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# Policy Pathways to Gender Power: State-Level Effects on the US Division of Housework

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## **Abstract**

Across industrialised countries, men contribute one-third of the household time in domestic tasks despite women's rising labour force participation. Like a Russian doll, however, the private sphere of the household nests within broader socio-political institutions. Proposed here is a relative gender power model incorporating both individual and policy-derived resources to explain differences in the division of household tasks. The sensitivity of the model to state-level policy differences is tested using data from the second wave of the US National Survey of Families and Households. After controlling for women's individual resources, laws and policies enhancing women's economic circumstances in the event of a divorce such as receipt of transfers, child support and property settlement predict that men in couples perform a greater share of domestic tasks. This evidence confirms that the state can ameliorate gender hierarchies and inequality.

Across industrialised countries, men contribute one-third of the household time in domestic tasks despite women's rising labour force participation (Gershuny, 2000). One explanation offered for this 'stalled revolution' (Hochschild, 1989) is that housework represents a symbolic as well as material product of marriage that produces and reproduces dominant and subordinate gender statuses (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; West and Zimmerman, 1987). The resilience of the gender hierarchy suggests that women's choice shall forever be constrained between economic vulnerability within a male breadwinner family, and carrying a double burden of paid and unpaid labour.

Like a Russian doll, however, the private sphere of the household nests within broader socio-political institutions, a point argued by feminists for over two decades (Hartmann, 1981; Hernes, 1987; Pateman, 1988; Hobson, 1990; Lewis, 1992; Orloff, 1993; Glucksmann, 1995). While many academics cede the point, only recently have they considered policy influences in cross-national analyses

of the division of housework. Earlier work found no significant cross-national differences in either the gendered division of labour or effects of individual attributes predicting it (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990; Baxter, 1997). More recent analyses find more egalitarian divisions of labour in countries with greater gender equality in political, social and economic institutions, although the magnitude of differences proves modest (Batalava and Cohen, 2002; Davis and Greenstein, 2004; Fuwa, 2004).

With these studies, however, it remains difficult to eliminate possible unmeasured cultural effects responsible for both the evolution of differing policies and observed division of housework across diverse countries (Pfau-Effinger, 1998). In addition, these studies do not specify exactly how policy affects the household division of labour, and as a result fall short of revealing effects of specific policy-related factors on the division of housework. Here I will expand the basic individual resource model to argue that policy affects relative gender power within the household. This expansion takes into account the impact of public and private transfers as sources of relative power, in addition to the traditional resources of education and earnings. Also important in couple negotiations is the attractiveness of alternatives to the relationship (Blau, 1960; Breen and Cooke, 2005), which vary with laws regarding property distribution and child support in the event of divorce. The macro-environment also shapes alternatives, as women are at greater risk of poverty absent a man (Daly, 1992).

After detailing the relative gender power model, I then capitalise on the federalist US structure and interstate policy variation to assess effects of specific policies within a single national context. One might argue that cultural variation exists within a given country as well as across national borders, but more egregious differences are minimised. The importance of the state in reinforcing patriarchy has long been claimed (Hartmann, 1981; Pateman, 1988), but to my knowledge this study provides the first assessment of how specific policies within a country perpetuate or ameliorate gender hierarchies and inequality. Recent evidence also indicates greater equity within the home predicts favourable family outcomes such as higher fertility (Oláh, 2003; Cooke, 2004; Torr and Short, 2004) and marital stability (Cooke, 2006). Consequently, encouraging gender equity appears to be in the best interests of individuals and the state.

### **The division of housework**

Three perspectives dominate analyses of the division of household tasks: relative power or resources, time availability and the gender perspective. Most empirical evidence suggests that relative resources such as education and employment predict some shift in the division of household tasks, but not equity (Blair and Lichter, 1991; Kamo, 1994; Shelton and John, 1996). Wives' domestic hours vary with their own work hours (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Shelton and John, 1996;

Bianchi *et al.*, 2000), but the sharpest drop in domestic hours across countries has occurred among women who are out of the labour market (Gershuny, 2000). Most of the observed increase in men's share of domestic tasks over the past 40 years results from women's reduction in their own domestic hours (Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Shelton and John, 1996; Bianchi *et al.*, 2000), as household tasks increasingly become commodified in the productive sector (Glucksmann, 1995).

Social exchange models (Blau, 1960) extend the relative resource model to include the influence of alternatives to the marriage on gender power. If being single would make one partner worse off than the other, the one with better non-marital alternatives has more power within the marriage; as Hobson phrased it, 'the fewer the exit possibilities, the weaker the voice' (1990: 238). For example, Lennon and Rosenfeld (1994) find that US women with more alternatives to the marriage perceive unequal divisions of domestic tasks as unfair, whereas women with fewer alternatives report greater acceptance of the situation.

Together, however, neither time nor relative resources explains the continuing gendered division of domestic tasks. Further, contrary to the 'logic of the pocketbook' (Hochschild 1989), as women's earnings exceed those of men, an even more traditional division of domestic tasks emerges (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Hochschild, 1989). Brines (1994) finds both US husbands and wives decrease their domestic hours as wives become the primary breadwinner, with women's actions predicted under the relative resource model, but men's actions interpreted as reflecting their need for 'gender display' of manhood *vis-à-vis* the non-traditional economic situation. Whether it is the man or the woman who exhibits compensatory behaviour under these circumstances, however, varies across countries. Among Australian couples, the woman increases her domestic hours when her relative earnings increase above equality, whereas Australian men show little evidence of adjusting their domestic hours (Bittman *et al.*, 2003). The authors offer that Australian women's corrective response is larger than that found for US women because policy reinforcement of the family wage and male breadwinner model makes women's primary breadwinning more anomalous in Australia than in the United States (O'Connor *et al.*, 1999). This suggests that at least part of the division of housework varies by the degree to which the state reinforces hierarchical gender roles in paid labour, analogous to Glucksmann's (1995) argument that the two are reciprocal in a 'total organisation of labour'.

This argument is not new (Hartmann, 1981; Blumberg, 1984), but only recently has comparative evidence emerged assessing whether the gendered division of household labour varies with the socio-political structure in which it is negotiated. The first comparisons found no significant differences across a range of countries (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990; Baxter, 1997), leading Baxter to conclude that we will only witness men's greater participation in unpaid labour as women's participation in paid labour increases. More recently, however, researchers find systematic cross-country differences once controlling

for individual resources such as education and employment (Batalava and Cohen, 2002; Davis and Greenstein, 2004; Fuwa, 2004). These studies reveal that across countries, women retain primary responsibility for laundry, shopping, deciding what to have for dinner, and tending to sick family members. Fuwa (2004) also finds using the United Nations' Gender Empowerment Measure, however, that time availability and gender ideology effects predicting the precise division prove stronger or weaker for women in more versus less egalitarian countries, respectively. This suggests that policy alters relative gender power beyond direct effects on individual employment.

The country differences noted above, however, are either theorised from mainstream literature on welfare state regimes (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld, 1990; Baxter, 1997; Davis and Greenstein, 2004) or based on the Gender Empowerment Measure reflecting relative employment and aggregate political representation (Batalava and Cohen, 2002; Fuwa, 2004). None of these studies assessed the impact of specific policies on the gendered division of labour.

### **Policy effects on relative resources**

An expanded relative power framework captures possible direct and indirect policy effects. Esping-Andersen (1990) employs a power resource perspective to develop his welfare regime typology, making his approach conceptually compatible with the individual-level relative resource model. Orloff (1993) suggests adding two dimensions to Esping-Andersen's (1990) typology to incorporate gender effects: women's access to paid work, and the capacity to form and maintain an autonomous household. O'Connor's (1993) concept of personal autonomy is similar. The state's performance on these two dimensions affects women's relative power within the family, in turn predicting the division of domestic tasks as depicted in Figure 1.

Education and employment policies, as well as support for maternal employment to balance the competing work–family time demands better, enhance women's relative power via her access to paid work. Across OECD countries, women's greater educational attainment, lower marginal tax rates, childcare subsidies, and paid parental leave all predict greater female labour force participation (Jaumotte, 2003). As a result of such policies, mothers' share of labour market earnings among married and cohabiting parents is greater in the Nordic countries, as compared with the Netherlands, Germany and the United Kingdom, where there is minimal support for maternal employment (Gornick and Meyers, 2003).

Relative power also derives from policies shaping economic alternatives to a marriage, what Orloff terms the ability to establish an autonomous household. The state can pay women directly via family allowances or other transfers. Although these enhance women's relative power, they discourage her employment

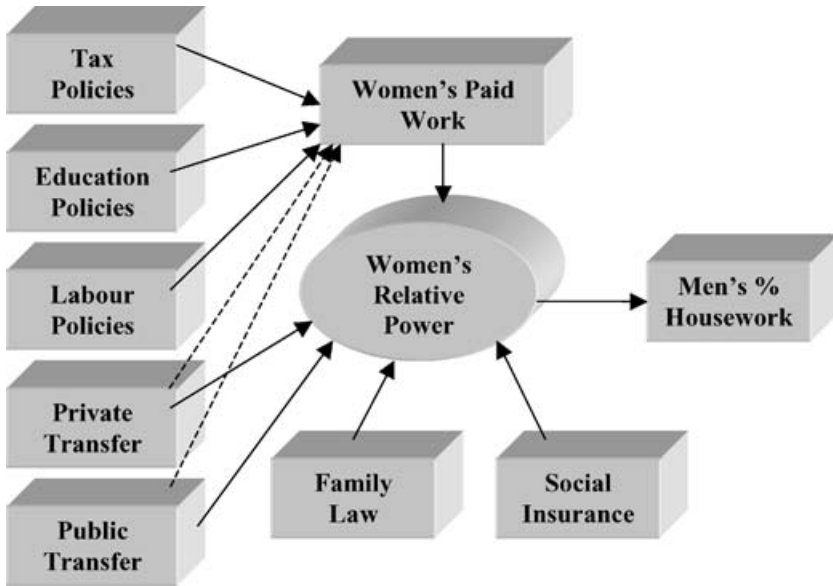


Figure 1. Policy effects on women's relative resources and division of housework.

due to income effects (Jaumotte, 2003), a negative relationship indicated by the dotted line in Figure 1. The availability of transfers, however, enables women with lower earnings to establish an autonomous household in the event of divorce, thereby minimising class differences among women and strengthening lower-income women's bargaining position in the family. Generally, female-headed households are worse off than male-headed households across industrialised countries, but the amount of transfers improves the situation for single female heads of household greatly in France, Germany and Italy as compared with the United States (Daly and Rake, 2003). Dewilde (2002) compares the financial effects of relationship dissolution for women across Denmark, the United Kingdom, Belgium, Germany and Italy, concluding that the availability of both the labour market and welfare state transfers varies women's ability to maintain autonomous households. Policy also shapes women's ability to establish an autonomous household through laws governing the division of marital assets and post-marital payments such as maintenance and child support. Following couples over time, DiPrete and McManus (2000) find the German welfare state more effective than that in the United States at reducing the gender gap in the financial impact of a marital dissolution.

While the relative gender power model provides a framework for predicting the gendered division of household labour across countries, comparative work inherently includes unmeasured cultural or other differences, confounding reliability and interpretation of results. In addition, the analytic focus to date

has been nation-state differences, when in fact women have much more political influence at the local level (Lister, 2003). Within the federalist system of the United States, there has historically been state-level variation in key factors affecting women's employment and claims as mothers (Skocpol, 1992). Consequently, the United States offers a natural experiment for assessing whether this variation alters relative gender power in the family and the division of household tasks. Possible cultural differences are not eliminated using a within-country study, but are arguably less acute. In addition, possible cultural or other unmeasured effects at the state level will be controlled for in the models.

### **US policy effects on relative gender power**

While most individual-level analyses define relative resources in terms of a woman's age, education and labour market earnings, also important to households is the private income from dividends, assets, pensions and the like. Further, even though public transfer payments in the United States such as unemployment assistance or Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) might be modest, their relative importance within the poorer households that qualify for them should not be ignored. The first extension of the relative resource model tested here predicts that the greater women's share of private non-labour or transfer income relative to the family income, the greater men's share of domestic tasks.

States vary in the available economic alternatives to the marriage or relationship. For example, in the event of a separation, women employed at good wages enjoy better prospects than unemployed women or women with low wages. Women as a group, however, historically suffer from a greater risk of poverty (Daly, 1992). This suggests that the general economic environment in which a couple resides has a greater effect on women's relative power, and leads to the second hypothesis that the greater the state poverty rate, the smaller men's share of domestic tasks.

US states also vary in laws governing the distribution of marital property in the event of a divorce. Nine states – Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin – are community property states, in which marital property is divided equally upon divorce, regardless of which partner's earnings led to its accumulation. In nearly all the remaining states, the court determines an 'equitable' division, which in a male breadwinner family would tend to favour the husband. Community property provisions nullify the detrimental relative power stemming from the gender wage gap or fewer accumulated years of work experience typical of women's careers if they exit the labour market during marriage. This enhances women's non-marital alternatives and leads to the third hypothesis that when couples reside in a community property state, men will perform a greater share of domestic tasks.

The amount and likelihood of receiving child support also varies by state (Pirog *et al.*, 1998). Historically, local judges decided whether a non-resident parent should pay child support; if so, how much; and what actions should be taken in the event of default. Thus, awards, amounts and enforcement all varied, with the burden of collecting unpaid support falling on the custodial parent. All processes and amendments within this system required the services of an attorney, so outcomes varied by socio-economic class and the financial resources of each parent, which generally favoured men.

The rapid rise in divorce rates and out-of-wedlock births during the 1960s and 1970s led to a dramatic increase in public expenditure on welfare benefits to mothers and children (Garfinkel and McLanahan, 1986), in part because fathers, particularly lower-income fathers, were not paying child support. As of the late 1970s, only 60 per cent of eligible single parents had a legal child support arrangement and, of those, only about one-half received the full amount due, one-fourth received only a portion of what was due, and another fourth received nothing (Garfinkel *et al.*, 1998).

In response to the rising federal welfare expense, Congress passed the 1974 Child Support Enforcement Act, requiring all states to establish comparable state offices and authorising federal funding for child support enforcement, primarily for cases where the mother was on public assistance. By 1980, federal support for child support enforcement extended to all eligible children regardless of income or welfare status. The 1984 amendments required states to adopt child support guidelines to determine obligation levels, withhold child support obligations from wages and other income of non-resident parents who were more than one month in arrears, and create procedures for placing liens against property for delinquent obligors. The 1988 Family Support Act made numeric support guidelines presumptive, in that departing from them required written justification. The 1988 Act also required automatic withholding of child support for families receiving welfare benefits as of 1990, and for all cases as of 1994. As part of welfare reform in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act, child support collection became coordinated across state lines, and states were required to develop procedures for revoking the drivers' and professional licenses of delinquent obligors.

Evidence indicates that more stringent enforcement results in greater compliance (Meyer and Bartfeld, 1996). Therefore, where child support enforcement proves effective, the likelihood of obtaining any future child support in the event of a divorce increases, enhancing a woman's relative power within the marriage in two ways. First, it improves her non-marital economic alternatives, while simultaneously reducing the man's relative resources since he is the source of the support payment. Yet despite the efforts at national coordination, state Offices of Child Support Enforcement vary dramatically in their effectiveness. In 2000, the percentage of applicable cases with court orders for child support



ranged from a low of 26 per cent in New Mexico and the District of Columbia, to a high of 93 per cent in South Dakota (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). Average collection per case also ranged greatly, from a low of \$299 in the District of Columbia to a high of \$2,083 in Minnesota (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002). This leads to the final hypothesis, that the greater the Office of Child Support Enforcement collections, the greater men's share of domestic tasks.

### Data and methods

Data are drawn from Wave 2 of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH2), fielded between 1992 and 1994 (Sweet and Bumpass, 1996). A more recent wave has been fielded, but the geographic coding of households necessary for assessing state-level effects is unlikely to be conducted.<sup>1</sup> The NSFH began in 1987 with a national probability sample of 13,007 households with an over-sampling of some ethnic minorities and family forms. For Wave 2 (NSFH2), 10,007 of the original families were re-sampled, with new spouses and partners added to the database. From Wave 2, all households where the primary respondent is either married or cohabiting are selected and merged with partner data where both partners provide information. This yields an unweighted sample of 5,371 couples (5,595 when the person weight was applied to the main respondent). Unweighted data are used for analyses, although applying the weights does not substantively alter results. A review of the state distribution of the sample reveals that it is generally representative of the US population distribution. California, Texas and New York are the most populous states (representing 12, 7 and 7 per cent of the population, respectively), while Vermont and Wyoming are the least populated, with just 0.2 per cent in each.

Men's share of domestic tasks is regressed using ordinary least squares on an array of relative resource and control variables. In order to control for possible unmeasured cultural or other factors associated with residing in a given state that might affect results, analyses were run clustering on state to provide robust standard errors. Doing so increased rather than decreased the significance of the policy-related factors, although effects of some other variables such as husband's education were no longer statistically significant.

The NSFH contains questions asking each person how many hours per week are spent performing nine tasks: preparing meals, doing dishes, housework, laundry, shopping, yard work, automotive maintenance, paying bills and driving. Factor analyses (results available from author) reveal that for both women and men, all tasks but driving load on one of two factors: meals, dishes, housework, shopping and laundry, comprising a factor of traditional female domestic tasks; and yard work, automotive maintenance and bill paying, comprising a factor of traditional male domestic tasks. The first tasks are deemed female because they

form the daily chores that cannot be scheduled at one's convenience, whereas bill-paying or yard work can be slotted into available time and have historically been the purview of men (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; Goldscheider and Waite, 1991; Shelton and John, 1996). To the extent performing domestic tasks reflects relative power, with the more powerful partner able to negotiate the most favourable activities, relative resource effects are assessed on the division of female tasks. It should be noted, however, that in the sample men's share of female tasks correlates with their share of male tasks, and model effects were substantively the same albeit weaker when using all domestic tasks.

The dependent variable is calculated as men's percentage share of the total household time spent in meal preparation, doing dishes, performing housework, shopping and doing laundry. Since evidence indicates that any increase in men's share of these tasks has primarily been the result of women decreasing their own domestic hours, a control is included for women's reported hours in these same tasks. This also allows us to see whether significant variable effects on men's share of female domestic tasks result primarily from women's alteration of their domestic time, or men's.

### **Relative resource variables**

Traditional relative resource measures include age, education and earnings (Shelton and John, 1996). The effect of women's relative age, however, is ambiguous. On the one hand, greater age relative to one's partner reflects more world and work experience and should therefore increase relative power. On the other, in many industrialised societies, youth and beauty remain highly valued characteristics of women (Parsons, 1942), so being older than one's partner may in fact reduce women's relative power. Also, retired men possess more available time to participate in domestic tasks that might mask competing age effects for younger men who may have more egalitarian divisions. To ascertain each of these possible effects, five age measures are created: four indicator variables for male cohorts (men aged 35 or less, 35 to 45, 55 to 65, and older than 65, against a referent of men aged 45 to 55) and an indicator variable for when the woman is older than the man, against a referent of being his age or younger.

Some empirical evidence of education effects indicates that in the United States men's education level is positively associated with domestic participation (Brines, 1993; South and Spitze, 1994), whereas studies of other countries find no association (McAllister, 1990), or that the effect disappears once gender ideology is included (Kamo, 1994). Women's greater educational attainment predicts less time in domestic tasks, but after controlling for possible earnings, a woman's education effect seems to be on her gender ideology (Shelton and John, 1996). To assess the absolute and relative effect of education when predicting men's share of domestic tasks, three measures are created. First is the man's years of education, the second his years of education squared to ascertain whether men's

share of domestic tasks changes at higher levels of educational attainment, and the third is an indicator variable for when the woman has completed more years of education than the man. A control for gender ideology will be included in the model as discussed below.

The third traditional source of power stems from relative economic resources, defined most frequently in terms of relative earnings. Women's labour earnings, including those from self-employment, as a percentage of the couple's total labour plus self-employment earnings comprise the first measure of relative economic resources. Women's earnings should be positively associated with men's share of female domestic tasks. A squared term for women's earnings is also included to ascertain whether couples are more likely to compensate in the private sphere as women become primary breadwinners, such as found by Brines (1994) and Bittman *et al.* (2003). An indicator variable controls for husbands who are out of the labour market, which includes unemployment or retirement. The time availability model predicts such men would perform more tasks as found by Bianchi and her colleagues (2000), but others have found even more compensation in the domestic sphere in the US when wives are the sole breadwinner (Brines, 1994; Bittman *et al.*, 2003).

Five additional measures capture a greater range of relative economic resources hypothesised here also to alter men's domestic behaviour. Women's *non-transfer, non-labour income*, expressed as a percentage of the couple's total income, captures effects of dividends, assets and pensions. Women's *transfer income* as a percentage of total couple income forms the second measure, which includes public assistance, child support and other government income excluding social security. While child support is a private transfer, the amount is regulated by federal guidelines and, unlike non-transfer, non-labour income, does not derive from prior economic activity. If the first hypothesis is supported, both of these additional income effects should be positively associated with men's share of female domestic tasks.

The state poverty rate for 1992 as published by the US Census Bureau (1992) comprises the third measure. The fourth measure is an indicator variable for when a couple resides in one of the community property states (Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington or Wisconsin). The fifth measure is the state's 1992 Child Support Enforcement Office collections (in millions) to ascertain whether the potential to collect future child support increases men's share of domestic tasks. In 1992, slightly more than half of state child support collections were for women receiving Aid to Families with Dependent Children, the forerunner to TANF (US Department of Health and Human Services, 1996), although the proportion of clients not on public assistance utilising CSE services has increased dramatically since that time (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2002).

### Control variables

Control variables include the log of total household income, number of children, home ownership, gender ideology, ethnicity and cohabitation. The log of total household income controls for the possibility that relative resource effects may vary depending upon total household resources. Since housework increases with the presence of younger children, the child measure reflects the total number of children under the age of sixteen in the household. An indicator variable for when couples own their home, against a referent of renting, is also included, as home ownership is associated with more hours in both male and female domestic tasks (Fenstermaker Berk, 1985; South and Spitze, 1994).

More traditional gender ideology predicts more traditional divisions of domestic tasks across countries (Baxter, 1997; Fuwa, 2004; Breen and Cooke, 2005). The NSFH2 asks both primary respondents and their partners questions regarding attitudes about women's employment and its effects on children, single parenthood, divorce and related topics. Factor analysis of all of the attitude questions yields several factors, with more non-traditional attitudes predicting husband's greater share of domestic tasks. Since effects are consistent regardless of measure, the question most central to the research question is selected here: 'A husband whose wife is working full-time should spend just as many hours doing housework as his wife.' It is recoded so that 1 is 'strongly disagree' to reflect the belief that women should retain responsibility for domestic tasks, to 5, 'strongly agree', reflecting an egalitarian attitude.

Two indicator variables for ethnicity are included, one for when the primary respondent is Black, and one if Hispanic. Some evidence indicates Black men participate more (Shelton and John, 1996), particularly in female tasks (Orbuch and Eyster, 1997), while others have found no significant effect (Bianchi *et al.*, 2000), or that part of the difference stems from Black women's fewer housework hours as compared with Caucasian women (Brines, 1993). Evidence for Hispanic households is also mixed (Shelton and John, 1996).

An indicator variable is created for cohabiters, since cross-national studies find that cohabiting couples have more egalitarian divisions of housework than married couples (Batalova and Cohen, 2002). In terms of US policy effects measured here, however, these couples fall under contract rather than family law, and the Office of Support Enforcement's ability to establish paternity among non-married couples in order to file child support claims has proven very weak. Separate analyses (not shown) confirm that among the policy-related factors, only the poverty rate is as significant among cohabiters as for married couples.

### Results

Table 1 displays the descriptive statistics of the sample. On average, US men contribute a little more than one-quarter to female tasks, while US women on

TABLE 1. Descriptive statistics for cohabiting and married couples: NSFH2, 1992–1994 ( $N = 4993$  couples).

Variable	Mean	SD
Man's per cent all 'female' tasks	26.25	18.92
Woman's per cent couple labour earnings	28.85	30.77
Woman's per cent couple earnings squared	1778.95	2829.75
Woman's non-transfer non-labour income as per cent couple income	3.76	12.15
Woman's private and public transfer income as per cent couple income	1.94	9.41
1992 state poverty rate	14.33	3.50
Reside in community property state	0.26	0.44
1992 state child support collections (\$millions)	281.42	242.12
Man aged 65 or older (fraction of sample)	0.17	0.37
Man aged 55 to 65 (fraction of sample)	0.11	0.31
Man aged 45 to 55 ( <i>referent</i> )	0.22	0.41
Man aged 35 to 45 (fraction of sample)	0.33	0.47
Man less than 35 (fraction of sample)	0.18	0.39
Woman older than man	0.20	0.40
Man's years of education	13.03	3.11
Man's years of education squared	179.53	80.72
Woman more education than man	0.32	0.47
Man not in labour force	0.22	0.42
Woman's attitude toward man's housework share	3.79	0.97
Man's attitude toward man's housework share	3.64	0.98
Woman's weekly hours of all domestic tasks	36.26	22.02
Total number of children under 16	1.00	1.20
Black respondent (fraction of sample)	0.11	0.31
Hispanic respondent (fraction of sample)	0.06	0.24
Cohabit ( <i>referent</i> married) (fraction of sample)	0.07	0.26
Own home ( <i>referent</i> rent) (fraction of sample)	0.79	0.41
Log of household income	10.19	2.75

*Notes:* Woman's other income includes pensions and dividend income; woman's public and private transfer income includes public assistance, child support and other government income excluding social security. Community property states are Arizona, California, Idaho, Louisiana, Nevada, New Mexico, Texas, Washington and Wisconsin. Attitude scores range from 1, reflecting the attitude that housework is women's responsibility even if she is employed full-time, to 5, reflecting the attitude that the division should be equitable.

average contribute almost 30 per cent to the couple's labour earnings. Women's other economic assets (non-transfer and transfer income) represent another 6 per cent, on average, of the household's income. One-quarter of the sample resides in a community property state, and the average state poverty rate is a little over 14 per cent. In 1992, Child Support Enforcement offices in each state collected an average of \$283 million in child support.

Table 2 presents results from three regression models. The first regression model includes each partner's traditional relative resource variables, plus

TABLE 2. OLS Unstandardised Coefficients from Regression with Robust Standard Errors of Men's Percentage Share of Female Domestic Tasks on Relative Resource Variables: Married and Cohabiting Couples, NSFH2, 1992–1994.

Independent variables	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>RSE</i>
Man aged 65 or older ( <i>referent</i> = 45 to 55)	0.37	1.32	0.51	1.33	1.32	1.19
Man aged 55 to 65 ( <i>referent</i> = 45 to 55)	-2.35**	0.90	-2.45**	0.88	-2.49**	0.79
Man aged 35 to 45 ( <i>referent</i> = 45 to 55)	1.65*	0.73	1.81*	0.73	1.60*	0.61
Man younger than 35 ( <i>referent</i> = 45 to 55)	2.22*	0.98	2.51**	0.97	2.07**	0.84
Woman older than man	0.74	0.64	0.63	0.62	0.64	0.65
Man's years of education	-0.11	0.48	-0.19	0.47	-0.52	0.58
Man's years of education squared	0.04*	0.02	0.04*	0.02	0.03	0.02
Woman more education than man	2.23***	0.58	2.17***	0.56	1.32*	0.59
Man not in labour force	6.22***	1.23	5.82***	1.22	3.98***	1.27
Woman's per cent couple labour earnings	0.36***	0.03	0.36***	0.03	0.19***	0.03
Women's per cent earnings squared	-0.003***	0.00	-0.003***	0.00	-0.001***	0.00
Woman's per cent non-transfer non-labour income/total	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.02
Woman's per cent transfer income/total			0.06+	0.03	0.07*	0.03
1992 state poverty rate			-0.33***	0.08	-0.24***	0.07
Reside in community property state			1.15+	0.60	1.03*	0.52
1992 state CSE collections (\$ millions)			0.003*	0.00	0.002*	0.00
<i>Controls</i>						
Woman's attitude on man's fair share	1.28***	0.30	1.27***	0.30	0.90***	0.23
Man's attitude on his fair share	1.68***	0.27	1.68***	0.27	1.54***	0.25
Total number of children under 16	-1.40***	0.23	-1.54***	0.25	-0.32	0.22
Black respondent	1.85	1.08	2.33**	1.09	2.56**	0.94
Hispanic respondent	-0.27	1.38	-0.80	1.81	0.46	1.80
Cohabit ( <i>referent</i> married)	1.50	0.95	1.01	0.95	1.12	0.95
Own home ( <i>referent</i> rent)	-4.35***	0.66	-4.08***	0.63	-3.63***	0.51
Log of household income	0.23*	0.09	0.19*	0.09	0.17+	0.09
Woman's weekly hours all domestic tasks					-0.37***	0.02
Constant	4.35	4.80	9.05*	4.68	30.02***	5.68
<i>N</i>	4993		4993		4993	
<i>F</i>	74.95***		118.04***		201.39***	
<i>Adjusted R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.11		0.11		0.28	

+  $p < .10$  \*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$  (two-tailed tests).

non-transfer, non-labour income and the control variables. The second model includes transfers and state-varying variables. Women's domestic hours are added in the final model to ascertain whether observed effects result from an increase in men's share of domestic tasks, or a decrease in women's hours. The change in the F statistic across the models supports that the inclusion of each additional set of variables significantly improves the fit of the model.

In the first model, the traditional relative resource measures are all significant and in the expected direction. There is evidence of life-cycle and cohort effects among men. As compared with the referent age group of men 45 to 55, younger men perform a significantly greater share of female tasks after controlling for effects of remaining variables such as employment and children, with men's share greater the younger they are. This suggests successive generations are evolving to be more egalitarian in the division of household tasks, although longitudinal data are necessary to follow these men over time to confirm this. Men older than 65 do not take on a significantly greater share, but this stems from including the indicator variable for when men are out of the labour force, which includes both the unemployed and retirees. When this indicator is removed, the share of female tasks among men older than 65 is over two percentage points greater as compared with the referent age group, or roughly equivalent to the youngest cohort of men. The indicator variable for a woman being older than her male partner is insignificant, so neither relative youth nor experience appears to contribute to women's relative power.

The main effect of men's years of education is negative but statistically insignificant, while the education-squared term is positive and significant, indicating that men with higher levels of educational attainment perform a larger share of female domestic tasks. Controlling for this, when women have more education than their partners, men perform over two percentage points more female domestic tasks.

Each percentage point increase in a woman's relative earnings predicts men will perform about one-third of a percentage point more of female tasks. The effect attenuates as women become the primary breadwinner, since the earnings-squared term is negative and also statistically significant. So in addition to the exchange of women's relative earnings to men's relative housework not being one to one, the effect of women's earnings deteriorates the more important her income is to the family. The effect of women's non-transfer, non-labour income, while in the expected direction, is not statistically significant, so these particular economic resources have no effect on the division of household labour. Controlling for these economic effects, unemployed and retired men perform over six percentage points more of the domestic tasks: a positive effect also found by Bianchi *et al.* (2000) but not by Brines (1994). This effect again, however, suggests a less than equitable exchange of men's relative domestic share for women's relative economic contribution.

The second model adds the policy factors to the relative resources of Model 1, with the latter effects remaining substantively the same. In contrast to effects of women's non-transfer income, women's transfer income predicts men will perform a greater share of domestic tasks. Both the mean and the variance of the non-transfer income are greater than for transfer income, so it is not a matter of restricted range stifling effects for the additional private income. Further, more women report receiving non-labour, non-transfer income ( $n = 924$ ) than transfer income ( $n = 615$ ). Consequently, although not all non-labour income positively affects women's relative power, transfer income among couples at lower income levels is important in encouraging greater gender equality in domestic roles. The effect of the log of total household income declines in magnitude between Model 1 and Model 2, so this interpretation appears plausible.

All state-varying effects are significant. Increases in the state poverty rate significantly decrease men's share of domestic tasks as predicted under the second hypothesis. The magnitude of the effect is nearly identical to that for women's relative earnings, highlighting the importance of the macro-economic environment to women's relative power in the family. Men in couples residing in community property states perform a greater share of female domestic tasks, although the magnitude is modest and the effect just marginally significant. Effective child support enforcement significantly increases women's relative power; the difference between the lowest and highest state collection rates accounts for a two percentage point difference in men's share of female domestic tasks.

The final model illuminates whether changes in men's share of household tasks result from women's or men's behaviour. With the exception of the effect of transfer income and ethnicity, it is clear that some of men's increasing share is the result of women decreasing their domestic hours, because the magnitude of effects between Models 2 and 3 declines. The positive effects of being in the youngest male cohorts, men's greater education, women's relative education, men out of the labour force, women's relative earnings, women's gender ideology and the state child support enforcement collections attenuate somewhat, indicating that under these conditions part of the effect derives from women reducing their housework hours. The effect for men with greater education becomes statistically insignificant, suggesting that all of this observed effect derives from the fact that wives of more educated men spend less time in domestic tasks. The negative state poverty rate effect diminishes in magnitude, indicating that in states with lower poverty rates, women spend less time in domestic tasks.

In contrast, the effect of transfer income increases in both magnitude and statistical significance, indicating that its effect on relative gender power is absolute. Results also indicate that Black men's greater share of domestic tasks derives from Black women's fewer domestic hours when controlling for the remaining variables, as well as from Black men's greater participation, because



the positive effect increases between Models 2 and 3. These results confirm what previously has been interpreted as conflicting evidence (Brines, 1993; Orbach and Eyster, 1997).

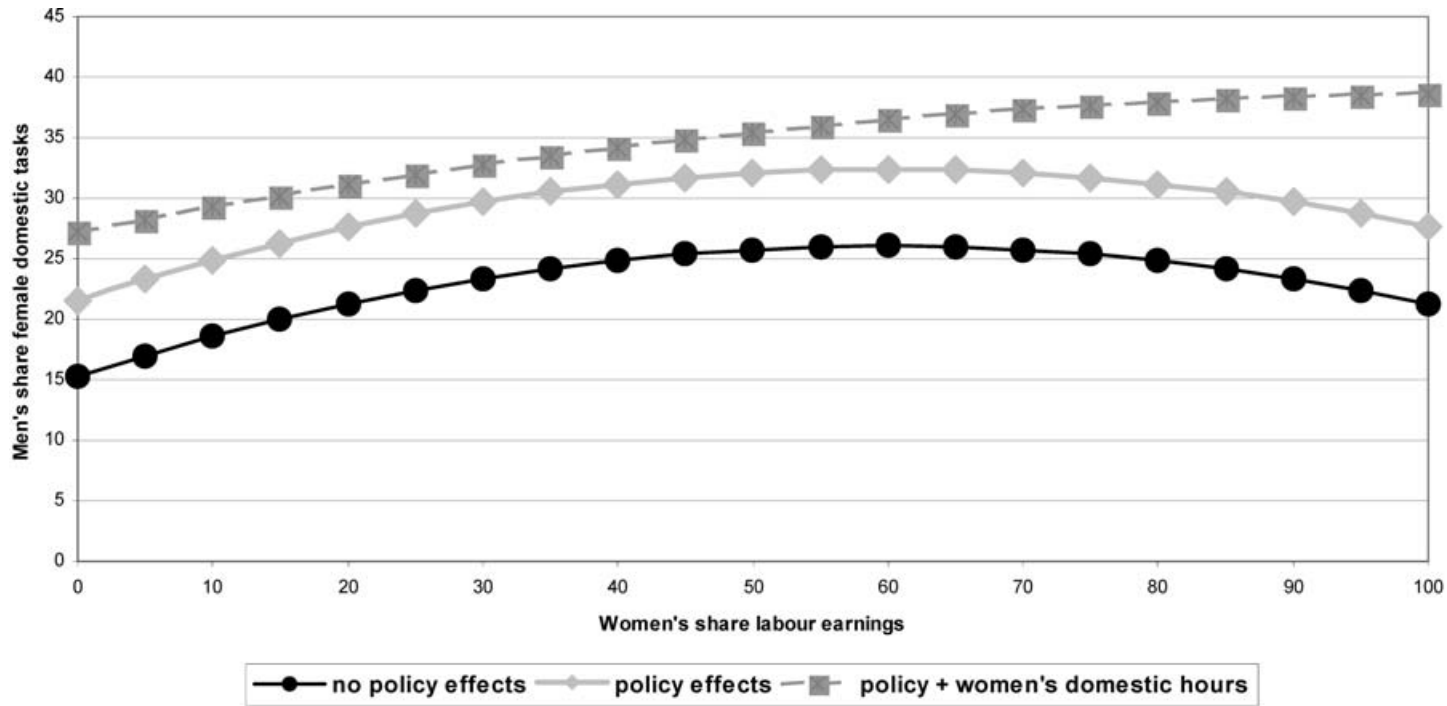
Figure 2 displays the combined effects of significant variables on men's predicted share of female domestic tasks under three scenarios. The first is the traditional relative resource scenario, represented by the black circle line, predicting his share of female domestic tasks for a man aged 45 to 55 with less than a university degree, setting ideology scores and the state poverty rate at their means from Table 1, and varying women's relative earnings along with its square. This illustrates that men's predicted share of female tasks using traditional relative resource measures ranges from just 15 per cent when the wife is not employed, to about one-quarter in remaining households, slightly less than the cross-national averages reported by Gershuny (2000). The compensatory housework division found by Brines (1994) and Bittman *et al.* (2003) is also evident: as women's relative earnings exceed 60 per cent, men's housework share declines.

The second scenario, represented by the grey diamond line, includes the individual resource variables while maximising the policy and state-varying effects. The poverty rate is set to its minimum (7.6) rather than its mean (14.3), women's transfer income is set at 10 per cent of the household's total income, and the couple resides in a community property state and one collecting the maximum 1992 child support (\$783 million). Under this scenario, men's predicted share of domestic tasks increases by approximately ten percentage points over the traditional relative resource scenario, or by more than 33 per cent. Again, however, his share is predicted to decline once women's relative earnings exceed 60 per cent.

The third scenario, represented by the dark grey square line, replicates the second scenario but adjusts effects for women's domestic hours as in Model 3 of Table 2. Doing so eliminates evidence of the compensatory division as women's relative earnings increase, because such women reduce their total housework hours. When US women are the sole breadwinner, however, they still perform more than half of the female domestic tasks. On the other hand, as evident at the other end of earning continuum, in male breadwinner households men are predicted to perform more than one-quarter of the female domestic tasks once we adjust for women's actual hours. This more egalitarian housework sharing among male breadwinner families is consistent with Gershuny's (2000) findings that unemployed, not employed, women have decreased their domestic hours the most.

### Discussion and conclusions

Feminists argue that the state reinforces patriarchy as evident in the continued gendered division of domestic tasks (Hartmann, 1981; Blumberg, 1984). Presented



*Notes:* “No policy effects” calculated with Model 2 constant term plus effects for women’s relative earnings and its square, man between the age of 45 to 55 with less than a university degree, setting woman and man’s ideology score and state poverty rate (14.3) at their means. “Policy effects” sets poverty rate at its minimum (7.6), transfers at 10 percent household income, state CSE at its maximum, and the constant effect for residing in a community property state. The “policy plus women’s hours” uses coefficients from Model 3 as above, plus effect of women’s domestic hours, beginning at the mean of 36 per week and discounting 1 per cent per five percentage point increment in her relative labour earnings.

Figure 2. Men’s Predicted Share of Female Domestic Tasks, With and Without State-Level Effects.

here is the first study of specific policy effects on women's relative gender power and the division of housework, comparing US interstate variation in both. Policy alters relative gender power directly through women's access to education and employment, as well as indirectly through its shaping of women's alternatives to a marriage in terms of the macro-economic environment, state transfers, child support and family law. The evidence supports that each of these pathways to gender power proves important to predicting the division of household tasks, although, even under the best scenario, women's responsibility for the domestic sphere persists.

Generally, successive generations of US men appear to be evolving to be more egalitarian, although longitudinal data are necessary to confirm this. The effects of some individual resources also appear to be strengthening. Women's education *relative* to her partner's predicts a more significant shift than men's educational attainment. This finding suggests that women's increasing educational attainment across industrialised societies enhances gender equity not only in employment and earnings (OECD, 2004), but in the domestic sphere as well after controlling for employment effects. Consequently, Figure 1 needs to be amended to reflect that education directly affects women's relative power. Future research might explore whether the content of education bestows greater equity, such as when women obtain degrees in traditionally male-dominated fields such as engineering, or if its power derives solely from attainment levels.

Given that US policy generally remains silent on the private sphere, the policy effects might be of greater interest to policy makers elsewhere actively seeking to enhance gender equity. First, the macro-economic environment has greater repercussions for women's relative power given their greater economic vulnerability. In US states with lower poverty rates, men do a greater share of domestic tasks. In states with higher poverty rates, women spend more hours in domestic work. Since individual earnings and household income are controlled for in the model, it is possible that this effect reflects that in more impoverished areas, less household production can be commodified through pre-packaged meals, household appliances, restaurants, cleaning services and so on. This might also explain women's greater responsibility for domestic tasks in transitional economies than predicted by their high labour force participation rates (Fuwa, 2004).

Related to this are the significant effects found for women's transfer income. The evidence here supports that public transfers among economically vulnerable couples encourage greater equity in the home so that the possibility of equity is not just a privilege of middle and upper class women. As in other liberal regimes, US transfers are meagre, so future research might assess their effect on the domestic division of labour in countries with more generous transfer structures but different institutional arrangements of gender relations, such as Sweden, Germany and the Netherlands.

Divorce law can enhance gender equity within existing marriages. US community property laws, by guaranteeing an even distribution of marital assets in the event of a divorce, equalise the historical gender disparities in wages and accrued work experience. The evidence here is that these laws have modest effects on the division of housework. The magnitude of the effect might reflect that, over time, the proportion of US dual-earner couples has grown substantially so that now, more than two-thirds of the married women in the sample are employed and US states without community property laws have increasingly divided marital assets more equally. On the other hand, during the past decades courts across countries with lower levels of married female employment, such as Italy, have increasingly denied women alimony in the event of a divorce, while seldom crediting women's time spent caring as equivalent to men's time spent in employment (Saraceno, 1994). So although the US effect might be small, the potential impact of similar laws in other countries might be substantially greater.

More effective child support enforcement also encourages gender equity within marriage. The difference between the lowest and highest US collection rates accounts for a two percentage point difference in men's share of female domestic tasks, or the same relative power effect as when women have more education than men or when the man is retired. The effectiveness of child support enforcement across countries is abysmal. Even after the extensive US efforts to coordinate child support across states, there is little improvement since 1983 in the proportion of custodial parents with legal agreements or who receive the full payment (US Census Bureau, 2000). Phipps and Burton (1995) found that in the mid-eighties, only Sweden guaranteed single mothers' receipt of child support, but that support comprised just 13 per cent of mean income. The Netherlands had the highest mean level of support, but only 10 per cent of mothers received it (Phipps and Burton, 1995: 160). The setting and enforcement of child support provisions appear to be areas where the state can make significant progress not only on enhancing women's ability to establish an autonomous household, but also on gender equity within marital households.

Taken together, the US policy effects modelled here can increase men's share of female domestic tasks by more than ten percentage points, representing substantially greater equality in domestic gender roles than predicted by individual resources. This difference is equivalent to the difference between the gendered division of domestic tasks in Italy versus Norway, or the Netherlands versus Sweden, as calculated from Gershuny's (2000) detailed time data for the eighties. Calculating men's share from Fuwa's (2004: 757) nineties data, the US cross-state difference is equivalent to the difference in the division of domestic tasks in Japan with the most traditional division, versus the formerly socialist Czech Republic, or the Czech Republic versus Sweden or Canada. That the within-country policy variation is as large across such diverse welfare and gender regimes

is remarkable, and underscores how policies can ameliorate gender inequality within and outside of the home.

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### Note

- 1 A similar analysis was conducted using longitudinal data from the Panel Study of Income Dynamics for couples marrying between 1985 and 1995 that confirms effects found here, although that study is not reported given the weakness in the measure of housework. The male of the household is asked to estimate the hours spent each week in housework broadly defined for both himself and any partner. In one year when both partners were asked, the man's estimate proved to be rather inaccurate. Consequently, the NSFH is preferred given the reports from each partner and extensiveness of the housework items queried.

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