>1.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s education</td>
<td>4.22</td>
<td>1.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>42.55</td>
<td>11.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: N = 6,170.

laundry services (55%), but paid housekeeping was rare (8%). For families relying on these services, modest amounts, on average, were spent annually on laundry ($194), but restaurant meals ($962) and housekeeping ($869) represented substantial expenditures. Those spending on male tasks averaged $702 annually. Although about as many couples paid for gardening (16%) as for home maintenance (17%), mean expenditures were considerably higher for home repairs ($783 vs. $291).

Weighted Tobit results evaluate the significance of total and personal earned incomes for outsourcing expenditures (Table 3). Net of other factors, the higher a couple’s earned income, the more money is spent on domestic outsourcing of female and male tasks (Models 1 and 3). Of greater theoretical interest is whether, dollar for dollar, the partners’ earnings weight equally in outsourcing expenditures or whether personal earnings relate more strongly to spending on own-gender than other-gender tasks. Disaggregating total earned income into personal earnings of men and women (Model 2), both partners’ earnings are significantly associated with expenditures on female tasks. Contrary to Hypothesis 3 but consistent with Hypothesis 4, women’s earnings translate into significantly more spending on the market basket of female chores than do men’s. Net of other variables, every $1,000 the woman earns equates to an extra $17 for cleaning, laundry, and restaurants, but $1,000 in male earnings adds only $9.

As for male tasks (Model 4), both partners’ earnings are statistically significant, but the coefficients for men and women are not significantly different from one another at the .05 level (per Hypothesis 1). Men’s earnings do not translate to more spending for male than female tasks either, contrary to the Hypothesis 2 prediction (Models 2 and 4). This implies shared household preferences for garden and home maintenance services, rather than self-serving personal preferences. Thus, shared preferences may characterize spending on male tasks, but expenditures on female tasks suggest a self-interested penchant for women to use personal income to relieve the burden of own-gender tasks. The time-consuming, unremitting, and disagreeable nature of “women’s work” may create a stronger incentive for women than men to outsource own-gender tasks.

Time availability argues for a positive association between work hours and outsourcing. When we control for couple’s earnings, however, the woman’s total weekly hours of paid work shows no significant association with female task spending (Model 1) and a negative association with male task expenditures (Model 3). With personal earnings controlled, her work hours are negatively associated with both female and male task expenditures. Although men’s work hours are not significantly associated with female task spending, they are negatively associated with spending on male chores when either total or personal earnings is controlled.

As for housework demand, spending on male tasks like gardening and home repairs is, as expected, significantly higher for homeowners than for renters. All things considered, homeowners spend over $1,700 more on male tasks than do others. Homeownership is not significantly associated with spending on female chores at the .05 level. The number of rooms in the home is positively associated with expenditures on both male and female tasks. Households with younger children spend less on female tasks. Those with older children show lower spending on the work of both genders. This suggests competing financial

### Table 2. Couples Purchasing Services and Mean Annual Expenditures (in Dollars)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Purchasing Services</th>
<th>Expenditures</th>
<th>Couples with Expenditures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>%</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Mean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female tasks</td>
<td>94.86</td>
<td>5,853</td>
<td>1,064.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laundry</td>
<td>54.55</td>
<td>3,366</td>
<td>105.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housekeeping</td>
<td>8.06</td>
<td>497</td>
<td>69.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meals out</td>
<td>92.33</td>
<td>5,697</td>
<td>888.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male tasks</td>
<td>25.33</td>
<td>1,563</td>
<td>177.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home maintenance</td>
<td>16.69</td>
<td>1,030</td>
<td>130.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gardening</td>
<td>16.26</td>
<td>1,003</td>
<td>47.23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: N = 6,170.*
demands, housework done by children, household help provided incidentally by in-home caregivers, or preferences tied to having children (e.g., preferring home-cooked meals).

All things considered, cohabitors spend no more than married couples. The education of the woman is positively associated with male task spending, but not with female task spending, once personal earnings are controlled. The man’s education is positively associated with higher spending on both female and male tasks. Although older adults spend predictably more on male tasks, age is not significantly associated with expenditures on female tasks. Non-Whites spend less than Whites on female tasks, but not male tasks.

The analysis establishes that additional earnings translate into greater expenditures on outsourcing. Denying self-interest, men’s earnings are no more likely to equate with extra spending on male chores than on female chores. Similarly, men’s earnings do not matter more than women’s earnings for spending on male tasks like gardening or household repairs. Perhaps reflecting the burdensome nature of laundry, cleaning, and meal preparation, women’s earned incomes count for much more than men’s for female-task spending. Given that women do the majority of onerous work around the house, both self-interest and objectively greater demands could explain why spending on female tasks increases as women’s personal income increases. The results do not suggest that women’s income is discounted in household bargaining in a way that disadvantages women in the consumption of household services. It remains to be seen whether the same results are found for cohabitations as for married unions.

Table 4 considers whether the relationship of earned income and outsourcing differs between marriages and cohabitations. As noted, outsourcing expenditures do not differ significantly by whether or not the couple is married. For female and male task spending (Models 1 and 3), the interaction terms are not statistically significant, showing no difference between marital and nonmarital unions in the positive income effect for married couples’ earnings. Model 2 asks whether being unmarried versus married conditions the observed relationship of personal earnings and spending on female household services.

Despite predictions that cohabitation will either amplify (Hypothesis 5) or diminish

Table 3. Tobit Results for Domestic Outsourcing Expenditures for Female and Male Tasks

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Female Tasks(^a)</th>
<th>Male Tasks(^b)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Couple earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>11.42***</td>
<td>7.84***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>17.20***</td>
<td>6.89***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>9.42***</td>
<td>8.15***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>46.29</td>
<td>43.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s work hours</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>−3.80**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s work hours</td>
<td>−1.37</td>
<td>0.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>−21.22</td>
<td>−27.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td>31.00***</td>
<td>31.22***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;6</td>
<td>−303.29***</td>
<td>−311.09***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 6–17</td>
<td>−412.19***</td>
<td>−406.11***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s education</td>
<td>35.20**</td>
<td>23.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s education</td>
<td>44.65***</td>
<td>51.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>−234.51***</td>
<td>−245.24***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>95.41</td>
<td>134.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>−50,124.82</td>
<td>−50,108.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>1,380.46</td>
<td>1,413.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6,170</td>
<td>6,170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\(^a\)Female tasks: laundry, housekeeping, meals out. \(^b\)Male tasks: gardening, home maintenance.

\(p < .05. \, **p < .01. \, ***p < .001.\)
(Hypothesis 7) the association of women’s earned income with female task outsourcing, union status does not matter one way or the other. According to the statistically nonsignificant woman’s earnings by cohabitation interaction, women’s earnings are no more consequential in cohabiting unions than in married ones for either female (Model 2) or male (Model 4) tasks. Men’s earnings are a different story. Consistent with cohabitation undermining (Hypothesis 8) rather than strengthening (Hypothesis 6) a woman’s bargaining power, men’s earnings display a significantly stronger positive association on female task spending in marriages (9.60) than in cohabitations (9.60/5.79 = 3.81). As indicated by nonsignificant interaction terms, however, there is no evidence that union status conditions the association of men’s or women’s earnings with male task spending.

In short, women’s earnings are positively associated with spending on male and especially female tasks, and cohabitation does not alter these associations. Cohabitation does not depress the positive income effect of the couples’ income on cleaning, laundry, and restaurant spending nor on gardening and home maintenance. Men’s earnings are no more important for male-task expenditures than are female earnings. Compared to their married counterparts, however, cohabiting men’s earnings are more weakly associated with spending on household services that would primarily benefit their female partner.

**DISCUSSION**

Consistent with the classic income effect of economics, the more money a couple earns, the more it spends on outsourcing of male and female tasks around the house. Both partners’ earnings are positively associated with expenditures on female tasks. Consistent with rational choice and exchange theories, women’s earnings translate into considerably more spending on female chores than men’s earnings do. This relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Female Tasks&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Male Tasks&lt;sup&gt;b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>11.53***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>17.18***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s earnings ($1,000s)</td>
<td>9.60***</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>192.50</td>
<td>176.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Couple earnings × cohabiting</td>
<td>-3.31</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s earnings × cohabiting</td>
<td>1.16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s earnings × cohabiting</td>
<td>-5.79 *</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s work hours</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>-3.81 **</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s work hours</td>
<td>-1.30</td>
<td>0.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>-18.88</td>
<td>-25.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of rooms</td>
<td>30.69***</td>
<td>30.75***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;6</td>
<td>-304.83***</td>
<td>-312.42***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children 6 – 17</td>
<td>-413.24***</td>
<td>-407.28***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman’s education</td>
<td>35.21 **</td>
<td>23.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man’s education</td>
<td>45.02 ***</td>
<td>51.81 ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>3.19</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-White</td>
<td>-234.51***</td>
<td>-244.46***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>79.08</td>
<td>119.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Log-likelihood</td>
<td>-50,123.38</td>
<td>-50,105.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chi-square</td>
<td>1,383.33</td>
<td>1,418.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DF</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>6,170</td>
<td>6,170</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup>Female tasks: laundry, housekeeping, meals out. <sup>b</sup>Male tasks: gardening, home maintenance.

* <i>p < .05. **p < .01. ***p < .001.</i>
is not just a function of women with higher earnings working longer hours and having less time for housework: It holds even when weekly work hours are controlled. Both partners’ earnings are positively associated with spending on male tasks, too, but men’s earnings do not translate into more spending for male than female tasks. Rather than supporting the economic assumption that individual preferences are subjugated to a single household utility function, the findings for female task expenditures are consistent with self-interested behavior on the part of women, who perform the overwhelming majority of time-intensive household cleaning, laundry, and meal preparation. Although women’s resources, such as earnings, may be discounted in household budgetary negotiations, any such effect would seem to be offset by their stronger incentive to outsource the demands of “women’s work” around the house.

Does cohabitation matter for the relation of earnings and outsourcing? All things considered, married and cohabiting couples do not differ in their expenditures on either male or female domestic tasks. Contrary to expectations, cohabitation neither amplifies nor diminishes the association of women’s earned income with female task outsourcing. Men’s earnings, however, display a positive association with female task spending that is weaker in cohabitations than in marriages. Although consistent with the idea that cohabitation undermines a woman’s bargaining power, this finding contradicts expectations that cohabitors are more motivated to achieve equality between the partners. Union status, however, does not condition the association of male task spending with either men’s or women’s earnings.

Unfortunately, no available data include detailed information on both expenditures and time use. We can only infer whose interests are served (i.e., whose time is saved) by measuring spending on two market baskets of domestic services assumed to replace either male or female household labor, respectively. Most of us transgress gender expectations to take on other-gender chores now and then, and some couples may depart markedly from traditional gender typing. Although we assume that spending on female tasks alleviates women’s domestic burden, it also spares some men in dual career couples from having to do “women’s work.” We assume that outsourced home repairs and yard work would have fallen to men, but some women garden. Furthermore, male and female task sets are not equivalent. By far the most time-consuming work around the house is “women’s work,” not men’s, and women pick up a larger share of male tasks than vice versa (Bianchi et al., 2006). It follows that spending on own-gender tasks is a better measure of time-saving benefits for women than similar spending is for men, perhaps explaining why male self-interest is not demonstrated for male task spending. Of course, there are other limitations to our data as well, notably the lack of information distinguishing different types of cohabitations and identifying same-sex unions.

From cleaning services to restaurant meals, market substitutes for household labor are commonly viewed as a strategic adaptation to married women’s labor force participation. Thus, this paper contributes to our understanding of this phenomenon in three ways.

First, prior research indicated that married women’s earnings are more important than married men’s for housecleaning expenditures (Cohen, 1998; Oropesa, 1993). This analysis demonstrates that this relationship holds not only for the relatively uncommon expenditures on housecleaning services, but also for spending on a broader package of outsourced female tasks that make up the bulk of women’s domestic work.

Second, to the best of our knowledge, we are the first to consider how women’s earnings might affect spending on chores that usually fall to men around the house. Results demonstrate that the greater the wife’s earnings, the more money the couple spends on male tasks like yard work and home maintenance. Thus, a woman’s earnings seem not only to relieve her own domestic burden, but her partner’s as well.

Third, this paper extends the analysis of outsourcing in marriage to include the growing numbers of cohabiting couples. Married and unmarried couples do not differ in spending for either male or female tasks (de Ruijter et al., 2005). Our analysis demonstrates that male earnings are positively associated with spending on female tasks to a greater extent in marriages than in cohabiting unions. Their egalitarianism would lead us to expect cohabiting couples to be more concerned than married ones with reducing women’s disproportionate housework burden, but the results are consistent with a loss of bargaining power for women in cohabitation versus marriage. Although cohabiting men are apparently less inclined than married men to use their personal income to reduce their partner’s domestic burden, they do share housework more equally.
than their married counterparts (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983). This suggests that cohabitators may favor a man’s hands-on “sweat equity” over his cash contributions to household labor. These unresolved issues highlight the importance of incorporating different types of unions in the study of household organization.

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REFERENCES


