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Housework Task Hierarchies in 32 Countries

Tsui-o Tai* and Judith Treas

Abstract: This paper examines participation in female-typed household tasks by husbands in 32 countries in the 2002 International Social Survey Program. Mokken scaling shows widespread and systematic ordering of married men’s performance of stereotypically female tasks, a hierarchy which is obscured by conventional measures of couples’ task-sharing. The hierarchy gives rise to a typology of men’s conformity to the social conventions of this task hierarchy. Multi-level, multinomial models test hypotheses on the micro-level predictors of husbands’ pattern of housework participation, as well as expectations for country differences.

Women do more household work than men (Fuwa, 2004; Treas and Drobnic, 2010). Some jobs (automobile upkeep, small repairs) fall mostly to men; other, more time-consuming chores (cleaning, laundry) are culturally defined as ‘women’s work’ (Blair and Lichter, 1991). Gender stereotyping of household tasks is found in the most gender egalitarian societies (Evertsson, 2006), but research has not gone much beyond dichotomizing chores into male-typed and female-typed. Men are more likely to participate in some female-typed tasks than in others, but nuances in task performance have gone unnoticed, obscured by conventional measures of task-sharing which simply average husband’s contributions over a set of disparate chores.

If men’s housework follows a hierarchy of more-to-less accepted tasks, some men will conform to the gendered task hierarchy, either foregoing ‘women’s work’ altogether or packaging their set of household chores in a way consistent with the taken-for-granted ordering of task acceptability. Others will pursue an idiosyncratic assortment of chores unrelated to the gendered task hierarchy. If the individual factors known to predict men’s relative share of housework also predict conformity to a task hierarchy, we have new evidence for the maintenance of gender inequality in the division of household labour. This paper makes four contributions. First, bringing probabilistic scaling to men’s performance of female-typed tasks, the paper employs widely used data in a new way, one representing a measurement innovation over popular summed scales, which obscure differences between, say, doing laundry and shopping. Second, for 32 societies, the paper demonstrates a systematic and widespread ordering to male performance of female-typed tasks. Third, it builds on this discovery to introduce a task performance typology, which considers not merely whether men do stereotypically female chores, but also whether their selective task performance is normative or idiosyncratic. Fourth, by testing hypotheses on how men’s type of task performance relates to time availability, housework demands, relative resources, specialization, and gender attitudes, this paper offers new evidence on established theories about the household division of labour.

Background

Partners’ participation in housework is often measured in time devoted to work around the house (Gershuny, 2000; Sayer, 2010). Women everywhere spend more time on housework than men. When housework is narrowed to core tasks classified as ‘women’s work’, the disparity in husband’s and wife’s time is even greater. Going beyond parity in time inputs, task items evaluate gender specialization in what men and women do with the time they devote to the house. By distinguishing gender-typed

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chores, task-based approaches capture gender segregation in housework (Twiggs et al., 1999; Hook, 2010).

Averaging men’s contributions across a set of stereotypically female chores creates a task-based summary measure of their share of ‘women’s work’ (Geist, 2005; Cooke, 2006; Knudsen and Waerness, 2008). This share correlates with housework time. The association is far from perfect, because men often spend time on male-typed tasks with minimal effort on female-typed chores. Summing reports on participation in various tasks into one multi-item measure promotes measurement reliability at the cost of some information on gender equality in housework, because the measure assumes the husband’s participation in the daily tedium of meal preparation matters no more for housework parity than his participation in infrequent sick care.

Summed measures also disregard task differences in the degree of gender-typing. Women may be more willing to surrender and men to embrace some female-typed tasks than others. To our knowledge, the only analysis of task hierarchies is a pioneering study by Twiggs et al. (1999). U.S. husbands were least likely to prepare meals and do laundry, more likely to grocery shop and clean, and quite likely to wash the dishes.

Guttman scaling did not find that tasks were ordered in a hierarchy: ‘(A)lthough husbands are far from being equally likely to participate in any female-typed task, they also do not fit a strict pattern of performing all less gender-typed tasks before they move up to more sex typed ones’ (Twiggs et al., 1999). Without the stringent, deterministic criterion for Guttman adequacy, however, probabilistic scaling might detect a task ordering (Mokken, 1971).

Beyond provisioning the family and maintaining the home, doing particular chores accomplishes symbolic ends linked to cultural ideals of what it means to be a man or a woman. Gender is socially constructed in the routine interactions of performing (or not) various sex-typed housework (Berk, 1985; West and Zimmerman, 1987), but some tasks may resonate more strongly with gender identities than others. Interestingly, the wife’s marital satisfaction, feelings of appreciation, and perceptions of fairness benefit from having a husband who makes even infrequent contributions to female-typed tasks, regardless of the inequality in their housework time (Thompson, 1991; Spite and Losocco, 2000; Ruppanner, 2008). His occasional breach of masculine norms is her sign of his caring. In cultural contexts where egalitarian preferences for husband’s engagement in family life conflict with the demanding reality of male breadwinner models (Aboim, 2010), the husband’s willingness to lend a hand, if only occasionally, with the full complement of ‘woman’s work’ may be a meaningful indicator of gender equality—above and beyond measures of his average level of housework contributions.

The Household Task Hierarchy

Task data have yet to be used to determine whether some chores are foregone by men and retained by women everywhere or whether there are merely idiosyncratic patterns varying between countries. Nor do we know what leads some men to follow conventions for gender-typed chores and others to resist, improvise, or innovate in domestic routines. Micro-social practices regarding laundry, shopping, etc., offer insights into the integrated, multilevel system of gender inequality that constitutes gender relations (Walby, 2004).

Inspired by theoretical frameworks more fully developed by others (Buhlmann et al., 2009; Aboim, 2010; Hook, 2010), we argue that individual task performance in the face of a task hierarchy derives from ideologically-based preferences for (non)conformity to gender conventions, as well as from constraints and opportunities that affect the realization of gender ideals. Although the task hierarchy is undoubtedly founded on cultural notions (e.g., laundry is women’s work) and pragmatic considerations (e.g., laundry is time-consuming), here we consider these factors to be exogenous. While some tasks are less pleasant than others, for our purposes, this and other distinctions are embodied in the task hierarchy describing the relative acceptability of the chores to men.

If a hierarchy underpins the gendered division of household labour, an ordering of task-performance invites a typology of men’s performance of female-typed tasks. Men’s task-performance falls into four categories. (i) The ‘gender-typed’ abstain from all female-typed tasks. (ii) The ‘egalitarian’ participate in all tasks. (iii) Performing only some tasks, the ‘conforming’ follow the hierarchical task order by participating in a task only if they also do the chores that are even more acceptable to men. (iv) The ‘pragmatic’ do some chores without following the hierarchy. For example, while avoiding more popular tasks, a husband may occasionally cook dinner when his wife works late.

Explaining Household Task Performance

Men follow the culturally preferred task hierarchy when they do all female-typed tasks, none, or some tasks in the prescribed order. Other husbands break rank to skip popular tasks in favour of less popular ones. Five leading micro-level explanations for the division of housework (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010) can be extended to predict how men will respond to a
performance hierarchy for female-typed household tasks. Gender theory, including gender ideology (Davis and Greenstein, 2009) and gender construction (Berk, 1985) variants, suggests husbands will perform fewer—and more acceptable—tasks, because women do and men avoid ‘women’s work’ to display gender competency consistent with feminine or masculine identities and ideals. Being less invested in gender differentiation, men with egalitarian gender attitudes are expected to be more willing to do all female-typed tasks, less likely to do none, and more likely to perform tasks regardless of how female-typed they are. Exchange theories, including relative resource and dependence versions (Brines, 1993), point to household bargaining and implicit contracts, whereby a spouse with comparatively greater resources (e.g., income) or lesser dependence on the marriage is able to force the partner to do the housework (Evertsson and Nermo, 2007). The husband with a resource disadvantage may be unable to bargain out of all female-typed tasks; he is more likely to be compelled to do all tasks or those that are not generally preferred.

According to time availability arguments (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard, 2010), the less one’s discretionary time, the less housework one will do. Men with long work hours outside the home may be unable to participate in all female-typed tasks (e.g., nursing a sick child) and may, in fact, do none. If they do only some tasks, they may favour expedient chores that fit their schedule over a pre-ordained task hierarchy. Conversely, men whose wives work long hours may have to do at least some female-typed chores. If she does not have free time to both shop for groceries and do laundry, he may need to help out to inscribe both meals and clean clothes in a timely manner. Men whose wives work full-time may contribute to all tasks or they may fill in where needed, regardless of the task hierarchy.

According to housework demand explanations (Treas, 2010), in a household with a lot of work to be done, circumstances may force the husband to do more. He may participate in all female-typed tasks or, else, take on the most pressing assortment, regardless of the task hierarchy. Young children pose high housework demands. According to time and summed measures of task participation, children do not increase men’s housework time (Sanchez and Thomson, 1997; Baxter et al., 2008), but the practical demands of households with children may well mean that fathers cannot completely avoid tasks that need doing (e.g., preparing a family meal if the wife is sick). Controlling for time in paid work and gender attitudes, high housework demands suggest fathers will be more likely to lend a hand, even if only occasionally, either with all chores or the most essential, whatever the acceptable hierarchy. By contrast, the theory of specialization holds that children increase the household economic benefits of the wife focusing on housework and the husband on employment (Becker, 1981). If efficiencies from labour specialization dominate demand considerations, fathers will be less likely to do all female-typed tasks and more likely to do none or perhaps an idiosyncratic selection unrelated to the hierarchy.

Table 1 summarizes these hypothesized relationships between key theoretical variables associated with these five theoretical traditions and the man’s task performance type: (i) the ‘gender-typed’ who abstain from all five female-typed tasks; (ii) the ‘egalitarian’ who participate in all five tasks; (iii) the ‘conforming’ who perform some tasks following the hierarchical task order; and (iv) the ‘pragmatic’ who do some chores without following the hierarchy. Being negatively related to all micro-level predictors, the conforming type is the omitted reference group in our analyses.

This paper extends interest in the relationships between female-typed tasks to 32 countries. The task hierarchy and its loose or tight coupling with male behaviour constitute new evidence about the strength and cohesiveness of the schema for household gender relations. Discovering a task hierarchy validates our typology of men’s task performance and motivates tests of theoretical propositions about the factors that distinguish husbands who conform to the task ordering from those who do not. Country-to-country differences in the division of housework are well documented (Treas and Drobnić, 2010). Because task performance hierarchies have not been examined before, we do not know whether task hierarchies for men’s household labour correspond to earlier cross-national results on the relative contributions of men to housework. Among the three capitalist welfare regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1990), egalitarian Nordic social democracies and English-speaking liberal countries have the greatest gender parity in men’s participation in household tasks (Geist, 2005). Conservative states (e.g., Germany), where policies support the male-breadwinner model, have the least. Among remaining countries, post-socialist states display the highest gender parity while Southern European and Latin American states demonstrate the least egalitarian housework allocation. Extrapolating from these findings, we expect men in social democratic and liberal states to be less likely to avoid all female-typed chores, more likely to perform them all, and more likely to disregard a task hierarchy in selecting just some chores. Conversely, post-socialist, Southern European, and Latin American countries will be less likely to do all female-typed tasks, more likely to forego them all, and more likely to follow a hierarchy if performing only some tasks.
Data and Methods

The 2002 International Social Survey Program (ISSP) data are representative of 32 countries covering six broad groups: Denmark, Norway, Sweden (Social Democratic); Austria, Belgium/Flanders, France, West Germany, Israel, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, Taiwan (Conservative); Australia, Great Britain, Ireland, New Zealand, Northern Ireland (Liberal); Cyprus, Portugal, Spain (Southern European); Bulgaria, Czech Republic, East Germany, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Russia, Slovenia (Post-Socialist); Brazil, Chile, Mexico (Latin American). Analyses focus on married men, ages 18–65 years. In the United States and Finland, no men reported doing none of the female-typed tasks. While an interesting rejection of strictly gender-typed behaviour, it was problematic to analyse incomplete data in multilevel multinomial models so the two countries had to be dropped from analysis.

Five female-typed chores (cleaning, laundry, grocery shopping, meal preparation, caring for sick family members) were recorded as done always by the woman, usually by the woman, about equal/both together, usually by the man, and always by the man. For all tasks, the modal response is always the woman. Our focus is not the extent of men’s contributions to each task, which has been previously studied. Rather, to identify a hierarchy of more popular to less accepted tasks, we consider whether or not men participate at all in each task. We dichotomize responses to distinguish husbands who never perform a task from others who do so at least occasionally (1 = always the woman, 0 = else). In multinomial analyses, husbands are classified into four types: (i) gender-typed, performing none of the tasks; (ii) egalitarian, performing all tasks; (iii) conformist, performing some tasks in the country-specific order (omitted reference group); and (iv) pragmatic, performing some tasks, but not in the country-specific order.

Individual-level predictors of task performance types speak to the five micro-level explanations for the division of household labour and have been widely used in the literature (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchar, 2010). Addressing gender theories, the scale for liberal gender ideology ($C_11 = 0.74$) is from a factor analysis of disagreement with Likert items: (i) A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works; (ii) Family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job; (iii) A job is all right, but what most women really want is a home and children; (iv) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay; (v) A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is look after the home and family. For exchange explanations, relative resources are dummy variables indicating whether the husband’s income is higher (reference category), the same, or lower than the wife’s. For each partner, time availability is measured by weekly hours of paid work. For six countries lacking the item, wife’s work hours are imputed from work status (i.e., full-time, part-time, not employed). For housework demand, the husband’s and wife’s housework hours are summed to total household work hours. Children (younger than 18 years) also indicate demand or, alternately, specialization. Control variables include the husband’s age, his highest educational degree, family income, and number of adults in the household.

To describe cross-national patterns, the analysis includes

### Table 1 Hypothesized relationships between task performance types and selected variables: married men, 18–65

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Theoretical perspective</th>
<th>Task performance types</th>
<th>Gender-typed</th>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Pragmatic</th>
<th>Conforming</th>
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<td>Wife &gt; husband income</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Liberal gender ideology</td>
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<td>Husband’s work hours</td>
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<td>Specialization</td>
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Gender-typed do no female-typed tasks; egalitarian do all five tasks; pragmatic do some without following task hierarchy; conforming do some following task hierarchy.
six familiar country categories: Social Democratic (the omitted reference category), Conservative, Liberal, Post-Socialist, Southern European, and Latin American. Although country typologies can be debated on a number of grounds (Esping-Andersen, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Ferrera, 1996; Bonoli, 1997; Korpi and Palme, 1998), their evaluation and the specific macro-level mechanisms accounting for task hierarchies are beyond the scope of our analysis. Appendix A (on-line) shows descriptive statistics.

The unweighted sample has 10,481 married men, ages 18–65 years. There are 9,308 cases with complete data on all tasks. Missing data were less than 5 per cent for most independent variables; deleting 1,468 cases with missing data, the analytic sample was 7,840. For family income and gender ideology, which had more missing data, we imputed country-specific mean values when values were missing. Non-significant imputation flags (1 = imputed, 0 = else) indicate imputation does not distort our findings (results shown on-line).

Task Scaling

The Mokken scaling determines whether the tasks form a hierarchical scale for the probability of husbands not performing female-typed housework. Mokken scales assume a unidimensional latent trait, \( \theta \), the backbone of a task hierarchy. For dichotomized tasks, the probabilities for \( X_i = 1 \) (not doing task \( i \)) are assumed to depend only on latent trait \( \theta \), not on other respondent or task characteristics. A husband foregoing one task (shopping) must have a significantly greater than zero probability of foregoing a less acceptable task (laundry). The probabilistic criterion for Mokken model fit is less stringent than deterministic Guttman scales, which insist that men who do not shop do not do a less acceptable task like laundry either (Mokken, 1971; van Schuur, 2003). To evaluate the adequacy of the scale, the scalability score, Loewinger's \( H_i \), is based on the ratio of observed Guttman errors (e.g., doing laundry but not the ‘more acceptable’ shopping) to the total errors expected given task independence. If no Guttman errors are observed, \( H_i = 1 \). If the tasks are totally unrelated, \( H_i = 0 \). Summing across all task pairs yields an overall \( H_i \). As a rule of thumb, values greater than 0.5 indicate a strong scale, 0.4–0.5 a medium scale, and 0.3–0.4 a weak scale.

Multilevel Multinomial Models

Multilevel, multinomial models (Raudenbush and Bryk, 2002) evaluate whether men’s type of task performance relates to micro-level variables, including relative resources, time availability, and other factors. At the macro-level, the models describe which groups of countries favour different types of (non)conformity to the female-typed task hierarchy.

The multinomial logit link yields three equations at the individual level:

\[
\begin{align*}
\eta_{ij}(1) & = \beta_{0(1)} + \beta_{k(1)}X_{kij}, \\
\eta_{ij}(2) & = \beta_{0(2)} + \beta_{k(2)}X_{kij}, \\
\eta_{ij}(3) & = \beta_{0(3)} + \beta_{k(3)}X_{kij},
\end{align*}
\]

where \( \eta_{ij} \), \( \eta_{ij}(2) \), and \( \eta_{ij}(3) \) are the log-odds of respondent \( i \) in country \( j \) reporting he is gender-typed, pragmatic, or egalitarian, respectively, relative to conformist. \( \beta_{k(1)}X_{kij}, \beta_{k(2)}X_{kij}, \) and \( \beta_{k(3)}X_{kij} \) are individual-level independent variables, such as husband’s age.

The log-odds of a performance type compared to conformist are equal to country-specific intercepts \( \beta_{0(1)} \), \( \beta_{0(2)} \), \( \beta_{0(3)} \). Country-level equations take the forms:

\[
\begin{align*}
\beta_{0(1)} & = \gamma_{0(1)} + \gamma_{0(1)}X_{kj} + u_{0(1)}, \\
\beta_{0(2)} & = \gamma_{0(2)} + \gamma_{0(2)}X_{kj} + u_{0(2)}, \\
\beta_{0(3)} & = \gamma_{0(3)} + \gamma_{0(3)}X_{kj} + u_{0(3)},
\end{align*}
\]

where \( \gamma_{0(1)}, \gamma_{0(2)}, \) and \( \gamma_{0(3)} \) are the country-level log-odds of the husband being gender-typed, pragmatic, or egalitarian (versus conformist). At the macro-level, each intercept is a function of the country group (relative to the social democratic reference) while \( \gamma_{0k(1)}X_{kj} \), \( \gamma_{0k(2)}X_{kj} \), and \( \gamma_{0k(3)}X_{kj} \) are country type effects. The random effects, \( u_{0(1)}, u_{0(2)}, u_{0(3)} \), are assumed to be normally distributed with mean zero and variance \( \sigma^2 \). Except for dummy variables, all individual-level predictors are centred at their grand means. The country-level intercept reflects the change in the log odds of the husband’s housework performance type (versus conformist) when comparing two otherwise similar men. To facilitate interpretation, log odds are exponentiated and shown as odds ratios.

Mokken scaling ascertains how well an ordered hierarchy of female-typed task performance characterizes husbands’ housework for 32 countries. Building on these results, we validate the task hierarchy with multilevel, multinomial models, which test theoretically-derived hypotheses on the micro-level predictors of husbands’ type of housework participation, as well as on empirically-based expectations for country differences.

Results

Table 2 shows the per cent of married men by country who reported not doing each task.

Over 32 countries, the tasks are ordered according to their mean per cent from the most accepted to the least.
Grocery shopping and caring for the sick are most accepted, followed by preparing meals or cleaning, and finally doing laundry. On average, only 16 per cent of husbands never care for the sick and 17 per cent skip all grocery shopping, but 46 per cent say that they do no laundry. Reporting no cleaning are 26 per cent of married men; 31 per cent report no meal preparation. Men forego laundry over all other tasks, but there is country-to-country variation in the order of shopping and sick care, as well as cleaning and meal preparation. The general ordering of tasks holds whether overall avoidance of female-typed tasks is high (Southern Europe) or low (Nordic social democracies).

**Evaluating the Task Hierarchy**

The Mokken scaling finds that tasks are ordered along a single hierarchical dimension. A man who does not shop...
or care for the sick is not apt to do the less acceptable cleaning, cooking, or laundry either. In Table 2, Loevinger’s H ranges from 0.40 in Sweden to 0.82 in Bulgaria and Spain. For country groups, Southern European states adhere to strict hierarchies while liberal and social democratic countries have loose orderings. The stronger the scale, the more adequately it predicts the probabilities of men performing specific tasks and the more closely a single, underlying latent trait defines their tasks. Tasks form a strong hierarchy \( H > 0.5 \) for 26 of 32 countries, particularly those in the Southern European, post-socialist, and Latin American groups. Even the gender egalitarian social democracies, which average the lowest \( H (0.47) \), show a moderately strong hierarchy. Confirming scale reliability, Chronbach’s \( \alpha \) is above 0.70 for 24 countries.

While related to conventional task-sharing measures, the task hierarchy provides new information about gender specialization in housework. The distinction is between how much men participate in housework and the way they participate, recognizing that tasks differ in their acceptability for men. Over 32 countries, the husband’s mean share of the five tasks demonstrates a predictably negative correlation \( (-0.42) \) with the \( H \) measure for the task avoidance hierarchy. As further evidence of construct validity, the \( H \) scalability measure is negatively and significantly \( (P < 0.05) \) correlated across countries with country-level indicators of gender equality, including the Gender Empowerment Measure or GEM (United Nations, 2002) \((-0.47)\), female labour force participation \((-0.36)\) (International Labor Organization, 2009), the female–male earnings ratio \((-0.41)\) (United Nations, 2002), and the country-specific mean for our ISSP liberal gender ideology measure \((-0.45)\).

### Predictors of Men’s Behaviour

Given their country-specific task hierarchy, what factors account for men’s type of task performance? Table 3 considers the four performance types. Across countries, the ‘gender-typed’ category includes the scant 6 per cent of husbands, who, on average, abstain from all five female-typed tasks. Forty-four per cent are ‘egalitarian’, participating at least occasionally in all tasks. The ‘conforming’ include the 29 per cent adhering to the country-specific order in selective task performance. Fully 21 per cent are ‘pragmatic’, taking on some tasks without following the hierarchy.

Men’s housework patterns depend on where they live. Southern European countries stand out with a high share of husbands (12 per cent) who perform none of the five tasks and fall into the ‘gender-typed’ category. The Nordic social democracies and the liberal English-speaking states are most likely to have egalitarian husbands who participate at least occasionally in all female-typed tasks. On average, Latin American men are also quite egalitarian, a surprising result driven particularly by Mexican husbands. Southern European countries have the most conforming men (39 per cent) whose selective performance of female-typed tasks follows the task hierarchy. This pattern is also common in conservative welfare states (33 per cent) and post-socialist (32 per cent) countries. Ranging from 17 per cent in social democracies to 25 per cent in conservative welfare regimes, there is relatively little macro-level variation in pragmatic selection of some tasks out of order.

In Table 4, multilevel, multinomial models jointly estimate men’s likelihood of being gender-typed, egalitarian or pragmatic, rather than conforming selectively to the task hierarchy. Consider the gender-typed. Following time availability arguments, husband’s longer work hours favour avoiding all chores instead of doing some in conformity with a prescribed order. All things considered, a husband working 40 h weekly is 55 per cent more likely than a man with no job to be gender-typed rather than conforming \((1.011^{60} - 1) \times 100 \text{ per cent} = 55 \text{ per cent}\). Also, wife’s longer work hours are predictably associated with a lower likelihood of her husband’s gender-typed avoidance. Gender-typed behaviour is significantly and negatively related to liberal gender ideology and educational attainment. Other individual-level variables (e.g., relative income, housework demand) are not statistically significant. All things considered, husbands in Southern Europe are over three times more likely than those in social democracies to avoid all tasks as opposed to conforming to the selective task performance hierarchy.

We turn to the egalitarian pattern of doing all tasks versus choosing some following the prescribed hierarchy. Consistent with relative resource arguments, having a wife with an equal or higher income is associated with a significantly higher likelihood that her husband will be egalitarian, not conformist. As hypothesized for time availability, a man whose wife works longer hours is significantly more likely to choose egalitarianism over conformity. Unexpectedly, his work hours are not statistically significant. Although egalitarianism might seem to be an accommodation to household demands, total housework hours are not significant either. Children are negatively associated with do-it-all egalitarianism versus conformity—consistent with arguments about the efficiencies of specialization, not household demands. Participating in all tasks appears motivated by liberal gender attitudes and education. Egalitarianism is not associated with family income. Being older disposes against all tasks and towards hierarchical conventions, suggesting cohort influences. Micro-level characteristics...
predict which men take on every task at least occasionally, but welfare regimes do not predict men’s choice of egalitarianism over conformity.

Few variables explain why a pragmatic husband takes on some tasks in no particular order versus conforming. Only husband’s and wife’s long work hours (time availability) favour pragmatic performance of some chores at the expense of cultural conventions. Unexpectedly, higher housework demands (children, housework hours) do not tip the balance towards the spontaneity and flexibility of pragmatic task performance; perhaps such solutions require too much coordination compared to taken-for-granted conventions. Ideological factors play no role, but liberal countries stand out from social democracies, because they are significantly more likely to take a pragmatic approach to housework rather than follow the task hierarchy.

Discussion

Moving beyond previous studies of the household division of labour, this paper demonstrates that there is a hierarchy underpinning men’s performance of female-typed tasks.

Table 3 Per cent distribution for types of task performance: married men, 18–65, in 32 countries, 2002

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Gender-typed</th>
<th>Egalitarian</th>
<th>Pragmatic</th>
<th>Conforming</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Social democratic</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.56</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
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<td>0.51</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.24</td>
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<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.14</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweden</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.60</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conservative</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austria</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flanders</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>France</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany-West</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Israel</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.27</td>
<td>0.29</td>
<td>0.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Netherlands</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Switzerland</td>
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<td>0.48</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taiwan</td>
<td>0.09</td>
<td>0.35</td>
<td>0.31</td>
<td>0.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Liberal</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Britain</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.55</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td>0.10</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Ireland</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.61</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.65</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.09</td>
</tr>
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<td>Southern European</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cyprus</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.15</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portugal</td>
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<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.36</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spain</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.49</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.23</td>
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<tr>
<td>Formerly socialist</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulgaria</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Czech</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germany-East</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.54</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hungary</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.17</td>
<td>0.32</td>
<td>0.40</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latvia</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poland</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.40</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>0.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.64</td>
<td>0.13</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovakia</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.42</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>0.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slovenia</td>
<td>0.04</td>
<td>0.30</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Latin America</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.53</td>
<td>0.20</td>
<td>0.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.26</td>
<td>0.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td>0.45</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mexico</td>
<td>0.02</td>
<td>0.68</td>
<td>0.16</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total mean</td>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.44</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Some chores are more readily accepted than others, suggesting a nuanced patterning to men’s engagement in domestic life which has been obscured by measures that focus on men’s time spent in housework or on their overall share of a set of household tasks. Our emphasis on finer-grained distinctions is consistent with recent developments in the study of the household division of labour, including evidence that specific tasks elicit more accurate reports (Schulz and Grunau, 2011), that distinguishing cooking from housework reveals different time-use trends (Hook, 2010), and that the various components of the GEM, the widely used index of country-level gender equality, relate differently to the division of household labour (Ruppanner, 2010).

Our approach reorients the discussion of gender inequality from how much housework men do to whether or not they engage, if only occasionally, in the various female-typed tasks. Knowing whether the wife usually does the laundry or shares it equally speaks to how domestic burdens are distributed, but our emphasis on task avoidance or performance gets at cultural ideals of gender normativity and their transgressions. Furthermore, it is a husband’s demonstration that he is willing to do some ‘women’s work’, not how much he does, that influences his wife’s assessment of the quality of their relationship (Thompson, 1991; Spitze and Losocco, 2000; Ruppanner, 2008). Companionate marriages of the mid-20th Century accepted separate roles for husbands and wives, but the postmodern ideal of individualized marriages and pure relationships values flexibility, sharing, and emotional gratification, even if complete equality eludes couples (Giddens, 1992; Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2004; Cherlin, 2004; Yodanis, 2010).

When parity in the burden of housework is the issue, the tasks that men are most likely to do (e.g., shopping)
are sometimes dismissed as episodic, undemanding, and even recreational (Bianchi et al., 2000). Recast as transgressions of (or challenges to) gendered norms, these chores take on new meaning as potential gateways to men’s fuller participation in housework. The man who buys groceries may sometimes follow up to prepare a meal, just as the man who cares for the sick may be drawn into some housecleaning tasks. Most wives prefer their husband over others for help around the house when they are in bed with the flu (Treas, 2011), but whether some tasks pave the way for participation in others calls for longitudinal data. At the very least, the gendered task hierarchy invites us to interrogate the qualities of the specific tasks that may make them more or less acceptable to men. Are the tasks that are less widely accepted by men the ones that are less pleasant, less discretionary, more time consuming, and demanding of greater investments in specialized domestic skills? If so, men will mobilize resource advantages and male privilege to evade these chores. We would also expect women to offload these undesirable tasks when they can, perhaps by outsourcing them to paid helpers (Treas and de Ruijter, 2008). On the other hand, the tasks that men are least likely to perform may be those that are—for whatever reason—most strongly associated with women. In this case, gender theories would predict that men demonstrate their masculinity by avoiding the most strongly female-typed tasks even as women retain those tasks in which they can unambiguously act on their gendered identity and demonstrate feminine competence. A systematic consideration of the qualities of household tasks is beyond the scope of our paper and data, but the task hierarchy does allow for new tests of the theoretical arguments from the literature on the household division of labour.

This paper identifies a typology of men’s responses to the task hierarchy, distinguishing the ‘gender-typed’ abstention from all female-typed tasks, the ‘egalitarian’ participation in all tasks, the ‘conforming’ performance of selective tasks consistent with the hierarchy, and the ‘pragmatic’ participation in some chores out of order. The results of multi-level, multinomial analyses are largely consistent with time availability arguments. All things considered, the husband whose wife is employed longer hours is comparatively less likely to do no female-typed chores, but more likely to do all or to carry some without regard to the task-hierarchy. His longer workweek translates into a greater likelihood that he will forego all tasks or pragmatically choose a subset regardless of the societal task ordering of acceptability. Consistent with the unsettled state of the literature (Brines, 1993; Bittman et al., 2003; Gupta, 2007), exchange theories, embodied in the relative resource concept, find only limited support. If the wife has a higher income than her husband, he is more likely to do all chores, but her income advantage does not affect the likelihood he will do no tasks or only pragmatic assortment. Nor does the housework demand explanation fare well. Total housework hours of husband and wife are not related to any type of husband’s housework performance. Having more children does not have the hypothesized demand effects either. We anticipated that the addition workload posed by children would encourage men to take on all chores at least occasionally. The results, however, are more consistent with the alternative specialization hypothesis. Children make it less likely that the man will participate in each task. We do not know, however, whether this finding reflects any real efficiencies of specialization or merely gender beliefs about the advantages of specialization, such as the idea that children benefit when the mother is more engaged in their care in the home (Treas and Widmer, 2000; Charles and Cech, 2010).

Even controlling for these individual-level variables, however, there is evidence that men in different countries differ in their approach to task hierarchies. Compared to men in the Nordic social democracies, Southern Europeans are, as anticipated, more likely to be gender-typed, avoiding all female-typed household chores, rather than conforming to the hierarchy with a selection of some chores. Men in the liberal, English speaking countries are more likely to be pragmatists, taking on some tasks without regard to convention. Despite cross-national differences, however, men’s participation in female-typed tasks follows a near-universal hierarchy. To greater or less extent, the hierarchy holds for all 32 ISSP countries. There are differences across countries, state regime types, and regions in the strictness of this ordering of tasks and the extent to which men break rank with conventions, at least occasionally, in order to challenge, innovate, or improvise in domestic life. Housework tasks in some countries correspond more closely to a hierarchy, suggesting a stricter and more coherent model of gender specialization. As compared to Nordic social democracies, tasks in Southern Europe not only conform more closely to a hierarchy, but men there are less likely to deviate from this order in the tasks they do. In the liberal and conservative welfare regimes, there is a looser ordering of male task performance. Thus, countries may be distinguished not merely in terms of the widely reported differences in their overall division of household labour, but also in terms of the strictness of the ordered hierarchy of male task non-performance. Although the strictness of the hierarchy is correlated with other, macro-level measures of gender inequality, a more
systematic investigation of these country-to-country differences in the strength and coherence of gendered task hierarchies would be a useful extension of this line of inquiry.

The limits to this analysis should not be underestimated. This study pertains only to a set of largely Western and industrial societies. We do not know whether task hierarchies exist for other parts of the world, nor whether such hierarchies are weaker or stronger. We have information on only five female-typed tasks, including an episodic sick care chore which may be qualitatively different than cleaning or laundry. A different set of chores might lead to a different set of findings, but sensitivity tests show that the omission of the sick care item results in minimal improvement in the already strong H measure of scalability (from 0.60 to 0.65). The typology of men’s task performance awaits additional validation. The type we identify with men’s pragmatic break with a hierarchy in their selective performance of some chores might reflect nothing more than some husband’s limited knowledge of the gender conventions of their society. Lastly, we are not certain whether the hierarchy results from men’s avoidance of certain chores, women’s reluctance to relinquish some tasks, or a combination of the two. This puzzle, however, points out the potential value of task hierarchies in advancing understanding of the persistence of gender differences in housework.

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References


