

Paid Work, Child Care, and Housework: A National Survey of High School Seniors' Preferences for Sharing Responsibilities Between Husband and Wife¹

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A large national sample of high school seniors rated their preferences for the allocation of work and family duties within their own prospective marriages. The results indicate that many seniors favor half-time or full-time work for wives without children. On the other hand, the majority prefer that the mother of preschool children stay home, although half-time work is acceptable to many. Respondents who are male or White or did not have a working mother themselves are somewhat more conservative on these issues. Virtually all seniors view less than full-time employment by the husband as unacceptable. With regard to child care and housework, most seniors prefer equal sharing between the spouses. A comparison of four senior classes reveals a slight trend from 1976 to 1979 toward increased sharing of duties.

The term "sex role" is used to denote a wide range of normative and behavioral differences between the sexes. Among the core differences are those involving the division of work and family responsibilities between husband and wife. Historically, this division of responsibilities emerged during industrialization, when production was moved out of the home and into the factories. While women stayed home and attended to children and

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housework, men followed the opportunities for paid work and began to specialize more exclusively in production. This pattern was described by Parsons and Bales (1955) as the basic role structure of the family, according to which the husband is the task-oriented leader and the wife the emotional caretaker of the family members.

That this role structure is not inherent in the family, but reflects the effect of certain historical constellations, has been argued by Young and Willmott (1973), who describe a more integrated pattern of work between husband and wife for preindustrialized society. Working in close proximity, both partners were then involved in productive as well as maintenance tasks. The historical relativity of sex-segregated role structure is further documented by the recent changes in sex roles. Most notable among these is the increasing number of gainfully employed married women (Treiman & Terrell, 1975; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1976). During the 1950s and 1960s this increase consisted primarily of middle-aged women without children at home; in the 1970s the large part was accounted for by younger women with preschool children (Bednarzik & Klein, 1977; Farkas, 1977). While much of the earlier research suggested that the wife's participation in the work force is associated with increased involvement of the husband in housework and child care (Blood & Hamblin, 1958; Blood & Wolfe, 1960; Holmstrom, 1972; Weil, 1961), more recent studies relying on the time budget method for assessing housework and child care have questioned this conclusion (Meissner, Humphreys, Meis, & Scheu, 1975; Robinson, 1977). These studies tend to show very little difference between the involvement of husbands of working and nonworking wives. Whatever the exact change in the husband's role may turn out to be, it is clearly much less extensive than the change in the wife's role.

In discussing these various forms of division of family responsibilities, it appears useful to view the family as a unit faced with a set of tasks all of which are relevant to maintaining the physical and psychological well-being of its members (Ericksen, Yancey, & Ericksen, 1979; Pleck, 1977). Historically, different solutions for allocation of these tasks have emerged, some of them more sex segregated, some more shared. At present, we seem to be witnessing a trend towards sharing of duties between husband and wife, although the trend is more adequately described as reflecting some involvement of each partner in the other's sphere rather than equal sharing of major tasks (Young & Willmott, 1973). Furthermore, the degree of sharing is more pronounced for the work role than for the family roles.

Within the adult population, these trends toward more egalitarian division of labor appear to be paralleled by attitudinal changes (Mason, Czajka, & Arber, 1976; Thornton & Freedman, 1979). But what are the attitudes of young people who have not yet entered marital and parental

roles? With what expectations do they approach these roles? And how flexible are their expectations? This latter point is critical in a time of change when partners are more likely to bring different expectations into their marriage, and flexibility may facilitate their negotiation process. The evidence on all these questions is incomplete and inconsistent. Some investigators have observed trends towards egalitarian attitudes among college students (Bayer, 1975; Parelius, 1975), but others have reported considerable conservatism among high school students, and in some instances also among college students (Angrist, Mickelsen, & Penna, 1977; Christensen, 1961; Dunn, 1960; Nelson & Goldman, 1969; Osmond & Martin, 1975; Payne, 1956). Many of the latter studies suffer from methodological limitations such as old and possibly obsolete data, use of local samples of students, or question formats not detailed enough to enable a careful analysis of the range of possible attitudes.

Naturally, the attitudes of individuals are likely to vary, apart from the aggregate changes over time. According to a socialization perspective, the social environment encountered during childhood and adolescence constitutes an important influence on individuals' subsequent expectations and aspirations. For example, Black women traditionally have been involved in the labor force in higher percentages than have White women, and the presence of preschool children has not served as much as a barrier to their employment as it has in the White community (Bowen & Finegan, 1969; Scanzoni, 1971; Sweet, 1973). Also, Black couples are reported as more egalitarian in the division of housework (Ericksen et al., 1979; for a contrasting finding, see Blood & Wolfe, 1960) and in decision making (Scanzoni, 1971; Willie & Greenblatt, 1978). Leaving aside the issue of how these constellations in family and cultural background are transmitted, we might predict Black adolescents would be more supportive of shared family responsibilities than Whites.

The prediction from socioeconomic status is somewhat less straightforward. On one hand, support for less traditional sex roles has been concentrated among the higher socioeconomic and particularly among the more highly educated strata (Mason & Bumpass, 1975; Thornton & Freedman, 1979); and more highly educated women have been more likely to enter the labor force (Bowen & Finegan, 1969; Sweet, 1973). On the other hand, husbands in the higher job echelons and higher income brackets are less likely to have a working wife (Kreps, 1971), they experience more work demands that interfere with their involvement in housework and child care (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), and they have more marital power to resist such involvement (Ericksen et al., 1979) than husbands in lower income brackets. In a study of approximately 250 couples, upper- and middle-class respondents reported considerable sharing of roles and decision making,

while lower-class respondents described more sex-segregated patterns (Rainwater, 1965). Perhaps the relationship between socioeconomic status and sex-role attitudes is even curvilinear. In sum, it is not entirely clear how the family of higher socioeconomic level differs from the lower level family regarding the role model provided to offspring.

The sex-role relevant climate of a family can be specified better if direct measures of the hypothesized mediators are available. One such example is the model set by a working mother. As reviewed by Hoffman and Nye (1974), the positive effects on daughters of having had a working mother include higher than average career aspirations, nontraditional sex-role concepts, greater approval for employment by mothers of young children, and a higher evaluation of female competence. Although some have suggested that the effect of a mother's work may interact with her own orientations towards her work and with the nature of her relationship with her offspring (Macke & Morgan, 1978; Safilios-Rothschild, 1979), we have no measures to test any interactions of this sort.

Of course, sex-role attitudes are not related only to family background and family's implicit attitudes about sex roles. The adolescent's own educational plans are likely to be important correlates also. Since educational aspirations are correlated with parental education (Alexander & Eckland, 1974; Hout & Morgan, 1975; Sewell & Shah, 1967), their effects reflect to some degree the influence of parental education on sex-role attitudes; but they also reflect the kind of peer subgroup an adolescent is likely to be involved with, the kind of educational experiences he or she is likely to be exposed to in high school, and the kind of future work and family roles he or she envisages. Educational plans might thus be predicted to be related to sex-role attitudes.

Sex-role attitudes may also be consistent with broader ideological orientations. Role differentiation by sex is an integral part of Judeo-Christian religions. Although there appears to be some variation among specific religious denominations, most of them support the traditional family and its procreative function, and thereby indirectly discourage changes of the female role. Thus, individuals with strong religious commitments seem likely to also exhibit relatively more traditional views on sharing of family and work roles.

By a similar token, notions of male superiority are fundamental parts of a patriarchal social structure (Lipman-Blumen & Tickamyer, 1975), while philosophies on the left tend to view women's emancipation as a form of class struggle and thus support female equality. Liberal political views might therefore be expected to be related positively to sharing of roles as a means of achieving equality between the sexes (Hershey & Sullivan, 1977).

The development of sex-role attitudes from an undifferentiated to a sex-stereotypical to a flexible orientation is conceptualized by some authors as a function of cognitive development (Kohlberg, 1966; Rebecca, Hefner, & Oleshansky, 1976). Assuming a Piagetian perspective, they argue that sex-role attitudes, like moral development, can become less stereotypical and more flexible only to the extent that cognitive development has also proceeded beyond the conformist to a flexible stage. By extension, the sharing of work and family duties might be expected to relate to the cognitive ability level of adolescents.

In order to (a) describe in detail adolescents' preferences for the division of labor between husband and wife, including the flexibility inherent in the various alternatives; (b) assess changes in these preferences over recent years; and (c) explore potential correlates; data from a large annual survey of high school seniors are examined and reported. In several respects, the items used here to measure preferences are more detailed than the measures contained in most surveys. First, using a scale ranging from "not at all acceptable" to "desirable," seniors rate each of five different ways a particular family task might be apportioned between the spouses. The apportionments range from traditionally sex segregated to completely shared to segregated in a sex-reversed sense. This format allows each respondent to express the latitude of his or her acceptance across the range of arrangements, in addition to indicating his or her preferred arrangement. These ratings are furthermore made separately for each of three major tasks—paid employment, child care, and housework. The three tasks cover the major responsibilities of a couple towards its family of procreation; and their separate assessments will enable examinations of the various aspects of the female and the male role. Finally, critical family circumstances, such as whether the wife holds paid employment or the couple has young children, are specified (i.e., the respondent is asked to imagine himself or herself in each of the specific family situations). This has the effect of making the measures more specific and more reliable, since preferences are likely to be contingent upon the situation that the respondents assume to exist. Of course, these contingencies are not entirely independent of each other; for example, intended labor force participation affects intended family size (Waite & Stolzenberg, 1976). But scenarios as broadly defined as these will apply to large parts of the adult population at some point during their life cycle (Glick, 1977) and thus may be specified as general contingencies.

The question format results in the following set of items, each of which is rated on a 4-point scale: "not at all acceptable," "somewhat acceptable," "acceptable," and "desirable."

1. Couple without children
 - (a) Husband works full-time, wife not employed outside home
 - (b) Husband works full-time, wife works about half-time
 - (c) Both work full-time
 - (d) Husband works about half-time, wife works full-time
 - (e) Husband not employed, wife works full-time
2. Couple with one or more preschool children;
 - (a) - (e) identical to (1)
3. Couple with one or more preschool children;
Husband works full-time, wife not employed outside home
 - (a) Wife does all (day-to-day) child care
 - (b) Wife does most of it
 - (c) Both do it equally
 - (d) Husband does most of it
 - (e) Husband does all of it
4. Couple with one or more preschool children;
husband and wife both work full-time
 - (a) Wife does all (day-to-day) child care (after working hours and on weekends)
 - (b) - (e) identical to (3)
5. Husband and wife work full-time
 - (a) Wife does all cooking, cleaning, laundry
 - (b) - (e) identical to (3)

METHOD

The data for the reported analyses are based on several questionnaire segments, each administered to approximately 3,000 high school seniors who represent randomly selected subsamples of Monitoring the Future project's annual data collection. The Monitoring the Future project is intended to monitor the life-styles and values of American youth, including a wide variety of attitudes and expectations about marriage, parenting, work, and education. The basic research design involves annual data collections during the spring, beginning with the class of 1975. (Descriptive results from the first four data collections are contained in Johnston & Bachman, 1980; Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1980a, 1980b; Johnston, Bachman, & O'Malley, 1980).

Each data collection takes place in approximately 115 public and 15 private high schools, selected to provide an accurate cross-section of the United States. The actual sampling procedure is multistage (Kish, 1965) as follows: Stage 1 is the selection of particular geographic areas, stage 2 is the selection of one or more high schools in each area, and stage 3 is the

selection of seniors within each high school. This sampling procedure results in an area probability sample of the coterminous United States.

Data are collected by questionnaires administered in the classroom during a normal class period, although circumstances in some schools require a larger group administration. The administrations are conducted by professional interviewers following standardized procedures. (For a detailed description of the study's design and procedures, see Bachman & Johnston, 1978.)

In the present article, data from the 1979 survey are used for the part that deals with description; analyses of trends and of correlates are based on the data from 1976 through 1979.

RESULTS

Description of Preferences for Division of Family Responsibilities

A graphic display was developed to summarize the data in a quickly apprehendable form (complete percentage tables are included in Herzog, Bachman, & Johnston, 1979). Since this sort of figure will be used throughout this entire section, we will outline some of its key features, using Figure 1 as an example.

1. The different possible divisions of labor are arrayed as a rough continuum across the bottom of the figure, ranging from a high degree of labor specialization of the traditional type (on the left), to an egalitarian sharing of labor, to a high degree of labor specialization of a sex-reversed type (on the right). (One other possible arrangement, both partners working half-time, did not fit neatly on the continuum and is not further discussed here.)

2. The bottom set of profile lines in Figure 1 shows the percentages of males (solid line) and females (dashed line) who rated each arrangement as *desirable*.

3. The next set of lines shows the percentage who rate each arrangement as *at least acceptable*—i.e., as either desirable or acceptable.

4. The top set of lines indicates the percentage who rate each arrangement as *at least somewhat acceptable*.

5. The distance between the top set of lines and 100% represents those who rate the alternative as *not at all acceptable*.

Division of Paid Work. It is clear from Figure 1 that the two most widely accepted types of working arrangement for a couple without children is for the husband to work full-time while the wife is employed either full-

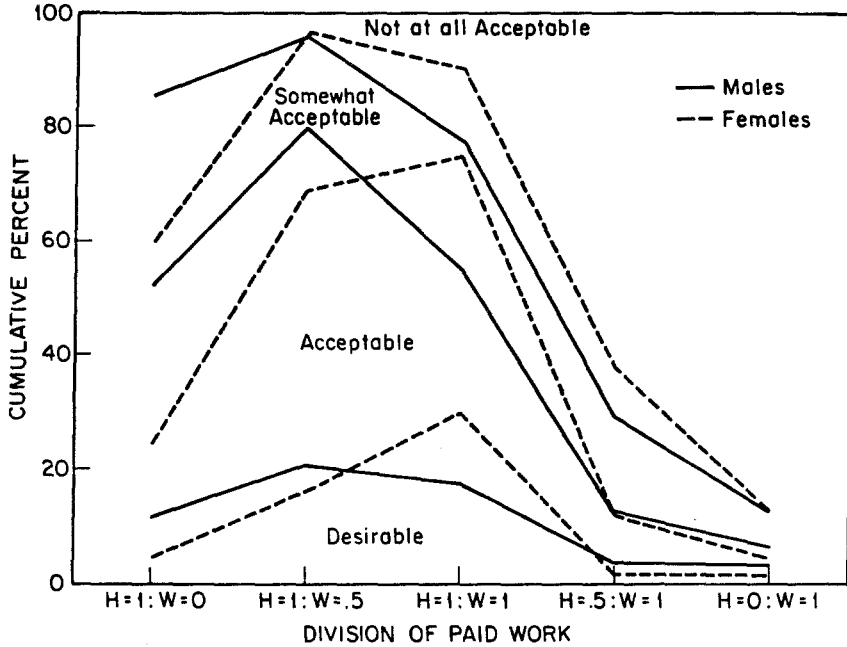


Fig. 1. Preferred division of paid work (no children). The bottom lines trace the percentages of males and females who rate each arrangement as desirable, the intermediate lines the cumulative percentages who rate each arrangement as either desirable or acceptable, the top lines the cumulative percentages who rate each arrangement as either desirable, acceptable, or somewhat acceptable.

time or half-time. These two alternatives receive the largest proportions of desirable and acceptable ratings by both males and females. It is interesting to note that the least problematic alternative for both sexes—the one that only about 4% rate not at all acceptable—involves the husband working full-time and the wife working half-time. While for many this is not their first choice, this compromise between traditionality and egalitarianism presumably comes close enough to be acceptable or at least somewhat acceptable to almost everyone. In contrast, the completely shared arrangement with both partners working full-time is not universally acceptable; about 23% of the males and 10% of the females rate it as unacceptable.

The most traditional arrangement, in which the husband is employed full-time while the wife is not employed, is considered desirable by only about 12% of the males and 5% of the females. The sex differences are most striking in the proportions who find this alternative not at all acceptable—40% of the females feel they could not accept this arrangement compared with only 15% of the males.

The right-hand portion of Figure 1 shows what might be termed sex-role reversal—wife employed full-time with husband employed only half-time or not at all. It is very clear from Figure 1 that this is not a popular notion among high school seniors. Large majorities of both males and females rate these arrangements as unacceptable. It may not be surprising that fully 87% of males rule out an arrangement in which they would not be employed at all (with a full-time working wife); however, it is interesting that just as many females (87%) would be unwilling to tolerate a not employed husband. In other words, only 13% of the female seniors would consider it even marginally acceptable to work full-time and “support” a spouse with no job; in contrast, fully 85% of male seniors would find it at least marginally acceptable to have a wife with no employment outside the home.

Preferences for the woman’s work arrangement are most dramatically affected by the existence of preschool children in the family, as the answers to a second set of questions (exhibited in Figure 2) illustrate. Among the five alternatives for the division of paid work, the arrangement clearly preferred above all others is that the husband work full-time and the

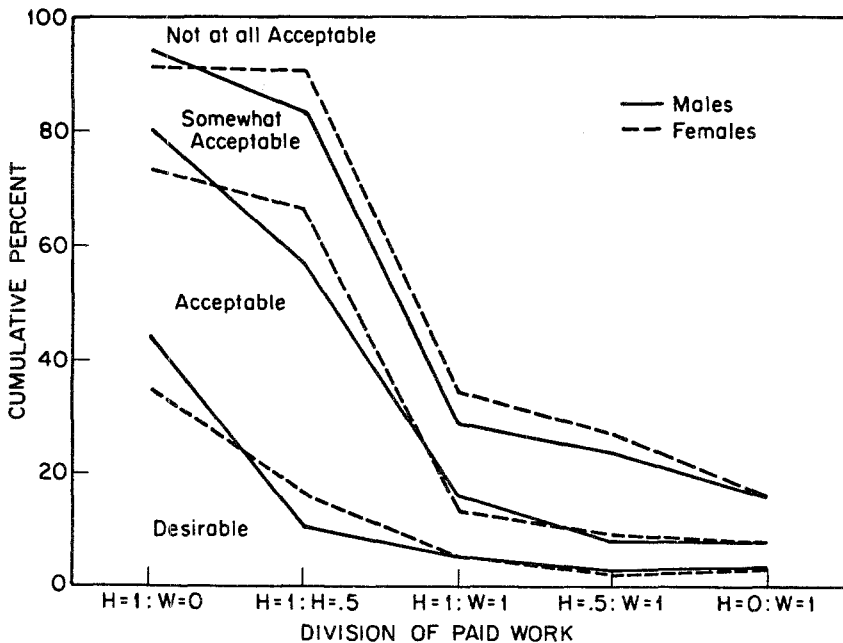


Fig. 2. Preferred division of paid work (preschool children).

wife not hold a paid job. Thirty-nine percent of the seniors rate this arrangement as desirable and only 8% consider it not at all acceptable.

Any arrangement in which the wife would work full-time, on the other hand, finds little acceptance; 69% or more judge each of these alternatives as not acceptable. Moreover, only 14% think it desirable for the wife to work half-time if the husband is working. A large majority feel, however, that they could at least accept this latter arrangement. This finding suggests that half-time work by the mother of young children is becoming the widely accepted nontraditional option.

Interestingly, the profile lines show that the acceptability of a wife's working does not vary with the extent to which her husband works; i.e., there appears to be little weight given to the fact that a husband who is not employed could take on some of the child care responsibilities his working wife cannot manage.

Division of Child Care. Two questions directly dealing with child care were included in the set of division-of-labor questions. Consider first the preferences for child care arrangements for a couple in which only the husband is employed, as shown in Figure 3. In this family situation, equal responsibility for child care is the most often desired alternative (35%) and

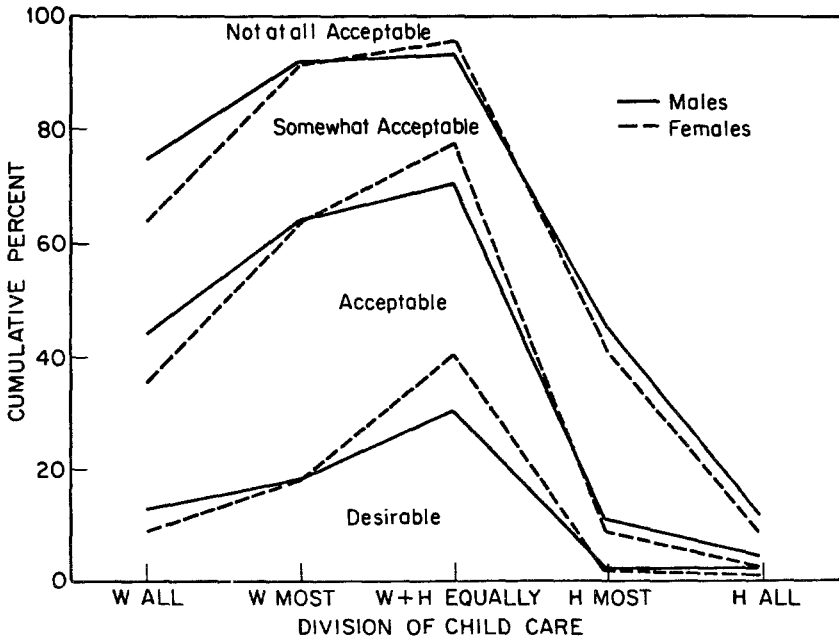


Fig. 3. Preferred division of child care (husband works full-time).

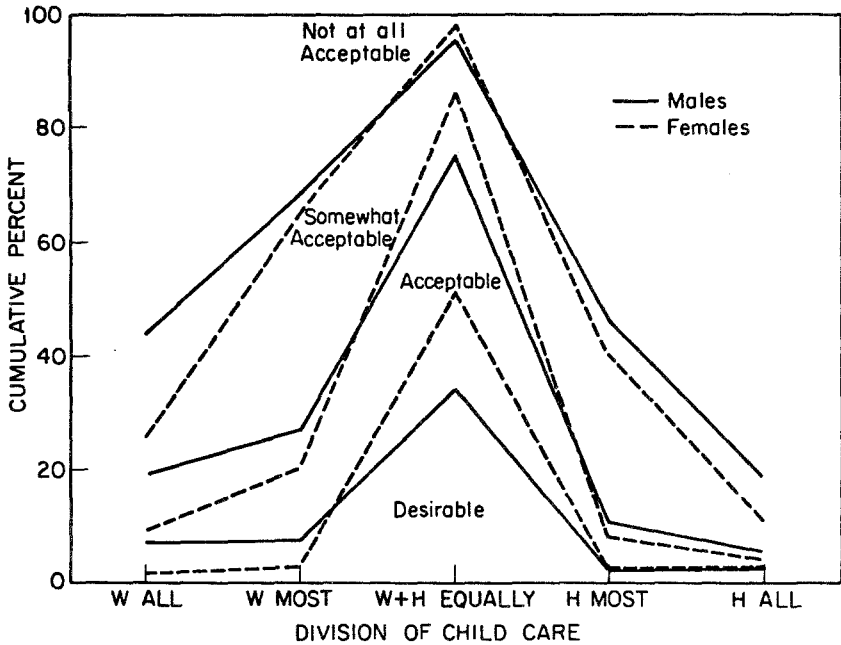


Fig. 4. Preferred division of child care (husband and wife work full-time).

is rejected by almost none (6%). The mother handling all of the child care responsibilities is judged as desirable by only a few (11%) and as unacceptable by a goodly number (31%). These findings may seem surprising in that they suggest that the husband should share child care responsibilities equally with his wife, in addition to having a full-time job. However, "child care" may be understood in less inclusive terms by many seniors than the entire range of chores of keeping children fed, dressed, changed, and supervised. Respondents may be thinking primarily in terms of time spent in active interaction with children or of the time when both parents can be home. If this is the case, the equally shared involvement of a full-time employed husband and a non-employed wife might seem more feasible. Ex post facto, we can only suggest that the dimension of child care used in this set of questions may be less precise in its meaning than the dimension of paid employment. Nevertheless, it appears safe to conclude from these data that seniors do not believe that a father is relieved of child care responsibilities by virtue of being the sole breadwinner in the family.

Consider next the situation of the working couple, shown in Figure 4. Since this situation deals with the division of child care on evenings and

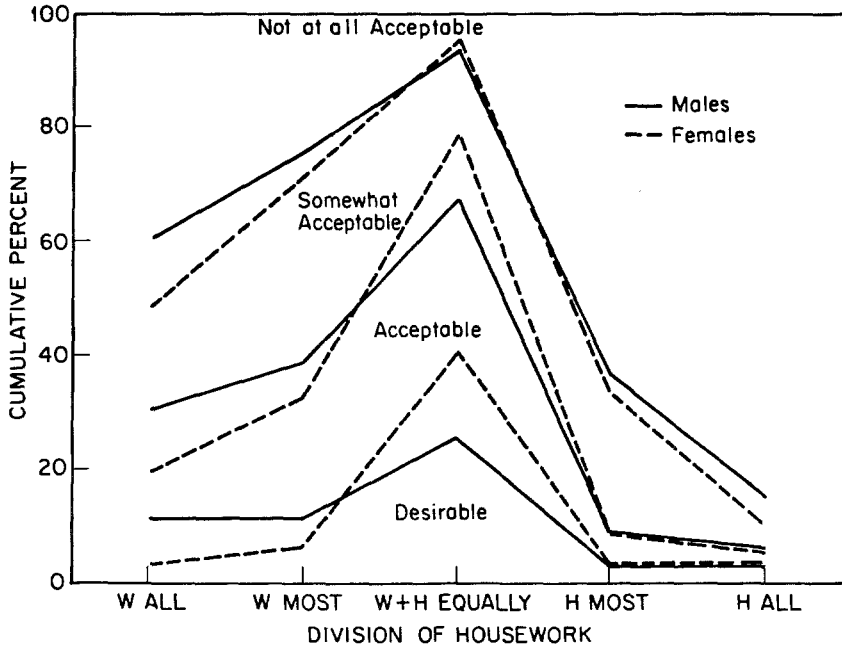


Fig. 5. Preferred division of housework (husband and wife work full-time).

weekends only, a substantial involvement of a working parent is more feasible than when day-to-day child care is concerned. The difference in the preferences for equal division between this and the previous set of questions may partly reflect a difference in feasibility rather than in actual preference; therefore, a direct comparison between the two sets of items is not attempted. The preference for equal division of child care is even stronger in this situation, probably reflecting the effect of an equity norm. In contrast, all the remaining alternatives defining an unequal share of child care are rated desirable by only a small minority that in no case exceeds 10%, though more rate them as at least somewhat acceptable. Among the unequal arrangements, somewhat higher percentages of seniors are tolerant of a division in which the wife has a disproportionate responsibility for the children than one in which the husband does.

Division of Housework. Different arrangements for the division of housework were rated only for a couple in which both partners are working full-time.³ The general pattern of views about a working couple sharing

³However, a parallel question in the 1975 data collection asked about the situation in which the wife has no outside employment. The data show a clear preference for the wife to assume major responsibility for housework in this case. (For a report of these data see Herzog et al., 1979.)

housework is fairly similar to the pattern of views about a working couple sharing child care. The equal division of housework is the preferred arrangement, and females favor it more strongly than males. However, where housework is concerned, there is not as strong a preference for an equal division as there is in the case of child care. Perhaps seniors perceive the equal contribution of both partners as less critical for the outcome of housework than for the outcome of child care.

*Trends in the Preferences for the Division of Family Responsibilities:
1976 Through 1979*

Table I presents mean values for 1976 through 1979 on the variables dealing with the division of paid work between husband and wife; it also contains the level of change between 1976 and 1979 expressed in standard deviations. As Table I shows, preferences have been shifting away from the working husband and towards a working couple. Although the trends are not very strong, they are very consistent in direction over what must be considered a very short period in which to observe social change. Moreover, the shifts are statistically significant in several instances. The clearest change has occurred with regard to half-time work by a mother of young children and, among female seniors only, full-time work by a wife without children—both of which have become more widely accepted. This reinforces our previous observation that acceptance of work roles for mothers of young children is largely limited to half-time work: Not only is this option viewed as much more acceptable and even more desirable than full-time work, as we noted before, but it also has become more acceptable over the last few years.

At the same time, remarkably little systematic change has occurred in preferences for sex-reversed arrangements. The idea of a husband working less than full-time while his wife works full-time is as strongly rejected in 1979 as it was in 1976.

Trends in preferences for work outside the home are quite similar for the two sexes. Given the persistent sex differences observed in the cross-sectional data, we note that both sexes have changed at a similar rate, which results in no substantial closing or widening of the sex gap on these issues.

Trends in preferences for housework and child care are not shown in tabular form, since little systematic change has occurred. One exception is a trend toward slightly more acceptance of equal sharing of housework and child care, but the trend is weaker and less consistent than those observed for paid employment. (Complete tables are included in Herzog et al., 1979).

Table I. Trends in Mean Preferences for Division-of-Paid-Work, 1976-1979^a

	Males					Females					t-score 1976/1979	
	1976	1977	1978	1979	d/s	t-score 1976/1979	1976	1977	1978	1979		d/s
No children												
Hb full, wife not	2.55	2.54	2.51	2.49	-.06	1.52	1.98	1.96	1.92	1.89	-.11	2.24
Hb full, wife half	2.93	2.99	2.93	2.96	.05	.91	2.89	2.84	2.85	2.82	-.10	2.12
Hb + wife full	2.39	2.43	2.43	2.50	.10	2.39	2.75	2.80	2.86	2.95	.22	4.71
Hb half, wife full	1.47	1.49	1.51	1.45	-.02	.55	1.52	1.57	1.55	1.52	.00	0
Hb not, wife full	1.27	1.29	1.30	1.23	-.07	1.30	1.23	1.22	1.23	1.19	-.08	1.51
Preschool children												
Hb full, wife not	3.32	3.26	3.19	3.18	-.16	3.65	3.12	3.02	2.98	2.99	-.14	3.08
Hb full, wife half	2.32	2.38	2.47	2.50	.20	4.43	2.56	2.64	2.68	2.73	.20	4.44
Hb + wife full	1.42	1.43	1.46	1.50	.09	2.06	1.44	1.53	1.53	1.53	.10	2.42
Hb half, wife full	1.32	1.36	1.38	1.34	.03	.64	1.31	1.35	1.36	1.38	.10	2.30
Hb not, wife full	1.29	1.32	1.28	1.27	-.02	.63	1.27	1.26	1.26	1.27	.00	0

^aColumn "d/s" shows the difference between the 1979 and 1976 means divided by the standard deviation in 1979. Each mean is based on approximately 1,500 respondents. T-scores were estimated with effective N_s of two-thirds the actual sample size (i.e., effective N_s of 1,000) in order to adjust for design effect. "Hb" means "husband."

Correlates of Preferences

In an attempt to explain variations in preferences for division of responsibilities between husband and wife, we explored a set of factors suggested by previous research as potential correlates of sex role-related issues. These factors are organized here into (a) family background factors—race, socioeconomic level as measured by father's and mother's education, and mother's degree of labor force participation; (b) personal characteristics—educational plans as measured by planned college attendance, self-reported ability level, political orientation, and religious commitment. In causal terms, the family background factors are clear antecedents of present preferences, although technically they are all measured at the same point in time. Personal characteristics, on the other hand, are concurrent and could be conceptualized as either causes or effects of present sex-role preferences. The operationalization of the variables are shown in a footnote to Table II.

These measures were then correlated with the variables measuring preferences for sharing of family duties between husband and wife. Correlations were examined separately for 1976, 1977, 1978, and 1979; since little variation in these correlations was noticeable across years, average correlations are presented in Table II. Also included in Table II are the average proportions of variance (R^2) accounted for by (a) family background variables only and (b) family background plus personal characteristics variables. R^2 indicates the proportion of variance which can be explained jointly by the predictors; the difference between R^2 attained with eight predictors and R^2 attained with four predictors indicates how much of the variation in the preferences is due to personal characteristics of seniors over and above of what is already explained by their background characteristics.⁴

Although Table II does not reveal many strong relationships, there are clear effects of race on the preference for employment of mothers of young children. More specifically, Blacks look more favorably upon such employment; fully 49% of the Black males and 53% of the Black females find a full-time working mother of young children at least somewhat acceptable, while only 23% of the White males and 29% of the White females express the same preferences. Another clear correlate of these preferences is the degree to which the respondent's mother worked outside the home when he or she was growing up; respondents who were raised by a working mother tend to feel more positive about employment by a mother of young children. Based on regression results not reported here, the variables race and working mother

⁴Since the correlations are generally small and not likely to conceal much shared variance between the correlates, no multivariate results are reported aside from the two sets of R^2 .

Table II. Relationships Between Division-of-Paid-Work Variables and Correlates^a

	Race ^b	Work- ing mother ^c	Father's educa- tion ^d	Mother's educa- tion ^d	Academic ability ^e	College plans ^f	Polit. orienta. ^g	Religious commi- ment ^h	R ² , by 4 fam. backg. vars.	R ² , by 4 fam. backg. + 4 pers. ch. vars.
Males										
No children										
Hb full, wife not	-.15	-.09	-.00	-.04	.03	-.02	-.08	.08	.030	.043
Hb full, wife half	-.14	-.01	.06	.07	.12	.08	.00	.00	.022	.033
Hb and wife full	.04	.09	.05	.09	.06	.11	.10	-.06	.016	.037
Hb half, wife full	.05	-.01	.08	.05	.03	.06	.11	-.10	.010	.029
Hb not, wife full	.05	-.03	.02	-.01	-.03	-.02	.10	-.09	.005	.021
Preschool children										
Hb full, wife not	-.28	-.17	.09	.07	.16	.13	-.03	.06	.095	.120
Hb full, wife half	.04	.13	.01	.05	.02	.04	.04	-.05	.019	.024
Hb and wife full	.20	.17	-.07	-.06	-.13	-.08	.01	-.04	.061	.071
Hb half, wife full	.10	.03	.03	.03	-.02	.02	.07	-.07	.011	.022
Hb not, wife full	.05	-.02	.01	.01	.00	.03	.07	-.05	.003	.011

Females										
No children										
Hb full, wife not	-.06	-.09	-.06	-.09	-.08	-.13	-.11	.08	.018	.045
Hb full, wife half	-.17	-.09	-.01	.01	-.01	-.06	-.07	.06	.033	.044
Hb and wife full	-.07	.07	.08	.10	.20	.16	.08	-.06	.021	.070
Hb half, wife full	-.04	-.05	.10	.10	.07	.13	.11	-.07	.016	.039
Hb not, wife full	.02	-.04	.04	.03	-.02	.03	.08	-.03	.004	.012
Preschool children										
Hb full, wife not	-.27	-.18	.06	.04	.07	-.02	-.11	.10	.090	.112
Hb full, wife half	-.02	.10	-.01	.02	.02	.03	.04	-.05	.012	.016
Hb and wife full	.20	.17	-.08	-.04	-.04	.02	.03	-.02	.061	.062
Hb half, wife full	-.03	.01	.08	.08	.04	.11	.11	-.06	.010	.030
Hb not, wife full	-.01	-.03	.07	.08	.05	.09	.10	-.05	.009	.023

^aEntries, except in the last two columns are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients averaged over 1976, 1977, 1978, and 1979. These coefficients are based on approximately 6,000 males and 6,000 females. With an *N* of this size, correlations of .04 are significant at the .05 level and correlations of .05 at the .01 level, assuming a design effect of 1.5 and therefore an effective *N* of 4,000. "Hb" means "husband."

^b0 = White, 1 = Black.

^c1 = No (mother did not have a paid job half-time or more), 4 = yes, all or nearly all of the time.

^d1 = Completed grade school or less, 6 = graduate or professional school after college.

^e1 = Far below average, 7 = far above average.

^f1 = Definitely won't graduate from four-year college program), 4 = definitely will.

^g1 = Very conservative, 5 = very liberal, 6 = radical.

^h1 = Never (attend)/not important, 4 = (attend) about once a week or more/very important.

have largely independent effects on preferences for paid employment, despite their intercorrelation.

These two variables are much less clearly related to preferences for paid employment by a wife without children, although Blacks are again less likely to favor no or half-time employment by such a wife (only 10% of the Black males and 8% of the Black females rate half-time employment as desirable, compared to 22% of the White males and 21% of the White females.)

Self-reported ability, college plans, and political orientation show generally weaker effects on preferences for paid employment of wives than race and working mother, but most of the relationships are in the expected direction; respondents with higher ability, college plans, and a more liberal-radical political orientation tend to be more likely to prefer employment by a wife without as well as with children. A curious exception is observed for males' preferences concerning paid employment of mothers. In this case, males' abilities and their educational aspirations are negatively related to acceptance of employment.

This latter observation points to an interesting interaction of sex with ability and educational plans. Abilities and educational plans are positively related to female seniors' preferences for the wife's employment if no children are assumed to be present—probably reflecting effects of career aspirations—but less of a relationship is found where children are present. In other words, only when no children are present do higher career aspirations translate into a preference for working. Among male seniors, on the other hand, abilities and educational plans are related only to preferences for paid employment of wives with children, while little relationship is noticeable for employment of wives without children. In this case, however, the relationship is negative. We interpret this finding as reflecting the more able males' greater sensitivity to the welfare of children—a concern that is not counterbalanced by their higher tendency towards a career, as in the case of females. On the contrary, by assuming a more traditional attitude these males may be protecting their own occupational strivings from being curtailed by child care duties.⁵

The pattern of correlates for the preferences for division of housework and child care can be summarized briefly; therefore, the data are not presented in tabular form (complete tables are available in Herzog et al., 1979). Essentially, no substantial correlations are observed between the independent variables in Table II and preferences regarding the division of

⁵With regard to nonlinear relationships between socioeconomic status and preferences, which would of course not be reflected in product-moment correlations, we found little and inconsistent evidence for them when examining the data without linear constraints.

child care by a traditional couple (i.e., husband works, wife does not). Females' preferences for the division of child care and housework in a working couple, however, are correlated with certain personal characteristics. Female respondents with college plans or higher self-reported abilities are more favorable towards equal involvement of both spouses and less favorable towards the sole involvement of the wife. They are also less favorable towards the sole involvement of the husband in these domestic duties; in other words, they favor a shared role distribution over any form of sex-segregated arrangement. In addition, females with a more liberal-radical political orientation or with less religious commitment also tend to favor shared division of duties. In sum, the pattern for female respondents seems to parallel the correlations observed for division of paid work between a husband and wife without children, while little relationship is noted for males.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

Several general themes seem to emerge from the data discussed above.

A Preference for Egalitarianism Within Limits

The first three alternatives that respondents rated for each family situation can be regarded as spanning the range from traditionally sex-segregated to shared arrangements. From this perspective the high school seniors of 1979 appear quite open to partners sharing family responsibilities. Specifically, most of them would accept or even desire that a wife participate full-time or half-time in paid employment if she has no children; and even assuming the presence of young children, quite a few seniors rate half-time work by the mother as at least acceptable. The seniors react in an even more egalitarian fashion where child care and household duties are concerned. This focus is particularly clear for the family situation where the wife is assumed to have a full-time job, but it is also evident for child care when the mother has no outside employment. Moreover, these preferences reflect some small but significant shifts towards shared arrangements since 1976. For paid work, the largest shifts are in the direction of both spouses working full-time where no children are present, and in the direction of half-time work by the wife where preschool children are present.

Although we have identified considerable support for egalitarian arrangements, the data do not reflect a complete abandonment of the sex-segregated role distinctions. Most notably, the acceptable options for paid

work of wives without children include nonemployment and half-time employment, as well as full-time employment. In other words, many seniors still prefer a wife who works half-time or not at all over one who holds a full-time job. Moreover, if the couple is assumed to have preschool children, the wife is very clearly expected to drop out of the labor force or to change to part-time work in order to attend to the children. Although the preferences for child care exhibit a strong focus on the egalitarian alternative, considerable numbers of seniors would still find it at least somewhat acceptable if the wife were responsible for all or most of the child care.

Some apparent contradictions in the data further suggest that an apparent preference for egalitarianism may actually hide a more subtle form of traditionalism. Consider the following juxtaposition of findings: If the preferences of most seniors for an equal division of child care is taken as a valid finding, not just as a wording artifact, then it seems inconsistent with the finding that most prefer the woman to stay home with her young children. If half of the child care really were to be done by the husband, the wife would be freed for paid work. It would then appear inconsistent that a husband should still have to work full-time, since the wife's economic contribution could presumably lighten his obligation. Further, having only a part-time job would free the husband to do his share of the child care.

We offer the following interpretation of these apparent contradictions: There is, on one hand, a tendency towards sharing of duties between marital partners; on the other hand, the final responsibility is still seen as resting with the partner who has traditionally held the particular duty. Thus, a husband's help in child care is very welcome, even to a point of equal involvement with the wife; but the final responsibility still rests with the wife, and she will be blamed if any insufficiencies in child care should develop (Kellerman & Katz, 1978). By the same token, the involvement of a woman in paid work is widely accepted; but the husband still is likely to be held accountable if economic support for the family is not adequate.

Small Children Change Things—for the Wife

The presence of preschool children drastically affects the preference pattern for women's work. For the couple with no children, half-time or full-time work for the wife seems acceptable or even desirable to a considerable proportion of seniors. On the other hand, when a couple has one or more preschool children, having the wife refrain from working seems desirable to almost half of the seniors and is at least somewhat acceptable to virtually all of them. In contrast to the effect on women's work patterns, preferences for men's work are barely affected by the presence of young

children. In each case, less than full-time employment meets with little acceptance.

Overall, the findings are impressive in their strength and quality; despite the observed tendencies toward shared responsibilities (including more equal sharing of child care), the arrival of children affects only the preference pattern for the wife's work. Moreover, these views are shared by male and female seniors, pointing to a general agreement about the differential modifiability of work patterns with the advent of children.

More Flexibility for the Wife than the Husband

Viewed from a slightly different angle, preferences regarding the male and the female work roles differ greatly in latitude or flexibility. We have noted before that for childless wives, full-time, half-time, or no employment are all rated at least somewhat acceptable by over 72% of the seniors. For wives with young children, the alternatives are more limited; no employment or half-time employment are the only widely accepted arrangements. However, a completely different picture emerges for the husband. In his case, only full-time work is preferred, while acceptability (in terms of at least somewhat acceptable) infrequently exceeds 25% for all the part-time alternatives. Overall, there is an impressive lack of flexibility in the way the husband's employment responsibilities are viewed by both male and female seniors. Also, and this is particularly remarkable in this age of changing sex roles, absolutely no change in preferences regarding the husband's role has been registered during the four years investigated.

Little Interest in Sex-Role Reversal

In general, we have found few seniors who rate sex-role reversed arrangements as desirable or even acceptable—a pattern that does not change from 1976 to 1979. More than half of the seniors would find it unacceptable for the husband of a childless couple to work half-time (66%) or not work at all (87%), even if his wife worked full-time and thereby contributed considerably to their economic support. Similarly, for a couple with preschool children, the great majority of seniors reject the option of the husband not working or working only half-time, even though it might reasonably be argued that the children would benefit from having their father spend more time at home. Furthermore, sex-role reversal is no more welcome where child care and housework are concerned; well over half of both male and female seniors reject as unacceptable any situation in which

the husband does more than an equal share under any of the circumstances covered in the questionnaire, and fewer than 4% rate any such situation as desirable.

Sex Differences in Preference Patterns

As shown in Figures 1-5 and quantitatively summarized in Table III, notable sex differences are quite consistent. Fewer female than male seniors are traditional in their preferences for particular arrangements allocating various types of family responsibilities between themselves and their future

Table III. Correlations Between Division-of-Responsibilities Variables and Sex of Respondents, 1979 Data^a

	Presence of preschool children	
	No	Yes
Division of paid work		
Husband full, wife not	-.32	-.10
Husband full, wife half	-.10	.13
Husband and wife full	.23	.02
Husband half, wife full	.04	.03
Husband not, wife full	-.03	.00
	Paid employment	
	Husband only	Both
Division of child care		
Wife all	-.12	-.20
Wife most	-.01	-.09
Both equally	.11	.19
Husband most	-.05	-.06
Husband all	-.06	-.08
Division of housework ^b		
Wife all		-.16
Wife most		-.08
Both equally		.16
Husband most		-.02
Husband all		-.04

^aEntries are Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients. A positive correlation indicates higher levels of preference by female respondents than by male respondents. These coefficients are based on approximately 3000 respondents. With an *N* of this size correlations of .05 are statistically significant at the .05 level and correlations of .06 at the .01 level, assuming a design effect of 1.5 and therefore an effective *N* of 2,000.

^bQuestions were not asked.

husbands, while more females than males favor egalitarian arrangements. Moreover, males and females have been changing at a similar pace since 1976, leaving the sex differences largely unchanged.

The consistent tendency for males to be somewhat more conservative, on the average, confirms other reports of more traditional sex-role attitudes in males than in females (Angrist et al., 1977; Osmand & Martin, 1975). It still seems to us that the level of sex differences observed in our data are not pronounced enough to predict widespread and fundamental disagreement between the sexes about the proper roles for husbands and wives.

Other Correlates of Preference Patterns

Above-average support for working wives as well as equally shared child care and housework is evident among female respondents who report high academic ability, college plans, and liberal political beliefs. Although the effects are not strong, they are consistent with hypotheses formulated on the basis of previous research. However, given the intercorrelation between abilities and educational plans and their overlapping effect on preferences (as shown in results from multiple regression analyses not reported here), it is impossible to assign the effect either to abilities or aspirations. Consequently, the two hypotheses cannot be tested separately.

In contrast to the females, young men show less clear effects of the above correlates. This suggests that men's abilities, attitudes, and ideologies bear a less uniform relationship to their preferences for the division of tasks between spouses. It appears quite plausible that sex-role preferences should be less well linked with men's attitudinal structure and with their life-styles, since variation in sex-role definition has less bearing on men's lives, or at least such bearing is less commonly recognized by the seniors.

Two unique and reasonably strong predictors are observed where the division of paid work for a couple with young children is concerned: respondents who are Black and respondents who have had a working mother are more likely to respond positively to the employment of a mother with young children. Thus, while personal ambitions and attitudes appear to influence intentions for labor force participation among young women, the presumed presence of preschool children in their future family weakens the effect of these very variables and equalizes intended labor force participation. The only variables that noticeably increase preferences for a working wife under the latter circumstances deal with relevant experiences; the example of a working mother or of otherwise self-supporting women as they abound in the Black community promotes favorable attitudes. Interestingly, the example of the working mother has a positive effect on

the preferences of young women as well as young men. This finding suggests that the effect should be understood in a broad sense as displaying a viable life-style or as setting norms rather than in the more narrow sense of providing a model for the same-sex child.

CONCLUDING REMARKS: THE NEED FOR MORE REFINED ASSESSMENT OF SEX-ROLE PREFERENCES

This study has dealt with a fairly complex set of data concerning high school seniors' preferences for the division of work and family tasks between themselves and their future spouses. While the seniors react quite liberally towards paid employment by the wife who has no children, they demonstrate much more conservatism in this regard when preschool children are present. These findings raise doubts about the usefulness of responses to items cast in the form of generalizations. One such item is included in many surveys and frequently used as an indicator of sex-role attitudes: "It is usually better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and the family." This item is likely to imply the presence of children and thus should result in rather conservative responses, according to our present findings. Indeed, data from the Monitoring the Future study, where this item was also included, indicate that 49% of all seniors agree with it, 15% neither agree nor disagree, and only 36% disagree. That responses to this item represent only one side of the coin is demonstrated by seniors' more liberal responses to women's work when no children are involved, as discussed earlier. A fuller understanding of the difference made by the presence and absence of children is very relevant, since increased life expectancy and the reduction in large families means that today's couples spend many years of their married lives without children at home (Glick, 1977).

The present question format permits another tendency towards liberalism to surface. Although most seniors do not consider it desirable that the mother of preschool children work even half-time, very few reject such half-time work as unacceptable. Moreover, this half-time work has shown a clear trend towards increased acceptability between 1976 and 1979, while the trend for full-time work is marginal. Only the inclusion of intermediate alternatives and the differentiation of the response scale allow these interesting findings to emerge.

In sum, it appears that the detailed measurement approach used in this study has outlined a complex set of attitudes concerning division of responsibilities between husband and wife, which cannot in the aggregate easily be labeled as traditional or liberal. Rather, it is suggested that preferences

toward sharing of responsibilities depend critically on the particular responsibility involved, the division of other responsibilities the couple has to meet, and the distinction between categorizing an arrangement as desirable versus merely acceptable.

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