

The Daily Consequences of Widowhood

The Role of Gender and Intergenerational Transfers on Subsequent Housework Performance

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This study examines (a) whether widowhood affects the performance of daily household activities, (b) the extent to which dependence on children mediates the effect of widowhood on subsequent housework performance, and (c) the extent to which these patterns vary by gender. Using the Changing Lives of Older Couples study, a prospective survey of married persons age 65 and older, we find that late-life widowhood is associated with an increase in men's housework, yet does not produce a change in women's subsequent housework performance. Dependency on children mediates the effect of widowhood on housework, suggesting that adult children assist their grieving parents with errands and other household chores. Findings imply that the daily consequences of late-life widowhood are dependent on the individual, dyadic, and intergenerational characteristics of the older adult.

Keywords: *widowhood; gender roles; housework; parent-child relations; caregiving; intergenerational transfers; instrumental activities of daily living*

Widowhood is characterized as one of the most distressing of all life events (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). Spousal death represents a severing of the emotional attachment to one's life partner (Bowlby, 1980), as well as the reconfiguration of the daily decisions and routine responsibilities that were once shared by both spouses (Carey, 1979-1980). Although a voluminous literature explores the mental and physical health outcomes associated with marital dissolution (for review, see Stroebe, Hansson, Stroebe, & Schut, 2001; Waite & Gallagher, 2000), relatively little is known about

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the consequences widowhood has on the routine social and behavioral tasks of everyday life. When one spouse dies, the surviving spouse must perform all the necessary tasks of household management, including those tasks that were once performed by their deceased spouse. Couples often allocate family and household roles along the dimension of gender, thus the adjustment to widowhood is likely to vary by gender (e.g., Stroebe & Stroebe, 1983; Umberson, Wortman, & Kessler, 1992). Furthermore, the adjustment may be particularly difficult for current cohorts of older adults, who likely maintained traditional gender-role specialization throughout their marriages (Ciabattari, 2001; Wilkie, 1993). Using the Changing Lives of Older Couples (CLOC) study, we examine gender differences in how a daily responsibility such as housework changes following the loss of a spouse and whether adult children assist their bereaved parents with tasks related to household management.

THE EFFECT OF LATE-LIFE WIDOWHOOD ON HOUSEWORK

Widowhood has been called the exemplar of a stressful life event, perhaps requiring more adjustment than any other life transition (Hatch, 2000; Thompson, Breckenridge, Gallagher, & Peterson, 1984). The death of a spouse sets off a series of adjustments in which the surviving spouse must not only cope with the grief and emotional distress caused by the loss of a meaningful relationship but also redefine a social reality that reflects their new status as a widowed person. When men and women initially enter a marital union, they redefine their individual identities and construct a social reality that is shared by both marriage partners (Berger & Kellner, 1970). When the marital union is broken (due to widowhood, in this case), that shared social reality and individual marriage identity are also shattered. Widowed persons must then reconstruct a new reality as they undertake the social roles associated with widowhood and modify the old ones that were associated with the marriage. Thus, on the death of a spouse, widowed persons undergo a conscious process of adaptation in which they must, among other things, alter the daily tasks and routine responsibilities that were once shared by the couple to reflect the new (or newly

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reconfigured) social reality associated with being a widowed person (Carey, 1979-1980).

We contend that change in household labor provides an illustrative example of how this identity transformation is manifested in the daily lives of older bereaved persons. Housework is a task that is typically shared—although perhaps unequally—by the married couple and needs to be performed frequently and daily, even after the spouse has died (Thompson & Walker, 1989). By evaluating the adjustment to daily household responsibilities, such as meal preparation and routine housework (often referred to as the female-typed housework), this analysis illustrates how surviving spouses adjust their daily routines to reflect their acquired identity of a widowed person. On the other hand, household tasks such as major repairs or home maintenance (often referred to as male-typed housework) are performed more sporadically and therefore would not as readily show the daily-life adjustments associated with becoming a widow or widower. More than 9 in 10 older adults live independently, separate from their children or extended family, and 77% of older adults are homeowners (HUD, 1999); thus, the daily performance of housework is a common concern for most noninstitutionalized older persons, bereaved or not. Therefore, the performance of routine household tasks is an appropriate case from which to assess the daily-life consequences of widowhood.

Most of the housework literature focuses on the allocation of tasks between the married couple (Berk, 1985; Blair & Lichter, 1991; England & Farkas, 1986; Huber & Spitze, 1983; Shelton & John, 1996). This literature largely ignores the effect of changing marital relations on an individual's housework performance (for exception, see Gupta, 1999). A few studies, though, provide compelling evidence that one's marital status or a change in one's marital status has a significant effect on an individual's performance of routine housework (Gupta, 1999; South & Spitze, 1994). These studies find that widowed men spend more hours doing housework than they did prior to the loss and in comparison to single, divorced, and separated men; widowed women, on the other hand, spend less time doing housework than they did when married and in comparison to married, divorced, cohabitating, and never-married women (Gupta, 1999; South & Spitze, 1994). The first objective of this analysis, as reflected in Hypothesis 1, is to try to replicate the empirical findings of Gupta (1999) and South and Spitze (1994) on a strictly aged sample.

Hypothesis 1: Late-life widowhood will increase the number of housework hours for men and decrease the number of housework hours for women.

It is important to limit the age of the sample because the existing literature has generally used samples representing couples of all ages, including young newlyweds, midlife families, and older couples (e.g., Gupta, 1999; South & Spitze, 1994). Current cohorts of older adults are more likely to embody a traditional gender-based allocation of household and familial roles than younger-aged widowed persons (Ciabattari, 2001; Wilkie, 1993). Consequently, the need for household adjustment may differ among older and younger widowed persons. Past research also finds that one's performance of housework after widowhood depends on, among other things, the number of young children in the household and the functional status of the surviving spouse (Huber & Spitze, 1983; South & Spitze, 1994; Szinovacz, 2000). Because older persons significantly differ from younger persons on these important characteristics, the previous literature using large age-range samples may not fully capture the differences in bereavement experiences that are due to the timing of widowhood.

The widowhood literature, on the other hand, is characterized by a lack of gender-comparative studies (Lopata, 1996), so it generally cannot capture the diversity in bereavement experiences by gender. To address the limitations of both literatures, the current analyses utilize a gender-stratified sample of older adults to explicitly assess the effect of widowhood on the performance of a daily activity such as housework. In so doing, this study expands the housework literature by focusing specifically on the adjustment process of older widowed persons and the widowhood literature by systematically exploring gender differences in the adjustment to spousal loss.

Because a major focus of these analyses is to explore gender differences in the daily-life adjustments to widowhood, it is imperative to understand how gender may structure or define the outcome of interest—housework performance. Research consistently finds that women, regardless of their age, do disproportionately more housework than their husbands (Coltrane, 1996; Herzog, Kahn, Morgan, Jackson, & Antonucci, 1989; Orbach & Eyster, 1997; Robinson, Werner, & Godbey, 1997). It is believed to be both rational and cost-effective for the couple to specialize in separate tasks—women in home tasks, and men in market work—because men tend to be more prosperous in the marketplace than women (Becker, 1965, 1991; Parsons, 1954). Although this functional theory illuminates one reason why household tasks are allocated along the dimension of gender, it falls short when trying to explain why traditional gender roles appear to persist in older couples where the economic motivations

for a gendered division of labor no longer exist, as both spouses are typically retired from the labor force.

Instead, a developmental perspective may offer a more appropriate explanation for why women, regardless of their age, continue to do more housework than their male counterparts. The continuity theory suggests that people develop identities, behaviors, and dispositions early in the life course and seek to maintain these qualities throughout the life course (Atchley, 1989). Gender differences among older adults could thus be attributable to the long-term, perhaps cumulative, influence of early-life socialization experiences (Hareven, 1982; O'Rand, 1996). In the case of housework, men and women learn the appropriate gender-specific behaviors during the early stages of their development and will continue to fulfill these normative roles throughout their lives. Thus, according to the continuity perspective, gender differences in housework performance will be maintained and even exacerbated with age.

In contrast, women and men could become more similar to one another in terms of personality and behaviors as they age (Gutmann, 1997; Sinnott, 1977). A reversal of roles may occur once gender-specific parental duties have been completed and men and women are able to reclaim the traits and qualities they relinquished during parenthood (Gutmann, 1997). This perspective, often referred to as the gender-role androgyny theory, claims that gender inequity and gender differences will dissipate with age, meaning that the household division of labor should become less specialized as men and women age. Regardless of whether gender-role disparities are maintained (continuity perspective) or minimized (androgyny perspective) throughout the life course, the experience of late-life widowhood and its impact on the performance of gendered behavior (e.g., housework) may be quite different from that of younger widowed persons. For this reason, it is important to isolate the experience of late-life widowhood when assessing gender differences in the daily lives of older widows and widowers.

THE EFFECT OF LATE-LIFE WIDOWHOOD ON INTERGENERATIONAL SUPPORT

The final objective of this article is to consider the role that others may play in helping the bereaved person cope with the transitions associated with becoming widowed. Because human lives are embedded in a complex network of social relationships (Elder, 1998) and also because no human is in complete isolation from others, we assume that the death of a

spouse will not only affect the daily experiences and self-identity of the surviving spouse, but the consequences will reverberate through the network of related social actors. Therefore, this study explores not only the direct effect of late-life widowhood on the survivors' daily activities but also whether adult children assist their grieving parents with instrumental tasks including errands and other household chores. Adult children, for example, may assist their widowed parent with simple household tasks, either as a way to alleviate some of the disruption in daily activities caused by the death or as a way to express support and caring for their grieving mother or father.

Family members, particularly children, may feel a sense of filial responsibility or obligation to provide care to family members in times of need (Piercy, 1998; Rossi, 1993; Seelbach, 1984). The gerontological literature has found that adult children often provide care to elderly parents during times of significant stress, such as health declines or widowhood (Hogan & Eggebeen, 1995; Mancini & Blieszner, 1989; Ward, Logan, & Spitze, 1992). In addition, the housework literature has found that the presence of children in the household, particularly female children, reduces the amount of housework done by parents (Gupta, 1999; South & Spitze, 1994; Ward et al., 1992). As stated earlier, most of the housework literature focuses on couples of all ages, meaning that most of the existing research considers young children living in the household and not on adult noncoresidential children who may also offer considerable assistance following widowhood. Although the caregiving and intergenerational transfers literatures examine time transfers to older parents (e.g., Couch, Daly, & Wolf, 1999; Stone, Cafferata, & Sangl, 1987), seldom have these literatures carefully examined children's caregiving in the form of housework and rarely have they focused on changes in caregiving behaviors resulting from widowhood. Because of increased human longevity and the ascent of the exceedingly large baby boom cohort into older ages, significant numbers of older adults will rely on adult children to assist with instrumental activities of daily living (e.g., housework), especially in times of need (e.g., widowhood). Thus, it is critical to understand the patterns of intergenerational dependence following widowhood. As suggested in Hypothesis 2, any assistance received from adult children will reduce the amount of time bereaved persons must attend to the routine activities of daily life themselves.

Hypothesis 2: Dependence on adult noncoresidential children for housework assistance will reduce the average number of hours spent performing housework per week for both men and women.

Given our objective to explore gender differences in the consequences of widowhood, it is essential to consider what role gender plays in determining intergenerational exchange of support and assistance. Empirical research repeatedly shows that older mothers are more likely to receive assistance than older fathers (Couch et al., 1999; Dwyer & Coward, 1991; Wolf, Freedman, & Soldo, 1997). Theoretical explanations for these gendered patterns of exchange rely on two perspectives: (a) gender differences in the maintenance of social support networks and (b) perceived gender stereotypes.

First, wives are often considered the kinkeepers, facilitating the “exchange of goods and services” within the family (Hagestad, 1986). Wives are more likely than husbands to have alternate sources of emotional and social support outside of the marriage (Antonucci, 1990; Bock & Webber, 1972; Fischer & Phillips, 1982; Powers & Bultena, 1976). While married, men enjoy their wife’s ability to maintain their social support networks; however, on the dissolution of marriage, men may experience reduced contact with others, as they are not accustomed to maintaining social relations with friends and family. Goldscheider (1990) offered empirical support for this perspective, showing that unmarried fathers are less likely to name adult children as a source of support. According to this explanation, widowers may receive less household assistance from their adult children than do widows.

The second explanation for why widows and widowers may receive different levels of support relies on the culturally dominant stereotypes regarding age and gender. On one hand, older persons and/or their children may adopt the so-called frail-old-woman stereotype, resulting in greater dependency among older women. By adopting an inaccurate, but culturally prescribed, frailty stereotype, widows may appear as needing more assistance than they physically or realistically need (Seeman, Unger, McAvaym, & Mendes de Leon, 1999). On the other hand, widowers may attract more assistance from their adult children (Zick & Smith, 1991b) because older bereaved husbands are considered ill-equipped to handle the daily tasks of maintaining a household since the men of this generation were typically not responsible for household tasks throughout their marriage (Berardo, 1970). Children may perceive their fathers as incapable of performing these tasks or at risk of adopting unhealthy behaviors without the wife present. This stereotype could, in turn, result in the widower’s having a higher likelihood of receiving assistance with household chores. The adoption of both stereotypes suggests that older persons—both men and women—are likely to receive assistance or increased social support on widowhood. According to Lopata (1996), widowed persons do receive increased support from friends and family immediately following the

death of their spouse, perhaps suggesting a combination of both stereotypes mentioned above.

By considering the role of other social actors during the bereavement process, we attempt to present a richer, more complete story of how older bereaved persons adjust to the daily consequences of widowhood. Specifically, we address how housework, as an example of a necessary activity of daily life, is affected by the death of a spouse, and also how assistance from adult children may mediate the adjustment process. Men's lower propensity to maintain social ties, and thus lower likelihood of receiving assistance from children following widowhood, may partially explain why widowers experience a hypothesized increase in housework hours after the death of their wife. In contrast, women's greater propensity to be kinkeepers or the internalization of the so-called frail old woman stereotype may increase their likelihood of receiving intergenerational support and may partially explain the hypothesized decrease in their postwidowhood housework hours. That is, adult children may differentially assist their widowed parents with daily chores of household management; these differences may partially explain the hypothesized gender differences in the effect of widowhood on housework. We summarize this mediation effect in Hypothesis 3:

Hypothesis 3: Dependence on children following the loss of a spouse will partially explain the hypothesized gender differences in how much housework older men and women perform after the death of a spouse.

OTHER PREDICTORS OF HOUSEWORK IN OLDER COUPLES

The central aim of this article is to explore gender differences in the daily consequences of late-life widowhood, yet the performance of household labor is dependent on factors beyond gender, marital status, and intergenerational relations. Several other individual- and dyadic-level characteristics will also be included in the analyses. Particularly important to studies of housework among older couples is the consideration of both the husband and wife's health and disability status. As health or functional abilities decline, participation in housework also declines (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992; Rexroat & Shehan, 1987). Because couples share household tasks, the health status of the other spouse has also been found to be a significant predictor of one's housework performance (Szinovacz, 2000; Szinovacz & Harpster, 1994). Caregivers, particularly caregiving husbands, report doing more housework than noncaregivers (Kaye & Applegate, 1994; Kramer & Lambert, 1999). Health status, particularly when con-

ceptualized at the dyadic level of the couple, appears to be an important predictor of older person's ability to perform daily housework activities.

In addition to health, the analyses will also include demographic characteristics, such as race, socioeconomic status, and household size, which have been previously found to predict housework performance. Black couples perceive themselves as more egalitarian and report greater participation from husbands with traditionally female-typed household tasks than do White couples (Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). Persons with higher educational attainment or higher income often have higher standards for housework, thereby increasing the amount of time they spend doing housework (Berk, 1985). Yet, greater economic resources may also increase their ability to purchase homemaking services, ultimately reducing the amount of housework one would have to perform (Bergen, 1991; Lopata, 1973; Shelton & John, 1996). Household size may increase or decrease the amount of time someone performs housework because although there is more housework to be done in larger households, there are also more individuals to participate in the completion of the tasks (Shelton & John, 1996; South & Spitze, 1994).

While controlling for the individual- and dyadic-level characteristics mentioned above, this study explores (a) the gender differences in the effect of late-life widowhood on housework performance and (b) the extent to which instrumental dependence on adult children mediates any gender differences in the daily consequences of widowhood. By linking the receipt of intergenerational support with one's actual performance of household chores, we seek to understand how widowed persons, as well as their adult children, cope with the disruption caused by spousal death. We contend that traditional gender-role socialization across the life course will invariably cause widowhood to be a distinct experience for older men and women. Using changes in housework as an example of a necessary behavioral adjustment following widowhood, we aim to show how the loss of a spouse requires an inevitable process of adjustment in which survivors (and in this case, adult children too) must alter the daily activities and routine responsibilities that were once shared by the couple.

METHOD

SAMPLE

Data are from the CLOC study, a prospective study of widowhood. A two-stage area probability sampling technique was used to collect infor-

mation from married individuals in the Detroit metropolitan area. To participate in the study, respondents had to be noninstitutionalized, capable of participating in a 2-hour face-to-face interview, and an English-speaking member of a married couple where the husband was at least 65 years old. Of those sampled, 1,532 individuals completed a baseline interview prior to spousal loss, yielding a 68% baseline response rate, which is consistent with response rates from other Detroit-area studies. Baseline interviews were conducted during an 11-month period between June 1987 and April 1988.

Following the completion of a baseline interview, the vital status of the respondent's spouse was monitored with death records provided by the state of Michigan. In cases where the death occurred outside of Michigan, the National Death Index was used to confirm the death and to verify the particular cause of death. A total of 319 respondents lost a spouse during the study. Widowed respondents were reinterviewed 6 months after the death of their spouse (Wave 1). Controls from the original sample, individually matched on age, race, and sex, were also reinterviewed at similar time intervals as the widowed persons.

The analytic sample of this article consists of 288 older adults who participated in both the baseline and Wave 1 interviews. Three respondents are excluded from the analytic sample because they were living with children at the time of the 6-month follow-up interview and were thought to depend differently on their children for housework assistance than respondents not living with their children. An additional 8 respondents are excluded because they have missing data on theoretically important variables. Results using sex-specific mean imputation for missing values do not differ from those reported here. Likewise, the excluded cases do not differ from the included cases on major demographic variables. The analytic sample is composed of 202 widowed persons (145 women and 57 men) and 86 matched controls (65 women and 21 men). Women were originally oversampled in an effort to maximize the number of bereaved respondents during the limited study period, whereas controls are fewer in number because funding for the control sample was cut from the proposed budget and not reinstated until halfway through the data-collection period for Wave 1. A final centered weight, which adjusts for unequal probabilities of selection and nonresponse, was applied to all data before analyses were performed. The unweighted sample size is 330 (285 women, 45 men).

MEASURES

Dependent variable. Wave 1 Housework is a self-reported measure of housework performance at the 6-month follow-up. It is measured as the number of hours per week and is based on responses to the following question: "How many hours do you spend preparing food and doing housework in an average week?"

Independent variables. The two primary independent variables include marital status and gender. Widowhood is a dichotomous variable indicating those respondents who became widowed between the baseline and Wave 1 interviews. Sex identifies those respondents who are female. Other independent variables include measures related to the quality of the spouse's health and the extent one depends on adult children for household assistance.

Baseline caregiving is measured with the question, "Does your spouse need to be taken care of because of a health problem? If yes, how many hours a week do you usually spend taking care of him or her?" Respondents who provided at least 1 hour of care per week were coded as caregivers, whereas those who said that their spouses did not need to be taken care of because of a health problem, as well as those who reported having a spouse in a nursing home are the reference group. Spouse health at baseline is assessed with the question "How would you rate your [spouse's] health at the present time?" The five-level response category is collapsed into a dichotomous variable where one indicates fair/poor health.

Dependence on children for housework help is measured at both baseline and Wave 1 with the question, "How much do you depend on [your children] for help with errands and other household chores?" A dichotomous response of "no dependence at all" (reference group) versus "some dependence" is used in the analyses because the effect is driven primarily by whether one depends on children, rather than by the degree to which one depends on children. Although the dichotomous variable does not capture the quality of the parent-child bond or the specific tasks performed for mothers and fathers, it succinctly captures whether intergenerational dependence mediates the effect of widowhood. Proximity to children indicates whether at least one child lives within an hour of the respondent at Wave 1. No children identifies those respondents with no living children.

Control variables. All analyses control for age (measured continuously in years), education (a continuous measure ranging from 3 to 17+ completed years of schooling), total household income at baseline (natural log of income), home ownership at Wave 1 (a dichotomous variable where 1 = *owns home*), and race (a dummy variable where 1 = *White*). The household income variable was originally measured by having respondents indicate which of 10 categories most accurately characterizes their economic status. To create a continuous measure of income, each respondent was assigned the midpoint of the reported income category. The natural log of income is used in this analysis because the distribution of respondents' income is heavily skewed toward the lower income categories.

Each model also contains a control variable for baseline housework, which is assessed in exactly the same way as the Wave 1 measure of housework. Other control variables include household size (the number of people, including the respondent, residing in the household at Wave 1) and activity limitation (a 4-item scale measuring functional limitation at Wave 1). The activity limitation scale ($\alpha = .77$) is standardized across the following four questions: "Because of your health, how much difficulty do you have (a) bathing by yourself, (b) climbing a few flights of stairs, (c) doing heavy housework around the house such as shoveling snow or washing walls, and (d) walking several blocks?" Higher values on this scale indicate higher levels of difficulty with daily activities. Employment status and total number of adult and female children were included in preliminary analyses but were later dropped as they are not significant predictors of housework for this sample.

Finally, all analyses control for the duration between the baseline and Wave 1 interviews. Although all the Wave 1 interviews were conducted with widows 6 months following spousal death, because of variation in the timing of spouse's death, the duration between the baseline interview and the Wave 1 interview ranges from 9 to 76 months.

ANALYTIC PLAN

Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is used to predict the effect of widowhood on housework performance. A residualized change analysis, in which baseline housework is used to predict Wave 1 housework, is used to assess potential changes in behaviors that occurred between the two waves of data collection. All analyses presented in this article separate males and females into sex-specific models, although the multivariate analysis was replicated using the full sample to assess the main effect of

sex (which was always a significant predictor of housework) and the two-way interaction term between sex and each predictor variable. The superscript a in Table 3 denotes significant sex differences in coefficients. Additional moderation analyses, where each independent variable was interacted with widowhood status, examine whether widowhood affects housework performance for everyone equally or whether the effects vary across categories of the independent variables. The superscript b denotes significant widowhood differences in coefficients.

RESULTS

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and *t* tests comparing the male and female samples. With the exception of age and home ownership, the male and female samples appear quite similar in terms of the major demographic characteristics. Men and women do not differ in how they perceive the health of their spouse or whether they provided care to their spouse at baseline. However, there are some important gender differences in housework performance and dependence on children. Despite reporting significantly higher levels of functional impairment than men, females spend significantly more hours per week doing housework than males. At baseline, females do nearly 3 times the amount of housework as their male counterparts (23 hours vs. 8 hours). Between the two waves of data collection, men increase their housework hours by 27%, whereas females decrease their weekly housework by 18% between the two waves of data collection. Although men and women do not differ in their dependence on children at baseline, females are significantly more likely than males to report dependence on children for household assistance at the 6-month follow-up.

Table 2 presents the sex-specific correlations among the housework variables, widowhood status, child dependence indicators, and demographic measures. Not surprisingly, widowhood is significantly correlated with living in smaller households at the 6-month follow-up ($-.50$), providing care to spouse at baseline ($.26$), and reporting spouse's baseline health as poor/fair ($.29$). Being female is positively correlated with baseline housework ($.33$), Wave 1 housework ($.49$), and activity limitation ($.12$), again suggesting that females spend more time doing housework despite having greater activity limitations. Among the female-only sample, dependence on children is significantly correlated with increasing age

TABLE 1
Means and Standard Deviations for Male and Female Respondents

	<i>Males (n = 77)</i>		<i>Females (n = 211)</i>	
	M	SD	M	SD
Dependent variable				
Housework at W1 (in hours/week)	10.59	7.66	18.47	10.90†
Independent variables				
Widowed, W1	0.73	0.45	0.69	0.46
Provided care for spouse, BA	0.14	0.35	0.18	0.39
Spouse health: poor or fair, BA	0.49	0.50	0.52	0.50
Depend on kids for housework, W1	0.52	0.50	0.67	0.47**
Depend on kids for housework, BA	0.61	0.49	0.58	0.50
At least one kid w/in an hour, W1	0.78	0.42	0.74	0.44
No children	0.05	0.23	0.11	0.31
Control variables				
Housework at baseline (in hours/week)	8.32	9.41	22.50	11.92†
Age, W1	76.72	5.99	72.77	6.47†
Education (in years)	11.04	3.41	11.56	2.63
Annual income (in \$), BA	23,579	17,054	21,137	16,429
Own home, W1	0.95	0.23	0.83	0.38*
Race (White)	0.87	0.34	0.84	0.37
Household size, W1	1.67	0.84	1.64	1.02
Activity limitation, W1	0.04	1.03	0.34	1.19**

SOURCE: Changing Lives of Older Couples Study, 1987 to 1993.

NOTE: *t* tests were used to assess significant differences between means. *N*s are weighted *N*s. BA = baseline measurement. W1 = Wave 1 measurement.

* $p \leq .1$. ** $p \leq .05$. † $p \leq .001$.

(.14) and activity limitation (.17), whereas dependence on children is significantly correlated with lower income (–.32) for the male-only sample.

At first inspection, widowhood does not appear to be correlated with housework hours at either baseline or Wave 1 ($r = -.05$ and $.05$, respectively), but given our hypothesis that widowhood affects the housework of men and women differently, the correlation for the full sample should be close to zero. However, when comparing the sex-specific correlation values, widowhood is significantly associated with less housework for women ($r = -.16$) and more housework for men ($r = .42$). To further explore the descriptive patterns of change in housework performance, we compare the mean number of housework hours by marital status and gender, revealing that housework of the nonwidowed sample does not significantly change between baseline and Wave 1 (from 5.3 to 5.3 hours for males and from 22.0 to 21.1 hours for females), whereas the mean number of housework hours for widowed persons does significantly change

TABLE 2
Zero-Order Correlations Among Variables by Sex

	Sex																
	Widowhood (Female)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
1. Housework, W1	-.05	.33**	1.00	.40**	-.19	-.07	-.02	.06	.01	-.31**	-.22	.12	.32**	-.21	.36**	.13	.12
2. Housework, BA	.05	.49**	1.00	.41**	.20	-.01	.13	-.21	.04	-.17	.17	.46**	.35**	-.11	-.05	.15	.16
3. Widow	1.00	-.03	-.16**	.04	1.00	-.09	.03	-.12	.14	-.15	-.32**	.25**	.18	-.14	.15	-.01	-.01
4. Age, W1	-.02	-.27**	.10	.06	-.02	1.00	.09	.12	-.19	.05	-.22	.01	.07	.22	-.22	.11	.12
5. Education	-.06	.08	-.03	.06	-.10	-.21**	1.00	.39**	.12	.21	-.09	.02	-.08	-.31**	-.17	-.01	-.12
6. Income, BA	-.10	-.07	.00	.04	-.09	-.21**	.26**	1.00	.24**	.18	-.23**	.17	.16	.10	-.32**	-.15	-.07
7. Own home, W1	-.06	-.11	.26**	.06	-.11	.14**	.07	.03	1.00	.07	.04	-.03	-.22	-.24**	.02	.18	-.19
8. Race (White)	-.02	-.04	.19**	.05	.01	.04	.05	.18**	.03	1.00	-.44**	.12	-.06	.08	.00	-.08	.10
9. Household size, W1	-.50**	-.01	.26**	.07	-.55**	-.14**	.01	.04	.15**	-.11	1.00	.04	-.16	-.27**	.14	.05	-.12
10. Activity limitation, W1	-.08	.12**	-.18**	-.10	-.05	.23**	-.11	-.06	-.14**	-.07	-.12	1.00	.09	.04	.19	-.12	-.03
11. Spousal caregiving, BA	.26**	.04	-.09	.08	.26**	-.01	-.07	.00	-.17**	.02	-.21**	.07	1.00	.37**	-.05	-.05	.22**
12. Spouse health, BA	.29**	.03	-.03	.08	.34**	-.07	-.08	-.19**	-.21**	-.08	-.06	.04	.34**	1.00	-.11	.12	-.00
13. Depend on kids, W1	.01	.14**	-.21**	-.10	.08	.14**	-.08	-.07	-.05	.10	.02	.17**	.11	.05	1.00	.22	.25**
14. Depend on kids, BA	.04	-.03	-.18**	-.09	.00	.05	.01	-.01	-.01	-.22**	-.03	.10	.16**	-.04	.40**	1.00	.20
15. Kids w/in hour, W1	.03	-.04	-.13**	-.09	.03	.05	.01	-.04	.09	-.16**	-.07	.04	-.01	-.03	.24**	.28**	1.00
16. No children, W1	.01	.07	-.12	-.07	.02	.04	-.05	.11	-.15**	-.08	.03	-.00	-.05	.23**	.29**	-.57**	1.00

SOURCE: Changing Lives of Older Couples Study, 1987 to 1993.

NOTE: Correlation values for the male sample ($n = 77$) are above the diagonal. Correlation values for the female sample ($n = 211$) are below the diagonal. BA = base line, W1 = Wave 1.

**Correlation is significant at $p < .05$ (two-tailed).

between baseline and Wave 1 ($p < .05$). As suggested in Hypothesis 1, female widows do considerably fewer hours of housework after spousal loss (24% decrease from 22.7 to 17.3 hours), whereas widowed males do significantly more hours of housework after spousal loss (33% increase from 9.4 to 12.6 hours).

Finally, in support of our second hypothesis, stating that dependence on children reduces the amount of time spent doing household chores, Wave 1 housework is negatively correlated with whether one depends on their children for housework help at Wave 1 ($r_{\text{males}} = -.21$ and $r_{\text{females}} = -.21$). However, dependence on children and widowhood are not significantly correlated, suggesting that the pattern of adjustment, in terms of whether one receives instrumental support from children, is not the same across all widowed persons.

THE EFFECT OF LATE-LIFE WIDOWHOOD ON THE HOUSEWORK PERFORMANCE OF MEN AND WOMEN

The descriptive patterns of adjustment discussed above indicate that males and females do experience widowhood differently—at least in terms of housework adjustment and dependence on adult children. The following multivariate analysis seeks to identify the reasons why men seem to increase their housework hours after spousal loss whereas women decrease their hours after spousal loss. Table 3 presents the OLS regression models predicting the effect of widowhood on housework performance. Model 1 presents the effect of widowhood on Wave 1 housework performance; Model 2 considers control variables; Model 3 incorporates exogenous factors such as spouse's health characteristics and spousal caregiving behaviors; and Model 4 includes whether one depends on children for assistance following widowhood, while controlling for the availability, proximity, and past helping behaviors of children.

Model 1 supports our hypothesis that widowhood differentially affects the subsequent housework of men and women. Widowers do 6.8 more hours of housework per week than men who did not lose their spouse. Widows do 3.5 fewer hours of housework than continuously married women. These effects are significantly different at the $p < .05$ level, revealing a significant sex difference in the effect of widowhood on subsequent household management. Comparing the adjusted r^2 values from Model 1, widowhood appears to be a far better predictor of housework performance for the male sample than it is for the female sample ($r^2_{\text{male}} = .17$, $r^2_{\text{female}} = .02$).

TABLE 3
**Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) Regression Coefficients Predicting the Effect of
Widowhood on Wave 1 Housework Performance**

	Males				Females			
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Widowed, W1	6.77*** ^a	4.14*** ^a	4.10*** ^a	3.41** ^a	-3.49*** ^a	-0.84 ^a	-1.19 ^a	-0.88 ^a
Baseline housework (in hours/week)		0.44†	0.48†	0.45†		0.36†	0.36†	0.34†
Age (in years)		-0.47† ^a	-0.54†	-0.60† ^a		0.10 ^a	0.11	0.14 ^a
Education (in years)		-0.15	0.01	0.001		-0.36	-0.36	-0.37
Log income		-0.51	-0.94	-1.52		-1.15	-0.96	-0.99
Own home		3.69	4.37	4.39		5.76***	5.92***	5.84***
Race (White)		-2.28	-3.54	-3.71		5.16***	5.18***	4.50**
Household size (number of people)		-2.59*** ^a	-2.51**	-2.68***		1.79*** ^a	1.66**	1.87***
Activity limitation (standardized)		-2.20*** ^a	-2.16***	-1.51**		-1.10** ^a	-1.11*	-0.91
Spouse health (poor/fair), BA			4.36*** ^b	3.72** ^b		1.04	1.04	0.83
Provided spousal caregiving, BA			-5.44*** ^b	-5.33*** ^b		-0.89	-0.89	-0.28
Depend on kids for housework, W1			-3.57***	-3.57***				-2.94*
Constant	6.55	41.48	42.83	50.44	20.21	-5.11	-5.48	-3.83
Adjusted R ²	0.17	0.41	0.48	0.58	0.02	0.31	0.34	0.31
N	77	77	77	77	211	211	211	211

SOURCE: Changing Lives of Older Couples Study, 1987 to 1993.

NOTE: OLS regression coefficients are presented, thus coefficients can be interpreted in "hours per week." BA = baseline. W1 = Wave 1. The months duration between baseline and Wave 1 is controlled in all models (not significant). Model 4 controls for baseline levels of dependent children (not significant), whether the respondent had children (not significant), and whether the respondent had any children living within an hour (not significant).

a. Significant sex interaction ($p \leq .05$).

b. Significant widowhood interaction ($p \leq .05$). Refer to text for interpretation.

* $p \leq .1$. ** $p \leq .05$. *** $p \leq .01$. † $p \leq .001$.

Model 2 illustrates the effect of widowhood on housework performance net of baseline housework, demographic controls, and functional disability. The addition of the control variables significantly improves the fit of the model ($r^2_{\text{male}} = .41$, $r^2_{\text{female}} = .31$) and highlights the effects of demographic predictors on the housework performance of older adults. Baseline housework performance is a significant positive predictor of housework, whereas functional impairment is negatively associated with subsequent housework performance of both men and women. The addition of control variables reduces the effect of widowhood for both men and women, illustrating that widowhood continues to increase the housework performance of men ($\beta = 4.14$ hours, $p < .05$) but no longer has a significant effect on the housework performance of females ($\beta = -0.84$ hours, $p > .05$). Given the reduction of effect for both men and women (but particularly for women), widowhood in Model 1 may serve as a proxy for the demographic variables, suggesting that people with particular demographic characteristics are more likely to be selected into a widowed status. Thus, controlling for demographic differences and baseline characteristics is necessary to fully understand the effect of widowhood, net of selection biases. Furthermore, the addition of demographic control variables shows that, for women, characteristics such as owning one's home, race, and household size are far better predictors of housework performance than the event of widowhood. In fact, standardized regression coefficients (not shown, but available from author on request) illustrate that, for women, widowhood has the least predictive strength among the 10 included variables; whereas, for men, widowhood is among the top five most significant predictors of housework, preceded in strength by baseline housework, age, activity limitation, and household composition.

Model 2 also reveals significant sex differences among several predictors of housework (designated with a superscript a). First, widowhood interacts significantly with sex, showing that men and women do experience different daily consequences related to widowhood—men perform more housework, whereas women decrease or perhaps do not change their housework performance following widowhood. Second, the effect of age differs by sex, showing that males reduce their housework as they age, whereas women do not appear to alter their housework as they age. Third, for every one additional person in the household, females do nearly 2 more hours of housework, whereas males do approximately 2.6 fewer hours per week. And finally, although both men and women decrease their housework hours with increasing activity limitation, functionally impaired men do significantly less housework than functionally impaired women.

Model 2 reveals that individual-level characteristics, such as self-reported health, are important predictors of housework performance, whereas Model 3 considers whether the dyadic consideration of health status is also an important predictor of housework performance. Results from Model 3 show that the main effect of widowhood (for men only) and the interaction term (sex and widowhood) both remain significant, even after controlling for baseline caregiving and spousal health. Males who report their spouse's baseline health as poor or fair exhibit more than 4 hours of additional housework at Wave 1 compared to men who have healthy wives. However, women's housework does not appear to be a function of whether their spouses were sick at baseline. Similarly, the coefficient for baseline caregiving is significant for men ($p < .05$) but not for women, suggesting that men who provided care for their spouse at baseline do 5.4 fewer hours of housework than men who did not provide care for their spouse. This finding corroborates the sex-specific correlation values presented in Table 2; male caregivers report significantly greater levels of baseline housework than male noncaregivers (.46), but female caregivers do not significantly differ from female noncaregivers.

Additional moderation analyses (designated with the subscript b) further illuminate these findings. The spousal health characteristics, particularly for the male sample, interact significantly with widowhood status. Among the male-only sample, widowers who provided care for their spouse and those who report their spouse as having poor/fair health at baseline report significantly fewer hours of housework at the 6-month follow-up compared to the nonwidowed males or the widowed males who did not provide spousal caregiving or report an ill wife. This finding, which is also replicated later in Model 4, may suggest that a widower who cares for his ill spouse prior to her death may inflate his report of baseline housework performance by including caregiving tasks in the calculation of hours.

DEPENDENCE ON CHILDREN AS A MEDIATING VARIABLE

The second objective of this article is to explore the extent to which men and women depend on adult children for housework assistance and whether their dependency mediates the relationship between widowhood and housework performance. Figure 1 illustrates the change in mean levels of dependence among widowed persons and matched controls, alluding to significant gender differences in the patterns of support. The proportion of female widows, male controls, and female controls that depend on children generally increases between baseline and Wave 1 interviews

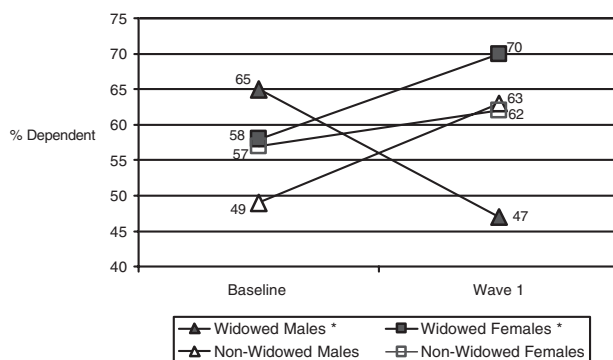


Figure 1: Percentage of Older Adults Who Depend on Their Children for Household Help at Baseline and Wave 1.

SOURCE: Data are from the Changing Lives of Older Couples Study, 1987 to 1993.

NOTE: Repeated measures *t* tests were used to assess significant mean differences over time, **p* ≤ .05, meaning that baseline ≠ Wave 1.

(although not significantly for the control group). Widowed males, on the other hand, exhibit a significant decrease in their dependence on children for instrumental support. Widowers represent the highest proportion dependent on children at baseline (65%) yet the lowest proportion dependent on children at Wave 1 (47%). This anomalous pattern of decreasing dependence among widowed males may prove important in explaining why widowed men significantly alter their housework on the death of their wives. Does the reduced dependence on children among the widower sample partially explain why men have significantly higher housework hours following widowhood?

Model 4 of Table 3 presents the mediation effects of whether older widowed persons receive instrumental assistance from their adult noncoresidential children. In support of Hypothesis 2, dependence on children at Wave 1 reduces the amount of time older adults spend doing housework ($\beta_{\text{males}} = -3.57$ hours per week, *p* .05; $\beta_{\text{females}} = -2.94$ hours per week, *p* .10). Model 4 also controls for the proximity of children (not significant), the availability of children (not significant), and whether the respondent depended on children at baseline (not significant). The effect of widowhood on subsequent housework performance is reduced for both men and women once we control for instrumental dependence—a 17% decrease for males and a 26% decrease for females. Although the relative mediation is greater for female widows, the magnitude of mediation is greater for widowers (.7 hours vs. .3 hours, respectively).

Model 4 furthermore shows that the effects of demographic and health variables remain relatively unchanged once we account for child dependence. When evaluating the standardized regression coefficients corresponding to the values presented in Table 3 (not shown, but available on request), widowhood remains among the least predictive variables for women's housework performance, and among the most predictive variables for men's housework performance. Likewise, the gender difference in the effect of widowhood remains significant, even after controlling for various family dynamics (e.g., intergenerational dependence) and other exogenous factors (e.g., health). Results of the full model show that widowers increase their housework by more than 3 hours per week after spousal loss, whereas female widows do not significantly differ from their nonwidowed counterparts. Family dynamics, such as dependence on children, partially account for a portion of the variation in the adjustment patterns displayed by men and women.

DISCUSSION

The preceding analyses demonstrate gender differences in how older adults adjust their daily activities in response to widowhood and how this adjustment process also affects members of the bereaved person's immediate social network. We find that both gender and intergenerational transfers play a significant role in shaping the daily lives of an older widowed person. Although findings show that widowers experience greater absolute levels of adjustment compared to widows, we do not want to assume that an increase in housework is necessarily more stressful, especially because women—regardless of age, marital context, or health status—continue to perform significantly more housework than men. If higher levels of housework create some sort of unnecessary burden, then we should be most concerned about the gender inequity found in the allocation of household roles.

The stress literature emphasizes that change can be either adaptive or maladaptive depending on whether the individual has the resources necessary to endure the change (Emirbayer & Micsche, 1998; Rodin, 1987; Showers & Ryff, 1996; Wheaton, 1990). The need to perform routine household tasks may be a tremendous source of stress for the spouse who lacks the prior experience or the necessary training needed to perform these mundane tasks (Carr & Utz, 2002). Umberson et al. (1992) found that, for widowed men, household chores are particularly stressful and contribute to an increased vulnerability to depression following widow-

hood. Similarly, Carr et al. (2000) found that widowed persons have higher postwidowhood anxiety if they had been highly dependent on their spouse for specific household tasks. Thus, future research may want to consider the preloss instrumental arrangements of the married couple to more fully understand the emotional bereavement and psychological stress associated with losing a spouse. Identifying the instrumental voids that are created on widowhood may also help practitioners offer effective care and support interventions for widow(er)s.

THE EFFECT OF LATE-LIFE WIDOWHOOD ON HOUSEWORK

Consistent with past research (Gupta, 1999; South & Spitze, 1994), our findings show that widowers perform significantly more housework than married men, whereas widows perform significantly less housework than married women. Bereaved husbands do nearly 7 more hours of housework than married men, whereas bereaved wives do 3.5 hours less than married women (the net difference represented by the main effect of widowhood is roughly equal to 1 standard deviation for men and $\frac{1}{3}$ standard deviation for women). This effect is fully mediated for women and only partially mediated for men after controlling for demographic and exogenous factors, such as race, income, and health. Although we replicate the findings of past research on widowers' increased housework performance, the hypothesized pattern of decreased housework for older widows is only partially supported.

A primary explanation for why we did not fully replicate the hypothesized pattern of change for women is perhaps related to the age of the sample. The CLOC sample is limited to couples where the husband is at least 65 years old, whereas past research considers widows of all ages in a single analysis. Although institutionalization rates increase with age and are more common among older women than men (Holden, McBride, & Perozek, 1997), it is important to remember that the older widows from the CLOC sample are all noninstitutionalized and assumedly still have housework to complete on a daily basis. Younger widows, such as those found in the Gupta (1999) and the South and Spitze (1994) analyses, are likely to increase the hours spent in paid employment and the time spent performing child-rearing tasks. Such activities may compete with a young widow's time to do housework (Szinovacz, 2000). Older widows, on the other hand, are generally retired/unemployed and no longer have to provide for children on a daily basis, assuming that most of their children are grown and living away from the nuclear household. Thus, one explanation

for why we did not replicate the findings of previous research regarding widows' decrease in housework is because older bereaved women are not forced to split their time between the increasing demands of employment, child rearing, and household management. In addition, past research finds that young children often increase their daily chores to support the household after a parent has died (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991). Because the children of the CLOC sample are grown and live outside of the nuclear household, older widows may not benefit from the relief offered from younger coresiding children. These interpretations suggest that the daily consequences of widowhood may be tied to the stage of the life course at which it occurs; thus, future studies of bereavement should isolate the experience of late-life widowhood from that of younger widows.

Furthermore, our findings suggest that changes in the marital relationship are important predictors of whether older men will perform the traditionally female tasks of routine housework. According to our analyses, men increase their housework hours as a result of either their wife's illness or their wife's death. Changing marital status or the health characteristics of the spouse do not, however, impact women's performance of housework. Because women typically perform the bulk of the housework throughout the marriage, they may not need to assume any additional tasks when their husband dies or becomes ill. We contend that these findings reiterate the persistence of traditional gender roles throughout the life course: Regardless of her age or familial circumstance, a woman is primarily responsible for the daily maintenance of the household. However, our findings offer a caveat to the traditional gendered division of labor theory: Although men do significantly less housework than women, they do appear to alter their participation in household activities when the wife is incapable or unavailable to carry out these tasks for the couple.

All in all, our analyses suggest that traditional gender roles persist across the life course, even when there is no rational or economic reason for their persistence. Consistent with prior research, we find that older women, regardless of age or marital status, continue to perform more housework than their male counterparts (Keith, 1994). Our research, therefore, offers little support for the gender-role androgyny theory, which states that gender inequity will dissipate with age. Instead, a developmental perspective that considers an individual's lifetime of behaviors and preferences is more useful in trying to understand why men and women continue to specialize in particular tasks as they age and in the face of stressful life events such as widowhood.

**THE EFFECT OF LATE-LIFE WIDOWHOOD
ON INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSFERS**

The second primary goal of the analysis is to assess how adult children may help alleviate the stresses associated with late-life widowhood. We find that depending on adult children for housework assistance mediates the effect of widowhood on housework, thus offering support for our second and third hypotheses. Adult children may assist their older parents with household tasks as a way to relieve some of the disruption caused by widowhood or as a way to express care and concern for the widowed parent (Lopata, 1996). This finding highlights the premise that human lives are interconnected and interdependent. Although adult children appear to be instrumental in the adjustment process, we caution against assuming that they are the only ones who can assist grieving elders. A cultural idealization of filial responsibility may mask the need for other support systems or public assistance that could benefit those widowed persons who do not have children or whose children do not live in geographic proximity.

Findings suggest that both men and women do considerably less housework when they receive instrumental support from adult children; however, women are more likely than men to receive such assistance from their children. Gender differences in dependence on adult children are likely a result of women's propensity to be kinkeepers (Goldscheider, 1990; Hagestad, 1986). Widows may be more likely to seek out or elicit assistance with housework from children because they have been socialized to be the kinkeepers and social coordinators throughout their marriage. In contrast, widowers may decrease contact with adult children as a result of losing their wife's kinkeeping abilities, thus resulting in fewer available persons to offer assistance with errands and other household chores.

Perceptions of vulnerability regarding elderly men and women may also account for the gender differences in intergenerational dependence. Adult children appear to rally support for mothers during vulnerable times, perhaps because they see her as the so-called frail old woman during these times of need. Bereaved mothers report the highest levels of dependence at Wave 1, whereas the soon-to-be widowers report the highest levels of dependence at baseline. The soon-to-be widowers should be considered in the context of the couple; they represent a relatively healthy husband with a generally sick wife at the time of the baseline measurement. Thus, the widowers' high dependency at baseline may, in fact, reflect adult children responding to the needs of a sick or dying mother. At

the time of the follow-up interview, the widowed mothers received the highest levels of assistance from adult children. On the basis of these findings, children appear to provide more support to mothers than they do to fathers, especially in times of perceived vulnerability such as illness or widowhood. Future studies, perhaps using couple-level data, should explore whether gender differences in levels of intergenerational exchange persist across other instances of perceived vulnerability.

Future studies should also assess whether these findings are specific to the cohorts born in the early 20th century. For example, will gender differences continue to persist in future cohorts where household tasks may be less sex specific? And, will future cohorts of adult children view the vulnerabilities of mothers and fathers differently? The women of the CLOC sample may be more likely to rely on others for assistance with household management tasks because the attributes of self-reliance and independence were not imbued in this generation of women, as they are in cohorts of women born more recently (Carr & Utz, 2002). As a result, their children may be more likely to adopt the frail-old-woman stereotype, believing that their mothers are in greater need of instrumental assistance than their more capable fathers. Future cohorts of older adults will have higher levels of education, and more years of work experience, and will have participated in a more egalitarian division of household labor (Bianchi, 1995). Thus, future generations of older adult may be less dependent on spouses and children for instrumental tasks (Carr & Utz, 2002). The increasing trend of divorce may further weaken father-child relationships (Goldscheider, 1990), suggesting that the changing demographics of the American family may actually perpetuate the tendency of children to provide more support to their bereaved mothers than their bereaved fathers.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Although widowhood is the most common form of marital dissolution among older adults, this study is not a comprehensive evaluation of the relationship between marital status and housework performance among older couples. It is not clear whether the response of adult children in this analysis is specific to late-life widowhood or if these patterns of intergenerational support are applicable to other forms of spousal loss. For example, Zick and Smith (1991a, 1991b) found that widowed men receive more social support than their divorced counterparts. Likewise other researchers find disparate patterns of social support offered to divorced and widowed women (Kitson & Roach, 1989; Miller, Smerglia, Gaudet,

& Kitson, 1998). Future research should compare the consequences of all types of marital dissolution on the daily lives of older men and women. This analysis may become increasingly more important as future cohorts of older adults are likely to experience higher rates of marital dissolution via divorce.

Future research should also explore measurement issues related to housework. The measure of housework used in these analyses excludes the number of hours spent doing home maintenance or major repairs, the portion of household labor where traditionally men make the greatest contribution (Kramer & Lambert, 1999; Szinovacz, 2000). As a result, our findings may underestimate the amount of household labor initially provided by men or the amount of assistance provided to widows. It is possible that adult children provide greater assistance with male-typed housework to their widowed mothers, as these tasks may be most problematic for widows or roles for which women have not been previously socialized. However, given that functional disability is fairly common among the older population, both older men and older women face greater difficulty performing these male-typed tasks and thus both are likely to exhibit increased dependence for this type of chore. Although our measure of housework performance does not capture all types of household chores, it does capture the most salient aspect of household maintenance that must be routinely performed by older adults. Both widows and widowers are required to perform the female-typed tasks such as daily housework and meal preparation, regardless of the amount or type of housework performed previously in the life course.

Future research may also consider measurement issues related to whether older adults confound housework and caregiving tasks. Our findings, consistent with past research of Stone et al. (1987), suggest that older adults may not carefully distinguish between housework and caregiving tasks. Providing care for a spouse at baseline decreases the amount of housework done in Wave 1, particularly for men. Thus, spousal caregivers may consider housework a part of caregiving responsibilities or vice versa. Although past research finds that men and women overestimate their housework hours by as much as 50% (Robinson & Godbey, 1997), little attention has been devoted to whether this overestimation may be a result of including other tasks such as caregiving in the calculation of housework hours. Are the tasks of caregiving and housework conceptually distinct or are the two activities so conceptually similar that they cannot be teased apart? And do men and women define the two tasks differently? Future research, based primarily on the insight from an older population, should seek to clarify the distinction between housework and

caregiving duties. Gender differences in what tasks are considered housework and what tasks constitute caregiving should also be carefully explored. A qualitative exploration of these measurement issues will considerably improve the validity of survey data regarding how older adults spend their daily lives.

In conclusion, the findings of this research indicate that late-life widowhood creates different consequences for the daily lives of men and women. We suggest that gender differences in the division of household labor as well as in the formation and maintenance of social networks are explained, in part, by the persistence of traditional gender roles throughout the life course. All told, the findings summarize two important themes relevant to widowhood research. First, widowhood is not experienced in isolation; persons facing the unfortunate experience of late-life widowhood receive considerable support from kin, including assistance with errands and household chores. Second, the adjustments associated with widowhood vary by individual characteristics (e.g., gender) and dyadic considerations (e.g., spousal health). Thus, this analysis reiterates the need to consider the unique effects of individual, dyadic, and intergenerational characteristics to understand the diverse trajectories associated with late-life bereavement (Carr & Utz, 2002).

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