

Outsourcing and Egalitarianism in Division of Domestic Work: Complementary or Competing Strategies for Addressing Work-Family Conflict?

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Introduction

Women's work-family conflict and role incompatibility are among the major foci of gender inequality in developed societies, with implications for family dynamics, as well as for women's labor market activity (Stier et al. 2012). In particular, even as their paid work activity is on the rise, women still take on the majority of domestic, unpaid work (childcare and housework), thereby compromising to some extent their economic and social status in the labor market (Blau and Kahn 2017; Ferrant et al. 2014).

Previous studies have suggested two main household strategies to reduce the burden of unpaid work among *women*: (1) a more significant contribution of male partners to unpaid work in the domestic sphere (Cooke 2008; Goldscheider et al. 2015; Torr & Short 2004); and (2) the outsourcing of domestic labor (Craig et al. 2016; Raz-Yurovich 2014). It is likely that neither strategy will eliminate work-family conflict at the household level. Regarding the first strategy, if men contribute more to domestic labor, they themselves may experience greater work-family conflict, especially if labor market expectations from men remain unchanged (Okun and Raz-Yurovich 2019). Regarding the second strategy, outsourcing in developed societies is not an all-encompassing solution. Therefore, even when domestic labor is outsourced to some extent, there will nearly always remain additional unpaid work which needs to be divided between household members (Craig & Baxter 2016; Raz-Yurovich 2014).

With the growing prevalence of dual-earner households, *both* partners may experience role incompatibility, and questions arise as to the household decision-making process which leads to the adoption of either one, both or neither of these strategies. However, little research has examined *joint* household decisions regarding outsourcing and gender division of (remaining) domestic labor (but see Craig et al. 2016). Other research has considered whether outsourcing and housework time may differ across couples by socioeconomic status. For example, some previous research has found that women with greater socioeconomic resources outsource housework more (e.g. Cohen 1998), while a different stream of research has documented that women with greater resources do less housework (Evertsson et al. 2009). With respect to an educational gradient in men's housework time, the results are more mixed across countries and over time (e.g. Evertsson et al. 2009; Sullivan 2010). However, little research has examined socioeconomic differentials in the *joint* strategies of outsourcing and gender division of domestic labor. We expect that our research will inform literatures both on outsourcing and on gender division of labor, by analyzing these two dimensions of domestic labor as joint decisions.

In the current research, we ask several questions regarding the use of outsourcing and/or men's greater contribution to domestic labor. First, we ask whether outsourcing and more equal division of labor are complementary strategies (i.e. couples use domestic services and equally divide the residual unpaid work between the partners) *or* competing strategies (i.e., despite outsourcing, the female partner still bears a larger share of domestic labor). Second, we ask whether the use of different joint strategies varies across couples with different educational levels of the partners. Third, we ask whether the use of the two strategies differ by the type of domestic work (housework vs. childcare).

Theoretical focus

Previous research has outlined how households face "make or buy" decisions with regards to domestic labor (Raz-Yurovich 2014). Home production done by household members ("make") can be

(partially) delegated to third parties who are not household members (“buy”) via outsourcing. The joint decisions partners make regarding division of household labor and outsourcing are affected by economic considerations of financial and time budgets, as well as by transaction costs that include considerations of trust, stress, training, specialization, preferences, and norms. Moreover, these considerations may differ between partners, and between different tasks (e.g. childcare vs. housework) (Van der Lippe et al. 2013), because childcare has different social value than housework. It is important to note that empirical research in Western societies, has demonstrated that households make **and** buy (Craig & Baxter 2016; Raz-Yurovich 2014).

Research has addressed the question of whether outsourcing of domestic labor reduces role-incompatibility for both women and men (De Ruijter & Van der Lippe 2007; Raz-Yurovich 2014). Empirically, it has been shown that outsourcing particularly affects women’s labor market outcomes (e.g. Cortes & Tessada 2011; Raz-Yurovich & Marx 2019). With regards to “make” decisions, previous research has considered how domestic work is divided between partners in heterosexual partnerships. Some theories predict less equal division between partners, with women taking on the majority of domestic labor. These theories include the following: (1) the specialization model (Becker 1981); (2) perspective on heterosexual partnerships as gendered institutions (Sayer et al. 2011); and (3) the “doing gender” perspective (West & Zimmerman 1987; Brines 1994). In contrast, more recent theories predict more equal division between partners, as gender role attitudes change and women’s economic power increases (gender revolution theory) (e.g. Goldscheider et al. 2015). Other theories predict that the division of domestic labor between partners is resource-dependent (e.g. bargaining theory), (Lundberg & Pollak 1993; Manser & Brown 1980), whereby women with greater resources use their economic and social power to leverage their way out of domestic responsibilities.

Given that with regard to domestic labor, couples may choose to “make” and “buy”, it is important to note that even if couples do outsource (part) of the domestic work, there will always be additional work to be divided between partners. For example, with regards to outsourcing childcare, even when a small child is enrolled in a pre-school program, couples need to divide between them the responsibilities for caring for the child in off-hours (including daily tasks of dressing, bathing, etc.). If more educated women are able to leverage their resources (as per *bargaining* theory) to outsource *as well as* divide more equally the remaining tasks, we will consider the two strategies as *complementary*. In contrast, if the greater use of outsourcing among more educated women is accompanied by even less equal division between partners (as per the “*doing gender*” perspective), we will consider the two strategies as *competing*. How joint strategies vary across educational couple types has implications for gender equality in the household as well as inequality across households.

Data, Variables and Methods

We address these questions using pooled data from four country contexts (Germany, France, Belgium and Austria) included in Wave I (2005 – 2010) of the Generations and Gender Program (GGP). These four countries were selected because they include the required information on both outsourcing as well as gender division of domestic labor. GGP respondents provide information about themselves as well as their partners, and our analyses will be performed at the couple-level. For the analyses of housework, we will focus on a subsample of married and cohabiting heterosexual couples for whom the main respondent is aged 23-59 (N = 10,034). For the analyses of childcare, we will focus on a subsample of these couples with at least one child aged 0-12, and we will further break this down by age of youngest child. As an example, the sample size of couples with a child aged 0-2 is N = 1,778.

We construct summary indices based on detailed information on the extent to which various tasks associated with housework (preparing daily meals, doing the dishes, shopping for food, and vacuuming,) and childcare (dressing, putting to bed, caring for child when ill, and leisure activities) are shared between the partners and/or outsourced. When women are always or primarily responsible for at least 3 out of the 4 housework tasks, we define the division as “less equal”. When women are always or primarily responsible for no more than 2 out of the 4 housework tasks, we define the division

as “more equal”, while noting that even this definition includes many couples in which the female partner performs more tasks than does the male partner. Division of childcare is defined analogously. We also exploit specific questions concerning the use of outsourcing of housework as well as use of formal (regular institutional/paid childcare) and informal outsourcing of childcare (regular informal, unpaid childcare from a relative/friend or other). We construct two categorical *dependent* variables (one for housework, and one for childcare) which each represent the four possible combinations of use of outsourcing (yes/no) with gender division of (remaining) domestic work (more/less equal division).

The main explanatory categorical variable captures relative resources of the partners in each couple, based on whether each partner has tertiary education. The four categories of this variable captures which of the partners has tertiary education: (1) both partners; (2) only she; (3) only he (ref.); and (4) neither partner. A rich set of control variables includes gender, number of children, age of youngest child, partnership status (married vs. cohabiting), both partners’ ages, health status, respondent’s gender role attitudes, employment status, and (ln) total household income. We also include dummy variables for the country context, as sample sizes do not allow for separate analyses for each country.

We estimate separate multinomial logistic regression models for each of the two categorical dependent variables. For each dependent variable, we present our results in terms of predictive margins, for different values of the main explanatory variable. For each dependent variable, we will estimate two different models – one which controls for all factors mentioned above, except for employment status and total household income, and one which also includes the latter two factors.

Preliminary Findings

At a descriptive level, we note that overall, 11% of respondents report outsourcing of housework, and 58% have “more equal” division of housework tasks. Among those respondents with a child aged 0-2 in the household (as an example), 57% outsource childcare and 60% have “more equal” gender division of childcare tasks. Further preliminary results indicate that in households that outsource housework, there is significantly more egalitarian sharing of the (remaining) housework than in households that do not outsource. For example, among respondents in households that do outsource housework, 66% have a more equal division of housework. In contrast, among respondents in households that do not engage in paid outsourcing of housework, the corresponding percentage is 57%. With regard to childcare of children aged 0-2, we observe a similar pattern, whereby among respondents who do report the use of outsourcing of childcare, 66% have a more equal division of childcare tasks. The analogous percentage among respondents in households that do not outsource childcare for children aged 0-2 is 51%. Therefore, descriptive results suggest that outsourcing and equal division of domestic work are complementary strategies overall.

In order to address our second research question, we compare predictive margins from multivariate models of the joint distribution of outsourcing and gender division, for each of the dependent variables, by different educational couple types. In Figure 1 below, predictive margins are compared between couples in which only the male partner has tertiary education (left panel), and couples in which both partners have tertiary education (right panel). The comparison highlights the effect of the female partner’s tertiary level education on the joint distribution of the two strategies with regard to housework.

Figure 1 indicates that, based on this comparison, among couples with educated female partners, there is much greater overall use of outsourcing of housework (right panel 25%, compared with left panel 7%), as well as a substantially greater share of couples with more equal division (right panel 68%, compared with left panel 57%). Therefore, with regard to housework, we conclude that based on this comparison, outsourcing and equal gender division are complementary strategies. One interpretation of this comparison is in terms of the educated female partner’s ability to leverage her socioeconomic resources via *bargaining*, with the end result of more outsourcing *as well as* more

equal division of (remaining) household tasks. The implication for socioeconomic inequality among women is that those who lack tertiary education face the double burden of doing the lion's share of household tasks without the benefit of domestic outsourcing, which presumably would have reduced the total amount of housework. The implications of this double burden may carry over to labor market outcomes.

Figure 1 – Housework: Outsourcing and Gender Division, by Educational Couple Type

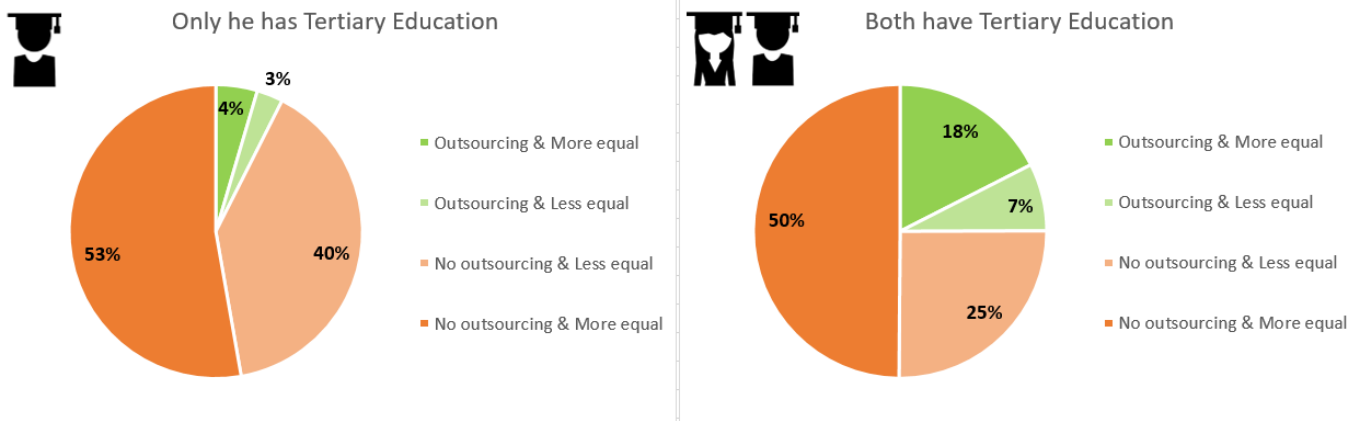
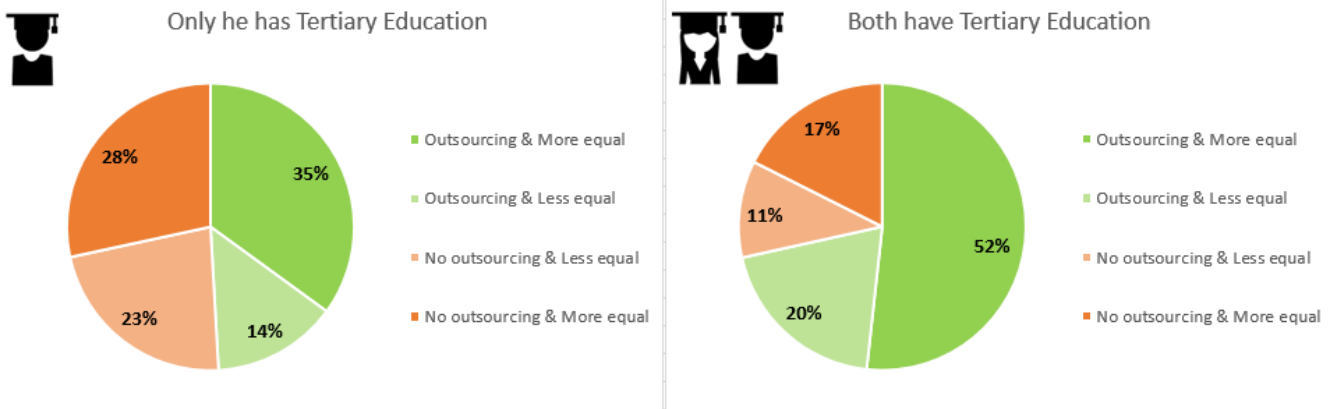


Figure 2 presents analogous comparisons with regards to childcare. The results show a somewhat different pattern than that with regards to housework. Based on this comparison, among couples with educated female partners, there is much greater overall use of outsourcing of childcare (right panel 72%, compared with left panel 49%). In contrast, the difference in terms of more equal gender division is relatively small (69% vs. 63%, respectively). One interpretation of this finding is that with regards to childcare, there is less bargaining in terms of gender division on the part of educated women, either because the educated women themselves are less keen on leveraging their way out of childcare and/or because their educated male partners are more interested themselves in contributing to childcare. Underlying this interpretation may be the idea that parents enjoy spending time with their child, and desire to transmit their own values to their children, possibly in response to cultural expectations regarding intensive parenting. In continuing research, we will compare between additional educational couple types, which will shed more light on the theoretical interpretation of our findings, and on the implications for socioeconomic inequality among women and men.

Figure 2 – Childcare: Outsourcing and Gender Division, by Educational Couple Type



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