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Poortman, A.R.; Lippe, T. van der

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Attitudes Toward Housework and Child Care and the Gendered Division of Labor

Research on the division of household labor has typically examined the role of time availability, relative resources, and gender ideology. We explore the gendered meaning of domestic work by examining the role of men's and women's attitudes toward household labor. Using data from the Dutch Time Competition Survey (N = 732), we find that women have more favorable attitudes toward cleaning, cooking, and child care than do men: Women enjoy it more, set higher standards for it, and feel more responsible for it. Furthermore, women's favorable and men's unfavorable attitudes are associated with women's greater contribution to household labor. Effects are stronger for housework than child care, own attitudes matter more than partner's, and men's attitudes are more influential than women's.

One of the most consistent empirical observations in family research is that women still do most of the housework and child care (in short, household labor), even though women's participation in the labor force has increased considerably (Coltrane, 2000). This persistent gender inequality has puzzled scholars for years, leading to a stream of research.

Socioeconomic factors have been the most frequent object of study. Hours spent in paid

employment presumably affect the division of household labor because the partner who has the most time available after work will do the most at home (Shelton & John, 1996). Partners' relative resources also matter: The partner with fewer economic resources (e.g., income) has little power and cannot "win" negotiations about who does household chores (Brines, 1993). Another argument is that it is more efficient for the lower resource partner to specialize in unpaid work (Becker, 1991).

Partners' hours of employment and income only partially explain the division of unpaid work, however, and some findings even contradict these explanations (Shelton, 2000). For example, when women are the breadwinners, men have been found to compensate for the loss of breadwinner status by doing less at home (Brines, 1994). Explanations focusing on gender have therefore gained popularity (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). Whereas the economic theories assume that decisions about the division of labor are gender neutral, rational, and driven by constraints rather than presumably fixed preferences (i.e., a dislike of housework), gender theories contest these assumptions and propose that household labor is intertwined with beliefs about certain behaviors being typically male or female (Berk, 1985; DeVault, 1991). For example, cleaning and doing the laundry are viewed as typically female tasks, whereas home maintenance chores are viewed as male tasks. To test for the gendered meaning of domestic work, most studies have examined the role of gender ideology (Bianchi et al.). Individuals internalize society's prevailing gender ideologies, and their

Department of Sociology, Utrecht University, PO Box 80140, 3508 TC Utrecht, The Netherlands
(a.poortman@uu.nl).

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views about men's and women's proper roles are therefore assumed to be gender specific, with tasks being divided accordingly (Huber & Spitze, 1981). Although egalitarian attitudes are often found to lead to greater equality, the relevant empirical evidence is not consistent, and women continue to do most of the housework, despite the contemporary egalitarian ideology (Shelton).

In the light of this weak support for the role of gender ideology, we contend that we can enhance our understanding of the gendered meaning of household labor by looking at men's and women's attitudes toward housework and child care. Contrary to people's more general views on how men and women ought to divide tasks (i.e., gender ideology), these attitudes reflect their personal feelings about performing household labor and the importance they attach to it, in other words their personal evaluations (Ajzen, 1989). If domestic work does indeed have gendered meaning, we would expect women to have more favorable attitudes toward household labor than men would. Furthermore, people are likely to act upon their attitudes, with more favorable attitudes leading to a greater share in domestic work. These attitudes, in turn, are reinforced by behavior because taking on more of the household labor will reinforce what are already more favorable attitudes toward such work. On the basis of this reinforcing process, our reasoning is thus that women's greater contribution at home may be explained by women's more favorable attitudes toward household labor as compared to men.

Given the reasoning above, our research questions are (a) whether men and women differ in their attitudes toward household labor and (b) whether such attitudes are related to the division of household labor over and above the standard explanations (i.e., time availability, relative resources, gender ideology). Note that our second research question is not framed in causal terms; our cross-sectional design does not allow us to assess the causal influences of attitudes on the division of household labor.

Our study contributes to existing literature in four ways. First, our focus on attitudes toward household labor extends economic explanations by considering individual preferences for household labor rather than assuming a general dislike.

Second, we contribute to research on the gendered meaning of household labor by looking

at personal and specific attitudes rather than general and abstract gender ideologies, which have been studied most often. We believe that a person's specific attitudes toward household labor add more to our understanding of the division of domestic work than his or her general attitudes toward men's and women's roles. Measures of gender ideology may be biased by a tendency to give socially desirable answers, and abstract attitudes are also believed to be weak predictors of behavior compared to more specific attitudes (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1977). In addition, personal feelings and thoughts about household labor may come closer to the implicit and subconscious nature of gendered allocation processes, as has been assumed in recent gender theories (Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

Third, we contribute to the field by relating measures of attitudes to the division of housework and child care. On the whole, there has been little empirical research on attitudes toward household labor, and studies that relate attitudes to time spent on household labor in order to assess their explanatory role are particularly scarce. Studies on attitudes toward household labor often describe (and sometimes explain) these attitudes (e.g., Robinson & Milkie, 1998; Spitze & Loscocco, 2000; Van Berkel & De Graaf, 1999), although we do know of a few studies examining the association between attitudes and the division of housework (Cast, 2003; Ferree, 1991; Pittman, Kerpelman, & Solheim, 2001) and child care (e.g., Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Maurer, Pleck, & Rane, 2001).

Fourth, we make use of unique survey data. Both partners reported on their attitudes toward housework and child care and on time spent on household labor. These data allow us to look at both men and women and compare their attitudes, unlike studies focusing on one gender only or using reports from only one partner (e.g., Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Robinson & Milkie, 1998). In addition, we are able to assess partner effects: the effects that someone's attitudes have on his or her partner's behavior. Although the literature on parenthood suggests that mothers' strong feelings about child care prevent fathers from becoming involved, studies have rarely assessed such partner effects (see Ferree, 1991; Pittman et al., 2001).

Our study was carried out in the Netherlands, where attitudes may play a particularly strong role. Whereas the Netherlands outscores many

other countries on egalitarian gender ideology, it is low in the rankings when it comes to gender equality in actual behavior, such as women's employment (Social and Cultural Planning Office of the Netherlands, 2000). It may well be that measures of gender ideology reflect Dutch progressiveness and tolerance toward many issues ("live and let live"), making them less suitable as indicators for the gendered meaning of household labor. Personal attitudes are likely to be a more accurate reflection of the gendered meaning of domestic work and may thus be stronger predictors than gender ideology of the relatively traditional division of labor in the Netherlands. To enhance our understanding of the role of attitudes, we control for indicators of the standard explanations: time availability (i.e., hours of employment), relative resources (i.e., income), and gender ideology. The analyses also control for sociodemographic correlates of the division of household labor (for reviews, see Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). These include the presence of children and their ages, as children—and especially young children—increase women's and men's hours spent on domestic work. Partners' educational levels and relationship type are controlled: Higher educated and cohabiting couples tend to have a more equal division of domestic work. Finally, we control for birth cohort and relationship duration because older cohorts and couples who have been together for a long time are more likely to have a traditional division of household labor.

Attitudes Toward Household Labor and the Division of Household Labor

People's attitudes toward housework and child care indicate whether they evaluate these tasks as positive or negative. Attitudes are assumed to have an affective (How do I feel about it?), cognitive (What do I think about it?), and conative (How do I behave?) dimension (Ajzen, 1989). We focus on the first two dimensions. The affective dimension is indicated by an individual's *enjoyment* of household tasks. The cognitive dimension reflects the importance attached to household labor, which is indicated by *standards*, that is, people's criteria as to how well tasks must be done. The importance attached to household labor is also indicated by the extent to which people think they are *responsible* for these tasks (Doucet, 2001). Our

conceptualization of attitudes closely follows the work of Allen and Hawkins (1999) and Ferree (1991), who were most elaborate in their conceptualization of the related concepts of "maternal gatekeeping" and "gendered expectations," respectively. Our attitudinal indicators are also found in other scholars' work (e.g., Pittman et al., 2001; Robinson & Milkie, 1998; Spitze & Loscocco, 2000), including social psychological studies that use more or less similar items to measure people's identities as to their parental or housekeeping role (e.g., Cast, 2003; Maurer et al., 2001).

Attitudes toward household labor are likely to be gendered. Housework and child care are seen as women's rather than men's work, and these beliefs are likely to have become part of men's and women's gender identities. Given these gendered beliefs, women probably have more positive attitudes toward household labor than men do. We thus expect women to enjoy household labor more than men do, to set higher standards for it, and feel more responsible for it.

Evidence that women enjoy household labor more than men do is mixed. Some studies did indeed find that women enjoy housework (Sullivan, 1996; Van Berkel & De Graaf, 1999) and child care (Grote, Naylor, & Clark, 2002; Kroska, 2003) more than men do; others found no gender differences or that men take greater enjoyment from housework (Ferree, 1991; Grote et al.; Kroska; Spitze & Loscocco, 2000) and child care (Sullivan, 1996). Women have been found to set higher standards for housework (Ferree; Pittman et al., 2001), with husbands often feeling they cannot live up to those standards (Ferree). To our knowledge, there has been no research examining gender differences in people's sense of responsibility for household labor.

How do these gender-specific attitudes relate to time spent on housework and child care? Literature on the relationship between attitudes and behavior (Ajzen, 1989; Cooper & Croyle, 1984) suggests a reciprocal relationship: People's behavior is consistent with their attitudes and they adjust their attitudes to match their behavior. Moreover, according to identity theory (Burke & Cast, 1997; Cast, 2003), people's behavior is likely to be consistent with their identity, and they may adjust their identity to a new situation. To the extent that attitudes toward household labor reflect gender identities, favorable attitudes will thus be

associated with more time spent on household labor. Literature specific to the division of household labor echoes these theories, with men and women being expected to “affirm” and “produce” their gender identities by performing domestic tasks, suggesting a reinforcing process (Coltrane, 2000). Hence, we expect that men and women with favorable attitudes (i.e., greater enjoyment, higher standards, and a greater sense of responsibility) do more household labor than those with less positive attitudes.

There is some empirical support for this hypothesized relationship between attitudes and behavior in the context of household labor. When men and women enjoyed housework more, they spent more time on it (Ferree, 1991). They also devoted more time to household labor when their standards for it were higher (Ferree; Pittman et al., 2001). In addition, fathers who attached greater value to child care were more involved with their children (Beitel & Parke, 1998) and “gatekeeping” mothers, who scored high on standards and responsibility, did more housework and child care than their lower scoring counterparts (Allen & Hawkins, 1999). Studies using similar items to measure identities also provided indirect evidence for a positive relationship between parental identities and parental involvement (Maurer et al., 2001) or between homemaking identities and time spent on housework (Cast, 2003).

We also expect to find partner effects, with an individual’s own attitudes affecting his or her partner’s involvement in household labor. Because a greater effort on the part of one partner implies that the other has less to do, one by-product of people acting on their favorable attitudes may be that their partner does less. Literature on strategies used to avoid or embrace domestic duties suggest more direct partner effects. Wives may actively prevent their husbands from undertaking domestic duties, for example, by voicing high standards or complaining about their husband’s performance (Thompson & Walker, 1989). In the context of child care, this behavior has been labeled gatekeeping. Hence, we expect that the more favorable women’s attitudes toward housework and child care, the less men are allowed to do. There is also evidence that women want their partners to become more involved (Walker & McGraw, 2000), but the implied association between woman’s attitudes and her husband’s domestic involvement is unclear. Her wish

for greater involvement on his part is more closely related to women’s attitudes toward their partner’s role than toward their own role in household labor.

Although women’s strategies have generally received the most attention, men’s more passive strategies to avoid household labor may also be important (Walker & McGraw, 2000). They may, for example, “forget” to carry out household tasks or wait for instructions (Hochschild, 1989; Thompson & Walker, 1989). His strategies lead us to expect that the more unfavorable his attitudes are, the more she has to take over the domestic work.

Empirical evidence for the influence of one partner’s attitudes on the other’s domestic work is mixed. The wife’s higher standards were indeed associated with the husband performing fewer domestic tasks (Ferree, 1991), but Ferree’s findings were less clear-cut when looking at husband’s time investment and the effects of his standards on her domestic efforts. Nor did Pittman et al. (2001) find partner effects: Husband’s standards were not associated with wife’s time spent on housework and vice versa.

Summarizing, our first hypothesis reads: Women enjoy household labor more, set higher standards for it, and feel more responsible for it (H1). Our hypotheses concerning the associations between attitudes and time spent on household labor are as follows: Positive attitudes are associated with more time spent on household labor (H2) and less time spent on household labor by the partner (H3). In gender-specific terms, this means that men with positive attitudes do more household labor and their female partners less, resulting in a smaller relative contribution by the female partner. Similarly, women’s positive attitudes will be associated with women spending more and men spending less time on household labor, thus resulting in a larger relative contribution by women.

METHOD

We used data from the Time Competition Survey (van der Lippe & Glebbeek, 2003), conducted in 2003 and focusing on organizations, employees, and their partners. Thirty organizations participated in the survey after selection, and their employees were then sampled in a two-step contact procedure. We first called the employees at work. If they agreed to participate, we asked

them for their home address (privacy regulations meant that the organizations were not allowed to provide home addresses). Of the 3,970 employees we contacted, 39% agreed to participate. We then contacted these employees at home to make an appointment for an interview. Employees in couple households had to ask their partner to participate as well. Of the employees whom we contacted at home, 28% were not interviewed in the end, usually because the partner had refused to cooperate. The overall response rate was 29%, a reasonable score in view of Dutch response rates, which vary between 25% and 45% (De Leeuw & De Heer, 2001), and the two-step contact procedure. Analyses showed that households not willing to cooperate hardly differed from those that participated on background characteristics (i.e., gender, education, employment hours, and family status). We therefore believe that our results are not seriously biased by selective nonresponse. Eventually, 1,114 employees participated and we selected the 819 employees with a cohabiting or marital partner. We excluded same-sex couples because there were too few for comparison purposes ($n = 24$; 3%). We also excluded any respondents with missing information on our main dependent and independent variables. Of all couples, only 5 ($< 1\%$) had missing values on the dependent variables referring to housework, and another 58 couples (7%) had missing data for the attitudinal items. Of couples with children ($n = 473$), 95 couples (20%) had missing values for child-care attitudes. Our sample eventually consisted of 732 couples, of which 378 had children at home. Partners were interviewed at home, filled in a self-administered questionnaire, and kept a time diary for a 1-week period. Details about our measures are presented below. Descriptive statistics can be found in Table 1.

Measures

Division of household labor. We focused on routine household tasks: cleaning, cooking, and child care (if children were present in the household). In the time diary, respondents and their partners estimated the number of hours spent on various activities per week. On the basis of this information, we calculated the weekly hours spent on cleaning (including vacuuming and washing windows), cooking (including setting the table and washing dishes), and child care (including care tasks, such as

bathing the children and doing things with them, for example, playing). We constructed three variables per task: the man's weekly hours spent on the task, the woman's weekly hours, and a relative measure indicating the woman's share in the total number of hours. If the total number of hours was 0, the woman's share was set to .50. We included both absolute and relative measures because the independent variables' effects on the most frequently used relative measure obscure whether an effect results from a change in the man's hours spent on housework, the woman's, or both.

Attitudes toward household labor. Both partners reported their attitudes toward household labor. Attitudes were assessed for each task separately (i.e., cooking, cleaning, and child care). Enjoyment was measured by asking "Can you indicate for the following tasks whether you generally enjoy doing these tasks yourself?" Answers ranged from 1 = *very enjoyable* to 5 = *not at all enjoyable*. The items were recoded so that a higher score represented greater enjoyment. Note that the wording of the enjoyment items left room for interpretation. People may have interpreted the question not only as asking whether they enjoy the task, but, for example, whether they enjoy doing it themselves rather than letting their partner do it. The response categories explicitly referred to enjoyment, however, making it more likely that the person answering would have interpreted the question in terms of enjoyment. Standards were measured by the following question: "I would like to ask about the quality of household labor. A 10 means that something has been done perfectly. Can you indicate on a scale of 1 to 10 what you find acceptable?" A score of 10 for cleaning thus meant that the individual found only a perfectly clean house acceptable; lower scores meant lower standards for an acceptably clean house. Finally, responsibility was measured by two items, the first being "Can you indicate for the following household tasks whether you generally think it is important to do them yourself?" Response categories ranged from 1 = *very important* to 5 = *not at all important*. Values were recoded so that high scores meant a great sense of responsibility. The second measure was a relative rather than an absolute measure: "Suppose that you have to divide the following tasks between you

Table 1. Means and Standard Deviations of the Indicators for the Division of Labor, Indicators for Relative Resources, Time Constraints, and Gender Ideology, and Controls (N = 732)

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Division of labor: cleaning		
Female partner's hours per week	4.76	3.79
Male partner's hours per week	1.51	1.74
Relative contribution of the female partner	.73	.24
Division of labor: cooking		
Female partner's hours per week	6.90	3.46
Male partner's hours per week	4.00	3.16
Relative contribution of the female partner	.64	.21
Division of labor: child care ^a		
Female partner's hours per week	19.68	12.99
Male partner's hours per week	12.18	9.14
Relative contribution of the female partner	.61	.17
Standard explanations		
Men's employment hours	39.86	10.57
Women's employment hours	25.39	13.38
Men's hourly wage rate	15.05	13.82
Women's hourly wage rate	13.02	11.12
Men's gender ideology	3.86	.69
Women's gender ideology	4.09	.63
Controls		
Oldest partner < 1970	.84	—
Married	.73	—
Duration	14.80	9.57
Men's education	7.88	2.42
Women's education	7.67	2.13
Children present	.65	—
Age youngest child ^a	6.89	4.98
Number of children ^a	1.93	.84

Note: *SD* not presented for dichotomous variables.

^aOnly for couples with children (*N* = 378).

and your partner. Which tasks would you prefer to do yourself and which tasks would you rather leave to your partner?" Answers ranged from 1 = *very much prefer to do myself* to 5 = *very much prefer to leave to my partner*. We recoded values so that high scores indicated that the individual felt he or she rather than the partner was responsible. Note that the above question not only reflects someone's sense of responsibility but also the extent to which he or she enjoys these tasks.

We conducted factor analyses per household task in order to assess whether the items for enjoyment, standards, and responsibility represented one underlying dimension indicating an individual's evaluation of a particular task. The results indeed suggested this, as we could extract only one factor for each task. We therefore constructed measures for partners'

overall attitudes toward cleaning, cooking, and child care by standardizing the separate items and summing the scores. Cronbach's α indicated moderate to high reliability of the scales, ranging from .56 for women's attitudes toward child care to .70 for women's and men's attitudes toward cooking. We included both separate items and overall measures in our analyses.

Standard explanations. The time availability explanation was indicated by hours of employment. Both partners reported the number of hours spent in paid employment per week, including overtime but excluding commuting time. All respondents worked (see sampling design) but not all partners. If partners were unemployed, they were assigned 0 hours. Relative resources were indicated by both partners' hourly wage rates. We calculated their net earnings per month

(in euros) and divided this amount by the number of monthly employment hours. The few men and women who were not employed were assigned the gender-specific average. Assigning an hourly wage of zero to the unemployed partners yielded similar results. We also experimented with income rather than wage rate and relative rather than absolute measures, but the results were similar. Gender ideology was measured by four items: "A woman is more fit to raise little children than a man," "I think it is normal for a girl to attend technical school," "It is most natural for the man to be the breadwinner and the woman to take care of the household and the children," and "It is not natural for women to supervise men in a company." Response categories ranged from 1 = *fully agree* to 5 = *fully disagree*. Values were first recoded so that high scores represented egalitarian attitudes and they were then averaged. The resulting scales had moderate reliability (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$ for women and $.67$ for men). Dutch research using almost the same items produced similar alphas (Kalmijn, 1999). These moderate alphas may result from the small number of items because the larger the number of items, the higher the Cronbach's α (Carmines & Zeller, 1979).

Controls. Our analyses controlled for birth cohort, as older cohorts may have a more traditional division of labor than younger ones. This dummy variable indicated whether the oldest partner was born before 1970. Relationship type was controlled for by a dummy indicating whether couples were married. Married couples tend to have a more traditional division of labor than cohabiting couples. Relationship duration (in years) was controlled for, as the division of labor may become increasingly traditional the longer a relationship lasts. This variable moderately correlated with birth cohort ($r = .46$). We controlled for partners' educational levels, ranging from 1 = *did not complete primary school* to 11 = *postgraduate*. Educational level indicates people's attitudes toward men's and women's roles as well as their economic resources. Finally, we controlled for the presence of children in the household (1 = *yes*) because having children often leads men and women to divide tasks more traditionally. We also controlled for the age of the youngest child and the number of children. Average values on age and number of children were assigned to couples

without children. This procedure allowed us to analyze the full sample. The effect of the dummy for "children present" represents the difference between childless couples and couples with an average number of children of an average age. The effects of age and number of children pertain to couples with children only, and these effects are the same regardless of the value assigned to childless couples. We experimented with other measures, such as the number of children (with childless couples being assigned a score of 0) and dummies for the presence of children aged 0–5, 5–12, and older, but the results were similar.

Analytical Strategy

Our data are on the couple level and we have information from both partners for each couple. We first compared the attitudes of the male and female partner. Below, we present the distribution, means, and standard deviations of the separate attitudinal items as well as the results of tests exploring whether partners' attitudes differ significantly. To assess whether attitudes are associated with the division of household labor, we estimated several models per household task, using OLS regression. Although couple data may yield correlated error terms between different equations, seemingly unrelated regression analyses that correct for such correlations produced similar results (not shown). We estimated three models when analyzing men's and women's hours spent on a task. The baseline model only includes the controls and standard explanations. Space constraints mean that we will not present these results but only the results of F tests of the change in R^2 when indicators for attitudes are added to assess improvements in model fit. Attitudes were added in two ways, labeled Model 1 and Model 2. Model 1 includes separate attitudinal items, whereas Model 2 includes the overall attitudinal scales. When analyzing women's relative hours, we only present the estimates for Model 2. Although the separate items constituted one underlying dimension, we include both separate items and overall measures of attitudes to ensure comparability with prior work. It should be noted that the use of cross-sectional data precludes interpretations in causal terms: The observed effects may represent not only a causal effect of attitudes on household labor but also the reverse relationship (e.g., if

the woman cooks often, she may start to enjoy it more).

RESULTS

Table 2 compares men's and women's attitudes. Both men and women had the least favorable attitudes toward cleaning, followed by cooking; child care had the most positive evaluation. Men and women enjoyed child care most, set the highest standards for it, and felt most responsible for it. Note that the scores for child care were high not only compared to cooking and cleaning but also in absolute terms. The reverse was true of cleaning.

Women had more favorable attitudes toward household labor than did men, which supports our expectations. Gender differences were least pronounced for cooking. The distributions and mean scores for cooking were found to be quite similar, even though gender differences were significant (except for the relative measure of

responsibility). Gender differences in attitudes toward cleaning and child care were significant and substantial, in particular men's and women's relative sense of responsibility. For example, whereas a third of women preferred to clean the house themselves, this percentage was only 6% for men, and most men (52%) would rather leave cleaning to their partner. Differences were smaller for attitudes toward child care but were still substantial. For example, less than 3% of mothers would rather leave child care to the father, whereas this holds for 11% of fathers.

Attitudes and the Division of Household Labor: Cleaning

Tables 3, 4, and 5 show the relationship between attitudes and the division of cleaning tasks, cooking, and child care, respectively. Owing to space constraints, we do not discuss our findings for the controls. Our findings for the

Table 2. *Men's and Women's Attitudes Toward Housework and Child Care: Distributions, Means, and T Tests*

	Cleaning (<i>N</i> = 732)		Cooking (<i>N</i> = 732)		Child Care (<i>N</i> = 378)	
	Female Partner (%)	Male Partner (%)	Female Partner (%)	Male Partner (%)	Female Partner (%)	Male Partner (%)
Enjoyment						
Not (at all) enjoyable	43.9	52.5	10.9	18.4	1.3	3.7
Indifferent	38.5	34.6	30.2	26.6	9.0	19.3
(Very) enjoyable	17.6	13.0	58.9	54.9	89.7	77.0
<i>M</i> (range 1 – 5)	2.6	2.4 ^a	3.6	3.5 ^a	4.4	4.0 ^a
<i>SD</i>	1.0	1.0	1.0	1.1	.7	.8
High standards						
Score of 5 or less	6.1	11.9	4.1	7.0	.8	1.3
Score 6 or 7	50.8	56.3	42.1	41.5	9.5	21.2
Score 8 or higher	43.0	31.8	53.8	51.5	89.7	77.5
<i>M</i> (range 1 – 10)	7.3	6.9 ^a	7.6	7.4 ^a	8.5	8.1 ^a
<i>SD</i>	1.1	1.2	1.2	1.3	1.0	1.0
Own responsibility						
Absolute measure						
(Very) unimportant	50.1	56.6	29.0	35.9	4.0	6.1
Indifferent	19.1	24.2	25.0	23.5	11.4	22.0
(Very) important	30.7	19.3	46.0	40.6	84.7	72.0
<i>M</i> (range 1 – 5)	2.6	2.4 ^a	3.2	3.0 ^a	4.3	4.0 ^a
<i>SD</i>	1.4	1.2	1.3	1.3	.9	1.0
Relative measure						
(Very much) leave to partner	22.0	52.0	20.6	25.4	2.6	10.6
Indifferent	46.3	41.8	56.1	52.7	55.3	59.5
(Very much) like to do it myself	31.7	6.1	23.2	21.9	42.1	29.9
<i>M</i> (range 1 – 5)	3.1	2.4 ^a	3.0	2.9	3.4	3.2 ^a
<i>SD</i>	.9	.8	.8	.8	.6	.6

^aGender difference in means significant ($p < .05$).

Table 3. Ordinary Least Square Regression of Men's and Women's Contributions to Cleaning: Unstandardized Coefficients (N = 732)

	Men's Hours Per Week		Women's Hours Per Week		Women's Relative Hours
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2
Controls					
Oldest partner < 1970	-.273	-.267	.270	.215	.067**
Married	-.110	-.115	-.136	-.184	-.011
Duration	-.004	-.004	.039*	.040*	.002
Men's education	-.024	-.026	-.096	-.099	-.010**
Women's education	-.057	-.061*	-.243**	-.246**	-.003
Children present	.412**	.422**	.832**	.811**	.000
Age youngest child	-.009	-.011	.019	.019	.003*
Number of children	.240**	.231**	.611**	.607**	-.007
Standard explanations					
Men's employment hours	-.026**	-.026**	.022*	.020*	.004**
Women's employment hours	.011*	.012*	-.083**	-.083**	-.005**
Men's hourly wage rate	-.010*	-.010*	.004	.003	.001**
Women's hourly wage rate	.005	.005	-.014	-.015	.000
Men's gender ideology	.142	.147	-.263	-.261	-.016
Women's gender ideology	.158	.155	-.095	-.136	-.005
Attitudes					
Men's enjoyment	.187**		.010		
Women's enjoyment	.013		.258*		
Men's standards	.077		-.108		
Women's standards	.082		.109		
Men's sense of responsibility, absolute	.188**		-.084		
Women's sense of responsibility, absolute	.058		.345**		
Men's sense of responsibility, relative	.231**		-.081		
Women's sense of responsibility, relative	-.191**		.103		
Men's overall attitudes		.187**		-.061	-.026**
Women's overall attitudes		-.005		.240**	.013**
Model					
Change in R ²	.088	.076	.033	.029	.097
(F change) ^a	(9.586**)	(33.239**)	(4.426**)	(15.396**)	(50.960**)
R ²	.190	.179	.342	.337	.321
Adjusted R ²	.165	.161	.321	.323	.306

^aChange in R² and F change (between parentheses) after adding indicators for attitudes to baseline model containing controls and standard explanations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed, two-tailed for F tests).

standard explanations were generally in line with previous studies. Confirming the time availability perspective, spending more hours in paid employment decreased the amount of time spent on cooking, cleaning, and child care,

especially for women. For cleaning and cooking, we also found that longer hours of employment increased the partner's domestic efforts. The relative resource approach is supported in that men's higher wages increased wife's share

Table 4. Ordinary Least Square Regression of Men's and Women's Contributions to Cooking: Unstandardized Coefficients (N = 732)

	Men's Hours Per Week		Women's Hours Per Week		Women's Relative Hours
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2
Controls					
Oldest partner < 1970	-.055	-.026	.401	.427	.018
Married	-.347	-.344	.364	.385	.029*
Duration	.018	.019	-.005	-.007	.000
Men's education	.018	.017	-.008	-.007	-.003
Women's education	.098	.101	.045	.039	-.007*
Children present	.189	.183	1.087**	1.121**	.028*
Age youngest child	-.021	-.024	-.010	-.008	.001
Number of children	.009	.010	.559**	.535**	.013
Standard explanations					
Men's employment hours	-.057**	-.057**	.023*	.023*	.004**
Women's employment hours	.013	.016*	-.076**	-.077**	-.003**
Men's hourly wage rate	-.017*	-.017*	.005	.006	.001*
Women's hourly wage rate	-.006	-.005	-.005	-.006	.001
Men's gender ideology	.183	.204	-.067	-.065	-.014
Women's gender ideology	.417*	.409*	-.024	-.019	-.015
Attitudes					
Men's enjoyment	.168		-.065		
Women's enjoyment	-.027		.274*		
Men's standards	.078		.007		
Women's standards	.120		.122		
Men's sense of responsibility, absolute	.228*		-.112		
Women's sense of responsibility, absolute	-.091		.136		
Men's sense of responsibility, relative	.702**		-.304*		
Women's sense of responsibility, relative	-.420**		.303*		
Men's overall attitudes		.322**		-.129**	-.022**
Women's overall attitudes		-.127**		.217**	.016**
Model					
Change in R ² (F change) ^a	.122 (14.224**)	.107 (49.260**)	.049 (5.752**)	.050 (23.610**)	.155 (88.595**)
R ²	.239	.224	.247	.248	.374
Adjusted R ²	.215	.206	.223	.231	.360

^aChange in R² and F change (between parentheses) after adding indicators for attitudes to baseline model containing controls and standard explanations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed, two-tailed for F tests).

in cooking, cleaning, and child care, mainly because his own efforts were reduced (at least for cooking and cleaning). Less support was found, however, for the role of gender ideology. Only women's egalitarian gender ideology was

positively associated with his cooking and with his and her time spent on child care. These findings run counter to American studies, which usually find stronger effects for men's ideology (Shelton, 2000).

Table 5. *Ordinary Least Square Regression of Men's and Women's Contributions to Child Care: Unstandardized Coefficients (N = 378)*

	Men's Hours Per Week		Women's Hours Per Week		Women's Relative Hours
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 2
Controls					
Oldest partner < 1970	−1.155	−1.357	−1.336	−1.302	.004
Married	−2.713**	−2.657**	−1.129	−1.206	.007
Duration	−.029	−.033	−.174*	−.181*	.001
Men's education	.001	.006	−.417	−.465*	−.007
Women's education	.191	.210	.178	.211	.006
Age youngest child	−.893**	−.883**	−1.607**	−1.612**	−.006**
Number of children	.204	.248	−.671	−.637	−.011
Standard explanations					
Men's employment hours	−.199**	−.189**	.031	.032	.004**
Women's employment hours	.016	.014	−.190**	−.192**	−.002**
Men's hourly wage rate	−.038	−.034	.033	.033	.001*
Women's hourly wage rate	.027	.030	.102	.104	.000
Men's gender ideology	.343	.497	−.420	−.456	−.016
Women's gender ideology	1.358*	1.268*	1.487*	1.478*	−.005
Attitudes					
Men's enjoyment	.642		−.432		
Women's enjoyment	−1.146*		−.133		
Men's standards	.378		.493		
Women's standards	.365		.502		
Men's sense of responsibility, absolute	.245		−.055		
Women's sense of responsibility, absolute	.304		−.511		
Men's sense of responsibility, relative	.837		−.593		
Women's sense of responsibility, relative	.250		1.596*		
Men's overall attitudes		.437**		−.102	−.012**
Women's overall attitudes		−.031		.237	.012**
Model					
Change in R^2 (F change) ^a	.021 (1.639)	.014 (4.364*)	.010 (.957)	.002 (.958)	.055 (12.142**)
R^2	.440	.433	.540	.533	.183
Adjusted R^2	.407	.410	.513	.513	.150

^aChange in R^2 and F change (between parentheses) after adding indicators for attitudes to baseline model containing controls and standard explanations.

* $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$ (one-tailed, two-tailed for F tests).

Attitudes toward cleaning were found to contribute significantly to explaining men's time spent on cleaning above and beyond the standard explanations. The model statistics in Table 3 show that when attitudes, whether measured separately (Model 1) or as a scale (Model 2), were added to the baseline model, the model fit improved significantly. The explained variance nearly doubled after adding attitudes. Confirming our expectations, men who had positive attitudes toward cleaning spent

more time on this task than did men with less favorable attitudes. The scale for men's attitudes (Model 2) and most of the separate attitudinal items (Model 1) were significantly related to men's cleaning hours. The more he enjoyed cleaning and felt responsible for it, the more hours he spent on cleaning. We found little support for partner effects, however. Only women's stronger sense of relative responsibility significantly decreased his cleaning hours.

Attitudes were also found to contribute to our understanding of women's cleaning efforts, as shown by the significant changes in R^2 . The relative increase in explained variance was less than that observed for men, suggesting that attitudes are more important for men's than for women's cleaning efforts. Furthermore, women who enjoyed cleaning or felt responsible for it (absolute measure) spent more time on cleaning than women with less favorable attitudes. Model 2, including the attitudinal scale, also showed a strong and positive association with women's cleaning efforts, which confirmed our expectations. Again, little support was found for partner effects: None of the indicators for men's attitudes was significantly related to women's cleaning hours. The above findings are reflected in the results for women's relative share in cleaning. The more positive the woman's attitudes toward cleaning and the more negative the man's attitudes, the greater her relative contribution to cleaning. The man's attitudes mattered more—the estimate for his overall attitude was twice as high as the estimate for her attitude.

Attitudes and the Division of Household Labor: Cooking

The results for cooking are presented in Table 4. Including attitudes significantly improved the model fit of the models for men's hours spent on cooking. For both Models 1 and 2, the explained variance doubled when attitudes were added to the baseline model. In addition, when men felt more responsible for cooking, they spent more time on it. Although the estimates for enjoyment and standards were not significant, their combined effect was strong and significant (Model 2). We also found some support for partner effects: The women's greater sense of responsibility was associated with men spending less time on cooking, and such partner effects are corroborated by the negative effect of the attitudinal scale (Model 2). The association with men's own attitudes was stronger, however.

Attitudes also helped explain women's time spent on cooking, as the explained variance increased significantly in both Model 1 and Model 2. The relative increase was smaller than for men's hours; attitudes may be more important for men's cooking efforts than for women's. As expected, women's greater enjoyment and sense of responsibility for

cooking were positively associated with time spent on cooking, and so was the overall scale. The partner's attitudes were important, too. The man's favorable attitudes toward cooking reduced his partner's cooking hours (Model 2), particularly when he felt greater responsibility for cooking (Model 1). The results for women's relative contribution corroborate the above findings; when the man had a positive attitude toward cooking, the woman cooked relatively less, whereas the reverse held when she had a more positive attitude. His attitudes were slightly more important for the division of cooking tasks than were hers.

Attitudes and the Division of Household Labor: Child Care

Looking at the hours that fathers spend on child care (see Table 5), we found that attitudes toward child care contribute significantly to explaining only Model 2 (i.e., attitudinal scale). Note also that the changes in R^2 were relatively small (i.e., from 42% to 44% in Model 1 and from 42% to 43% in Model 2). Estimates for the attitudinal items also show that attitudes toward child care were relatively unimportant. Although the coefficients for the separate indicators of the man's attitudes were in the expected direction, none was significant. Only when items were combined (see Model 2) were the father's favorable attitudes toward child care found to be associated with greater involvement on his part. Support for partner effects was weak as well; only the mother's greater enjoyment was found to be negatively related to the father's involvement with his children.

The role of attitudes was found to be even weaker for the time mothers spent on child care. Adding attitudinal items did not improve model fit, regardless of whether attitudes were measured separately or on a scale. The coefficients for the separate items showed a random pattern, and only the effect of the women's relative sense of responsibility was significant. When the overall measure was used, there was no relationship between his and her attitudes toward child care and her child-care hours. More convincing results were found for the mother's relative contribution to child care. Model fit improved when attitudes were added to the baseline model, and the mother's share in child care was significantly greater when she

had more positive and the father more negative attitudes toward child care.

DISCUSSION

Empirical research on the persistent gender inequality in housework and child care has typically focused on the amount of time partners have available for domestic work, their relative economic resources, and gender ideology. We argued that our understanding of the division of household labor can be increased by looking at the role of men's and women's attitudes toward domestic work. Such personal feelings and thoughts are likely to reflect the gendered meaning of household labor and are believed to come closer to the implicit nature of gendered allocation processes than people's gender ideology. Using unique couple data from the Netherlands, we examined whether women's attitudes toward cleaning, cooking, and child care were more positive than men's and whether these gendered attitudes were related to the actual division of housework and child care.

Women were found to have a more positive attitude toward cleaning, cooking, and child care than did men. Women enjoyed these tasks more, maintained higher standards, and felt more responsible for these tasks. We interpret these findings as evidence for the gendered meaning of household labor. Along with other scholars (e.g., Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1991), we argue that domestic duties are primarily seen as women's work. We contend that the gender-specific meaning of household labor translates into more favorable attitudes among women and that women's attitudes, which are already more positive, are reinforced in everyday life because they do most of the domestic work (Coltrane, 2000). The observed gender differences in attitudes are the result of these reinforcing processes.

Attitudes were also found to be related to the division of household labor. Even taking the standard explanations concerning time availability, relative resources, and gender ideology into account, we found that men's and women's attitudes toward cleaning, cooking, and child care helped explain the gendered division of these tasks. The more positive her attitudes and the more negative his attitudes were, the greater the woman's relative contribution to household labor. Combined with the observed gender differences in attitudes, these findings

lead us to conclude that the unequal division of housework and child care is, in part, explained by women's more favorable attitudes toward these tasks. We would, however, like to qualify this conclusion in three significant ways.

First, the importance of attitudes depended upon the type of domestic task. Men's and women's attitudes were found to be far more important for housework than for child care. There is little empirical research with which to compare our findings, as prior studies on the role of attitudes have typically focused on either housework or child care (Ferree, 1991; Pittman et al., 2001). Nonetheless, our findings concur with studies suggesting that the meaning or importance of child care may be different from housework (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992). Although the weaker role of attitudes in child care may be attributed to the low variance in child-care attitudes compared to cleaning and cooking attitudes, another reason may be that parents already attach such great importance to child care that individual preferences add little to the explanation, as there is no need for partners to play out their preferences. Future research should corroborate our tentative conclusion that attitudes matter more for housework than for child care.

Second, we found little evidence that an individual's attitudes affected the number of hours that his or her partner spent on household labor. Men and women tended to act upon their own attitudes rather than their partner's attitudes. These findings lend little support for the idea that men and women use strategies to take charge or leave tasks to their partner, as is often suggested in the literature on maternal gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Women's higher standards or greater sense of responsibility did not keep men from performing household labor, and similarly, men's attitudes had little to do with their partner's domestic efforts. There may be more subtle processes at work, however. Men's and women's strategies may be more accurately indicated by their attitudes toward their partner's role rather than their own role in child care or housework (Beitel & Parke, 1998) or perhaps even by their own perceptions of their partner's attitudes toward them (Maurer et al., 2001). For example, such strategies may have more to do with mothers assuming that their partners attach little value to child care (Beitel & Parke) or with men anticipating women's criticism (Ferree, 1991).

Future research should thus include people's attitudes toward both their own and their partner's contribution to household labor.

Third, the man's attitudes mattered more than the woman's. Men's greater leverage to act upon their attitudes was particularly pronounced for tasks that are generally less favored. We found "male dominance" (Ferree, 1991) to be relatively strongest with respect to cleaning, followed by cooking; no male dominance was found for the most preferred task of child care. These findings are in line with those of Ferree and support Walker and McGraw's (2000, pp. 564–565) claim that men's role in the division of household labor should not be underestimated. Women's strategies, particularly in parenting, have received the most attention, but Ferree's findings combined with our more recent findings suggest we should focus more on men's strategies. More generally, our study suggests that the division of household labor is even more gendered than implied by women's more favorable attitudes, as women are also less able than men to avoid (or take on) household labor when they do not (or do) feel like it. Gendered power differences may underlie women's lesser ability to act upon their attitudes (Cast, 2003). Women generally have less power because they earn less than men. Women's power is further reduced because their specialization in household labor means that they have fewer economic opportunities after separation (England, 2000). Another reason is that, at an older age, women have fewer opportunities to repartner; unlike for men, the pool of potential mates becomes smaller when women age (Sigle-Rushton & Ní Bhrolchain, 2005). Because men have more power than women do, men may be able to resist doing household labor when they do not want to do it, whereas women have to give in.

Our study suggests that gendered attitudes toward household labor contribute to our understanding of persistent gender inequalities in the division of household labor. As explained in the introduction, the role of men's and women's attitudes toward household labor may be especially strong in the Netherlands. Future research should replicate our study elsewhere to see whether our results can be generalized to other cultural and institutional contexts. In addition, our study had some limitations that could be improved upon in future research. First, we focused on routine household tasks,

as most other studies have done. These tasks are considered to be typically feminine (Coltrane, 2000), and future research may look at the role of attitudes toward less routine, and more masculine, tasks such as odd jobs or gardening. Second, our measures for attitudes and gender ideology could be improved upon by using better and more elaborate items. The wording of some of the attitudinal items was somewhat ambiguous, and our scale for gender ideology was only moderately reliable. Other attitudinal aspects may also be important enough to incorporate in future research. For example, perceived competence may be an important attitudinal factor as well (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Grote et al., 2002), and, as suggested, evaluations of the partner's (rather than one's own) enjoyment or standards should be included in future research. Third, and more generally, we encourage future research into the dynamic and reciprocal relationships between attitudes and the division of household labor. Our cross-sectional study is a snapshot in time of the association between gendered attitudes and the division of household labor. Theories focusing on gender, however, point to the reinforcing process of "producing" gender identities through the division of labor. Finally, it would be worth investigating the role of attitudes in men's and women's satisfaction with the division of household labor and whether they perceive it as fair. One puzzling paradox in the literature on housework is that women consider the unequal division of household labor be fair, even though they do most of the domestic work. Gendered attitudes may help resolve this paradox (Grote et al.).

NOTE

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