

# *THE SEX-TYPING OF CHILDREN'S HOUSEHOLD LABOR*

## *Parental Influence on Daughters' and Sons' Housework*

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**Although studies of the division** of household labor are numerous, most interest in this area of study has focused on the division of household labor among adults. Relatively few studies have investigated the division of household chores among children (Goodnow, 1988). Yet even existing studies are somewhat limited in their scope, primarily due to the seeming lack of appropriate or adequate data on children's household labor participation. Children have been shown to consistently perform chores within the home (Cogle & Tasker, 1982) and to represent a significant portion of the total amount of labor performed by all persons within the household (Peters & Haldeman, 1987). This study will seek to further the current understanding of children's housework by exploring the linkage between the adult division of labor in the home and that same sex-based division found in children's labor contributions. Two primary goals are pursued in this research. Using recent data from a nationally representative sample, this study will (a) investigate the extent to which sex-typing is found among children's household labor and (b) examine the association of parental factors

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with children's sex-based division of household labor. The latter investigation will focus specifically on how parents both *directly* and *indirectly* affect the division of children's household chores.

## PREVIOUS RESEARCH

### SEX AND AGE DIFFERENCES IN CHILDREN'S HOUSEHOLD LABOR

Several studies have shown that sex-typing does occur in the allocation of chores to children. For example, Zill and Peterson (1982) reported that girls tended to perform those tasks typically associated with mothers' household labor. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) reported that girls and boys differed in regard to both total inputs and types of household chores performed. Girls did significantly more work. Among children aged 14 to 17, girls worked approximately 5.7 hours per week, whereas boys averaged 3.6 hours. Although this indicates some differentiation by sex, children also differed in the types of chores performed. Girls were considerably more likely to clean the house, work in the kitchen, and babysit their younger siblings. Boys, on the other hand, were more likely to perform outside chores (e.g., mowing, raking leaves) and to take out the garbage (White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). Goldstein and Oldham (1979) reported similar findings; girls were more likely to assist in cleaning chores and dishwashing, whereas boys were more likely to perform garbage and yard-care duties. Using time diaries, Timmer, Eccles, and O'Brien (1985) found that teenage girls (ages 12-17) spent twice as much time as teenage boys on housework during weekdays; on weekends, girls spent almost three times as much time on household chores.

The degree of segregation of tasks by sex among children thus seems quite similar to that found among adults (see Blair & Lichter, 1991). That is, females (a) are more likely to perform *greater total amounts* of labor and (b) perform *qualitatively* different types of chores. These conclusions have been supported by several researchers. Lawrence and Wozniak (1987) found that girls performed significantly more labor than boys, with girls averaging 77 min per day in total household work, as compared to an average of

55 min per day among boys. Girls were also found to spend more time overall than boys in the areas of shopping, house cleaning, food preparation, dishwashing, clothing care, and clothing construction. In fact, the only labor area in which boys outperformed girls was in the maintenance of the home and yard (Lawrence & Wozniak, 1987). Cogle and Tasker (1982) provided further support for these findings, reporting that girls were twice as likely to wash dishes and four times as likely to perform clothing-related chores (e.g., washing, ironing). Such results have been found by other studies (Munroe et al., 1983; Whiting & Whiting, 1975).

Finally, Cogle and Tasker (1982) reported that the extent of sex-typing of children's household chores tended to increase with the age of the child. They found that young children (aged 6 to 11) were less likely to occupy sex-typed task assignments than were older children. In particular, Cogle and Tasker found this trend to be stronger among girls than among boys. In support of these conclusions, White and Brinkerhoff (1981) found that between the ages of 6 and 9, 33% of boys and 61% of girls assisted their parents in meal preparation; however, between the ages of 14 and 17, only 22% of boys performed kitchen-oriented chores, whereas the same percentage for girls increased to 72%. Clearly, the age of children has a strong effect on the extent of sex-typing in their household chores.

If the basic assumption is accepted that children perform housework primarily because of (a) its assignment by parents and (b) children's imitation of parental behaviors, it logically follows that associations should exist between the characteristics and behaviors of parents and the sex-typing of children's household labor.

#### ASSOCIATION WITH PARENTAL FACTORS

Given the apparent sex-typing of children's household labor, it is surprising that few linkages have been found between parental characteristics and children's chores. Duncan and Duncan (1978) reported a strong association between the reported egalitarian division of adult household labor and the degree to which parents supported the egalitarian division of labor among children. Essentially, if parents were egalitarian in their own division of household

labor, they were more likely to support those same behaviors among their own children. This would seem to indicate that parental ideologies have a significant effect on children's labor contributions, particularly if the assumption is made that parents *assign* chores to children (i.e., as opposed to children behaving in an altruistic manner). Lackey (1989) found that a relative consistency existed between parents' attitudes concerning adult sex roles and the sex-typed assignment of household chores to children.

Duncan and Duncan (1978) found that mothers were less likely than fathers to sex-type children's tasks. This may be related to the fact that adult females perform the majority of household labor. That is, mothers may be less likely to sex-type chores because they would then be left with fewer potential sources of labor (in the form of their children) if they chose to specialize children's chores. Lackey (1989) found that fathers, more than mothers, preferred to assign their children to traditional, sex-typed chores. Further, there was a relative consistency between adult sex role attitudes and their interactions with their children, thus indicating the possibility of intergenerational continuity of the division of household labor. In fact, Thrall (1978) concluded that children's exposure to the sex-based division of labor among their parents was significantly linked to their own preferences for a division of household labor in adulthood. However, Berk (1985) reached the opposite conclusion, reporting that fathers' participation in household labor had no effect on children's participation in housework.

The division of labor among children may also be associated with the relative compensation of boys and girls. White and Brinkerhoff (1981) found that boys more often received money for performing chores outside the home. Girls, on the other hand, typically performed chores in the home without receiving an equivalent level of monetary return for their efforts. Goodnow (1988) proposed that this difference may serve to further socialize children into accepting a given sex-based role in society. Goodnow (1988) stated, "Mothers do not get paid in money, and their daughters seem to be socialized into a similar pattern of work that is 'for love'" (p. 15).

Beyond sex-typing, several parental factors have been shown to be related to the *total amounts of labor* performed by children. One

of the more prominent factors is that of mothers' employment status. Several studies have shown that there is a significant increase in children's total labor in the home when the mother is employed outside the home (Hedges & Barnett, 1972; Rubin, 1983). Cogle and Tasker (1982), using different dependent measures of housework, reported that children whose mothers were employed only part-time in the paid labor force may have performed the least number of chores, whereas children of traditional housewives performed slightly more, with children of mothers employed full-time in the paid labor force performing the greatest amounts of housework. The implications of this are obvious. If the mother's time is constrained, she may call on her children as a viable labor resource. Again, given the degree of sex segregation among adult household labor (Blair & Lichter, 1991), employed mothers may call on daughters more than sons to "fill in" the labor formerly performed by the mother (e.g., cooking, cleaning).

Duncan and Duncan (1978) also reported that parental educational attainment was inversely associated with the acceptance of a sex-typed, traditional division of household labor among children (see also White & Brinkerhoff, 1981). That is, parents with relatively high levels of educational attainment were less likely to support a sex-typed division of chores for their children, preferring instead a more egalitarian allocation of tasks. Parents with lower educational attainment levels were more likely to prefer a traditional segregation of chores by sex. However, Cogle and Tasker (1982) did not find a significant association between fathers' educational attainment and the overall amounts of labor performed by children. Thus previous studies are not entirely in agreement over the effects of parental education.

In general, then, there are a number of parental variables that are associated with the sex-typing of children's household labor. What is lacking, however, is a meaningful articulation of parental characteristics and the sex-based division of labor among children. This gap in the study of children's household labor has not gone unnoticed (Burns & Homel, 1989). This study will investigate the sex-based division of children's household labor from a *social learning* perspective. Specifically, it will examine the manner in

which parents both directly and indirectly affect the segregation of children's household chores.

### **EXPLAINING THE SEX-BASED DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR AMONG CHILDREN**

This study will utilize an adaptation of social learning theory. Here, it is proposed that gender roles within the home are learned via two primary means: (a) through the application of rewards and punishments by parents and (b) through observation and imitation (Bandura & Walters, 1963; Lindsey, 1990). Hence the division of labor among children is envisioned as resulting (a) from enforcement by parents (e.g., the parents will dictate what household labor children will perform and when they will perform it) and (b) through imitation of the division of adult labor within the home (e.g., in traditional households, daughters will prefer to wash dishes because they observe their mother doing so).

Research in social learning theory has also consistently presented one other important conclusion related to the division of household labor among children: Gender role stereotyping by parents tends to increase with age (Silvern, 1977). Social learning theory thus seems quite applicable to the study of the division of household labor among children, particularly in understanding the linkage between children's labor and that of their parents.

The impact of parents on the division of children's household labor thus has two sources. Parents may affect children's division of labor *directly* through the application of their own sex role ideologies and attitudes. If, for instance, a parent maintains traditional sex role attitudes, he or she will be more likely to assign daughters to dishwashing chores and sons to yard-care duties. This direct effect may also entail the use of punishments and rewards in the form of compensation for chore performance. As concluded in several studies (Goodnow, 1988; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981), boys and girls are rewarded differently for performing chores. Along with their sex role attitudes, parents may also affect children's chore division through the selective compensation they provide for task performance.

Parents can also affect children's division of household labor via *indirect* routes. Specifically, parents may serve as *role models* for their children. If children view their same-sex parent performing a distinct set of household tasks and if these tasks do not overlap significantly with those performed by their opposite-sex parent, the children will be likely to model their own behaviors and attitudes after those exhibited by the parents.

This study thus proposes to examine the sex-based division of household labor among children. Further, it will examine sources of interfamily variation in children's household labor contributions, particularly as they are affected by parental factors. This examination will be embedded within a social learning perspective and will focus particularly on the *direct* and *indirect* sources of parental influence.

### DATA AND VARIABLES

Data for this study are taken from the 1988 National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) (Sweet, Bumpass, & Call, 1988). The NSFH provides a cross-sectional national sample of 13,017 respondents aged 19 and older. The sample here is limited to 600 married or cohabiting households with only one child present between the ages of 5 and 18. Given that the query made of the respondents applies to all others in the household under age 19, the sample is restricted to ensure that the estimates obtained apply to that one child specifically. After limiting the data in this fashion, 290 households with a single female child aged 5 to 18 are present, with 310 such households for male children. It is recognized that this study's findings are limited by the sample (e.g., families with multiple children between the ages of 5 and 18 may exhibit different patterns of chore allocation). Further, there were insufficient numbers of single-parent families to include in the analyses.

For each parent, the NSFH includes reports of the contributions of others in the household under age 19. Each parent has provided an estimate of the hours spent per week on eight specific household tasks. The tasks are (a) preparing meals, (b) washing dishes, (c)

cleaning house, (d) outdoor tasks, (e) shopping, (f) washing and ironing clothes, (g) paying bills, and (h) auto maintenance. These activities span the gamut of household chores typically performed within an average family. Unfortunately, the desirable area of child care, such as the care of younger siblings on the part of the child, is not available because of the limitations of the data. Nonetheless, estimates of children's participation in each of these areas is taken from each parent in the household, with the average of the two being taken as the level of participation by the child in question (differences between mothers' and fathers' estimates were nonsignificant).

Three separate dependent variables are constructed from the household level estimates by parents. First, total labor is simply the number of hours spent weekly by children in all of the eight areas of labor previously mentioned. Second, percentage of all labor is the percentage of all labor performed in the home by all household members that is reported as being performed by the son or daughter. This is intended to provide a relative measure of the level of participation of sons and daughters, with the intent of measuring sex-based differences in terms of relative labor inputs and responsibilities. And third, time in female-dominated tasks is the number of hours spent weekly by sons or daughters on those tasks shown to be performed primarily by adult females. Specifically, this includes the chores of (a) meal preparation, (b) washing dishes, (c) cleaning, and (d) washing and ironing. Here, by limiting examination to those chores typically performed by women, sex-based differences in task allocation to sons and daughters may well be identified.

Direct parental influence factors were measured in several ways. Indexed measures of fathers' and mothers' sex role orientation were created from responses to each of the following statements: (a) "It is much better for everyone if the man earns the main living and the woman takes care of the home and the family"; (b) "Preschool children are likely to suffer if their mother is employed"; (c) "Parents should encourage just as much independence in their daughters as in their sons"; and (d) "In a successful marriage, each partner must have the freedom to do what they want individually." Respondents answered each question on the basis of a 5-point scale,



ranging from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Scores on this scale ranged from 4 to 20 (Cronbach's  $\alpha = .5206$ ), with a low score indicating more egalitarian sex role orientations. A dummy variable assessing whether the parents gave the child an allowance (coded 0 = *yes*, 1 = *no*) was inserted, with the expectation that allowances may be used as rewards for adherence to parental labor requests.

In addition, measures of mothers' and fathers' weekly hours spent in the paid labor force and education (number of years of formal schooling) were included. Finally, a separate measure of mothers' employment status (employed or nonemployed) was used to assess the impact of mothers' employment alone. Time constraints for parents (labor force participation) were hypothesized to result in increased allocation of household chores to children. The employment of mothers was proposed to result in decreased sex-typing of children's housework, as was an increase in parental education.

Indirect parental influences were derived from the roles portrayed by parents in their own household labor behaviors. Here, measures of mothers' and fathers' total household labor were used, with the expectation that children would mimic the household labor contributions of their same-sex parent. These simply included the total self-reported hours that each spouse spent in the performance of household chores.

In addition to direct and indirect parental influences, the analysis included separate measures of children's age and presence of children 4 years of age or younger (coded 0 = *no*, 1 = *yes*). Here, the need was to assess the impact of children's age, which has been shown to affect their labor contributions, and to measure the effect of younger siblings on those same labor outputs. As suggested by White and Brinkerhoff (1981), children may be assigned to the care of younger siblings when they are present in the home. If this is the case, the presence of younger siblings may result in lower labor contributions by children. The rationale here is that the care of siblings will take away from labor time they would otherwise have spent in ordinary household chores. This relationship is hypothesized to be stronger for daughters, as child-care tasks are traditionally viewed as feminine duties.

**TABLE 1**  
**Children's Division of Household Labor, Mean Hours per Week**  
**(Includes Only Households With One Child 5-18 Years of Age)**

<i>Chore</i>	<i>Sons</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Daughters</i>	<i>%</i>
Meal preparation	0.53 (1.12)	11.5	0.92 (2.01)	16.4
Dishes	0.82 (1.79)	17.7	1.48 (2.16)	26.4
Ironing or washing	0.24 (0.95)	5.2	0.71 (1.70)	12.7
Cleaning	1.01 (2.58)	21.8	1.78 (2.69)	31.7
Shopping	0.24 (0.75)	5.2	0.27 (0.75)	4.8
Outdoor tasks	1.32 (2.26)	28.5	0.41 (1.16)	7.3
Auto maintenance	0.46 (1.66)	9.9	0.04 (0.27)	0.7
Bills	0.01 (0.15)	0.2	0.00 (0.07)	0.0
Total labor	4.63 (6.46)	100.0	5.62 (8.36)	100.0
Percentage of all household labor		7.6		9.1
Total labor in female-dominated tasks	2.60 (4.79)		4.89 (7.38)	
<i>N</i>	310		290	

NOTE: Standard deviations are shown in parentheses.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the mean hours per week spent by children on household chores, as well as the percentage distribution of their total time across all tasks. These data reveal substantial differences between the labor contributions of daughters and sons. First, daughters perform significantly more total labor than sons (5.62 vs. 4.63 hours) per week. More important, however, is the percentage distribution of their respective labor time across all tasks. Daughters

spend the majority of their time in those tasks traditionally defined as "female-dominated." They spend 31.7% of their time cleaning the house, 26.4% washing dishes, and 16.4% preparing meals. Sons, on the other hand, spend the largest percentage of their labor time on outdoor tasks (28.5%). Obviously, sons and daughters mimic the household labor trends found among adults.

Also presented in Table 1 are the measures of the percentage of all household labor and total labor spent in female-dominated areas by daughters and sons. Daughters contribute more of the total labor within the home than do sons (9.1% vs. 7.6%). Further, daughters spend considerably more time than sons on female-dominated tasks (4.89 vs. 2.60 hours per week).

The second goal of this study was to examine the association of parental factors with the division of household labor among children. Table 2 presents the means for daughters' total household labor, percentage of all labor, and time spent in female-dominated labor across each of the aforementioned independent variables.

In support of earlier research, the age of daughters is strongly associated with all measures of household labor. As daughters increase in age, they perform more total labor, contribute a greater percentage of all labor in the home, and spend more time on female-dominated chores. For instance, daughters aged 5 to 9 years contribute an average of 1.88 hours per week of total labor, as compared to 8.19 hours per week for daughters aged 15 to 18.

The presence of younger siblings also affects daughters' household labor as expected. That is, daughters with younger siblings perform substantially less labor than those without younger siblings (2.89 vs. 6.81 hours per week). This may indicate that daughters are "taken away" from the typical gamut of household chores and are assigned to caretaking duties when younger siblings are present.

Of central interest, however, is the impact of parental factors on the division of children's household labor. As shown in Table 2, indirect parental influences appear to account for a significant portion of daughters' variation in household labor performance. Parental sex role orientations are of particular interest. With both fathers and mothers, egalitarian sex role orientations are associated with lower levels of labor time and lower levels of time spent in

female-dominated chores. Interestingly, the association of mothers' sex role orientations is slightly stronger than the association of fathers' sex role orientations ( $\eta = .14$  vs.  $.11$ ).

This mother-daughter linkage is shown again in the relationship of daughters' household labor with parental educational attainment. Although an increase in the education of both parents is associated with a decrease in total labor time, the effect of mothers' education is much stronger. Daughters of mothers with a high school education average 7.68 hours per week of household labor, compared with 3.57 hours per week for daughters whose mothers have a college degree.

Parental employment variables also have a strong effect on daughters' labor. Again, those variables associated with the mothers are seemingly more significant. For example, daughters of employed mothers average 5.92 hours per week on housework, whereas daughters of nonemployed mothers contribute only 5.07 hours per week. Daughters of employed mothers also experience considerable variation in their labor contributions. Daughters whose employed mothers work less than 20 hours per week average 3.99 hours per week of total labor (representing only 6% of all labor), whereas those daughters whose mothers work 40 hours per week or more average 7.39 hours per week of household labor (representing 12% of all labor). Obviously, daughters appear to fill in the labor shortage caused by their mothers' work in the labor force.

The impact of an allowance given by the parent produces surprising results. Daughters who receive an allowance average 7.30 hours per week of total labor, whereas those who do not receive an allowance average only 4.97 hours per week. Obviously, direct compensation of daughters by parents produces clear results. However, the meaning of this compensation by parents is difficult to specify.

Indirect parental influences are shown in the form of parental household labor patterns. Here, the labor contributions of both parents appears to be associated with daughters' own household labor. Curiously, the labor input of fathers maintains a slightly stronger association with daughters' total labor time ( $.14$  vs.  $.13$ ),

TABLE 2  
 Daughters' Mean Levels of Total Household Labor, Percentage of  
 All Household Labor, and Total Hours Spent in Female-Dominated Chores

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Daughters' Total Labor</i>	$\eta$	<i>Daughters' % of All Labor</i>	$\eta$	<i>Daughters' Hours Spent in Female-Dominated Chores</i>	$\eta$	<i>N</i>
Age of child		.34		.50		.33	
5-9	1.88		3		1.59		101
10-14	6.47		10		5.81		64
15-18	8.19		14		7.07		125
Presence of children 4 years of age or younger		.22		.34		.21	
No	6.81		11		5.90		202
Yes	2.89		4		2.57		88
Allowance		.13		.18		.14	
Yes	7.30		12		6.39		122
No	4.97		8		4.26		125
Fathers' sex role orientation		.11		.10		.11	
Egalitarian	4.12		8		3.59		74
Moderate	5.64		9		4.98		107
Traditional	4.38		7		3.89		51
Mothers' sex role orientation		.14		.09		.14	
Egalitarian	4.12		8		3.63		96
Moderate	6.67		10		5.84		124
Traditional	6.28		8		5.16		40
Mothers' employment status		.05		.18		.05	
Employed	5.92		10		5.18		191
Nonemployed	5.07		6		4.35		71

Mothers' weekly hours in paid labor force					
1-19	3.99	.17	.21	3.44	.17
20-39	4.89	10		4.28	17
40-59	7.39	12		6.45	67
60+	5.48	13		4.71	90
Fathers' weekly hours in paid labor force					
1-19	—	.08	.13	—	4
20-39	6.62	12		5.38	0
40-59	4.78	9		4.31	16
60+	4.39	11		3.54	171
Fathers' education					
<12 years	4.88	10	.08	4.66	22
High school degree	5.54	8		4.97	.11
Some college	5.25	8		4.35	20
Bachelor's degree or more	3.79	8	.19	3.30	93
Mothers' education					
<12 years	5.49	8	.22	4.66	68
High school degree	7.68	11		6.82	64
Some college	4.28	7		3.60	30
Bachelor's degree or more	3.57	7		3.04	109
Fathers' total household labor					
0-9 hours	4.65	10	.10	4.11	70
10-19 hours	5.38	9		4.59	55
20-29 hours	6.82	7		5.98	.14
30 hours or more	9.29	8		8.20	97
Mothers' total household labor					
0-9 hours	1.37	6	.13	1.06	126
10-19 hours	4.32	12		3.83	50
20-29 hours	5.27	9		4.68	18
30 hours or more	6.41	8		5.51	9
					40
					85
					155

although the difference is negligible. What this may indicate is that, regardless of mothers' household labor patterns, daughters are consistently assigned household chores. For example, daughters whose mothers perform 10 to 19 hours of household labor average 4.32 hours themselves, whereas daughters whose mothers perform 30 hours or more of household labor average 6.41 hours per week.

A comparison of the results shown for daughters with those for sons should serve to provide more tangible evidence of the impact of parental variables on children's household labor. As shown in Table 3, one of the strongest associations is found between sons' age and their respective household labor contributions. As with daughters, sons take on greater total amounts of household chores as they age (but to a lesser degree).

Also, the presence of younger siblings is associated with decreased labor among sons. Sons with younger siblings average 3.13 hours per week of total labor, as compared to 5.18 hours per week for those without siblings. Although the association is similar to that of daughters, the overall strength of the association is considerably weaker among sons ( $\eta = .22$  vs.  $.14$ ). This seems to indicate a parental preference for assigning caretaking chores to daughters rather than to sons.

Direct parental influences among sons are significantly different from those found among daughters. Mothers' and fathers' egalitarian sex role orientations still maintain a significant inverse association with sons' household labor. Sons whose fathers maintain an egalitarian sex role orientation average 5.09 hours per week of total labor, as compared to 3.76 hours per week for sons of fathers with traditional sex role orientations. The same relationship holds true among mothers. The implications here are readily apparent. Sons of parents with traditional sex role orientations will perform less household labor, whereas daughters of traditionally oriented parents will perform more labor.

As with daughters, sons' household labor is associated more with the employment of the mother than with employment of the father. For example, sons whose mothers work less than 20 hours per week average 3.31 hours per week of total labor, whereas those sons whose mothers work 40 hours per week or more average 4.71 hours of total labor. The employment of sons' fathers is negligible.

Further, parental educational attainment is only weakly associated with sons' household labor, which contrasts sharply with the relationship found with daughters.

Interestingly, the provision of an allowance produces an opposite effect with sons as compared to daughters. Sons who receive an allowance average 4.07 hours per week of total labor, whereas those who do not receive an allowance average 5.71 hours. One possible reason for this finding is that, as White and Brinkerhoff (1981) conclude, sons and daughters are rewarded differently. Daughters may be encouraged to participate in domestic chores by parents, with this participation being supported by the use of an allowance. Sons, on the other hand, may be as likely to receive an allowance as daughters, but their allowance does not carry the parental provision that they perform labor, either ordinary or extra tasks, within the home. Essentially, parents may reward daughters and sons differently (i.e., for performing different types of behaviors, particularly behavior that is congruent with the parents' gender role ideologies).

Indirect sources of parental influence for sons are indeed notable. For sons, the impact of fathers' household labor is considerable ( $\eta = .33$ ). Sons whose fathers perform less than 10 hours of household labor average 2.40 hours per week of total labor, whereas sons whose fathers perform 30 or more hours of household labor average 9.89 hours per week. This certainly supports the aforementioned hypothesis that the same-sex parent may serve as a role model for the child. Indeed, the association between mothers' household labor and sons' is small compared to that between fathers and sons.

#### **REGRESSION RESULTS: CHILDREN'S TOTAL HOUSEHOLD LABOR**

Table 4 presents the results (standardized regression coefficients) of models of sons' and daughters' total household labor. Given that the housework of children has been shown to differ by the number of adult earners in the home (see Benin & Edwards, 1990), separate analyses are performed for all households and dual-earner families. For the most part, these results reinforce the bivariate results given in Tables 2 and 3. Each of the models



TABLE 3  
**Sons' Mean Levels of Total Household Labor, Percentage of  
 All Household Labor, and Total Hours Spent in Female-Dominated Chores**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Sons' Total Labor</i>	$\eta$	<i>Sons' % of All Labor</i>	$\eta$	<i>Sons' Hours Spent in Female-Dominated Chores</i>	$\eta$	<i>N</i>
Age of child		.31		.38		.20	
5-9	1.86		4		1.28		105
10-14	5.79		10		3.73		59
15-18	6.16		10		3.10		146
Presence of children 4 years of age or younger		.14		.21		.04	
No	5.18		9		2.73		227
Yes	3.13		5		2.25		83
Allowance		.12		.09		.07	
Yes	4.07		7		2.35		125
No	5.71		9		3.06		136
Fathers' sex role orientation		.08		.20		.11	
Egalitarian	5.09		10		3.18		75
Moderate	4.86		8		2.73		120
Traditional	3.76		6		1.77		71
Mothers' sex role orientation		.12		.19		.19	
Egalitarian	5.21		10		3.27		104
Moderate	4.21		7		2.15		144
Traditional	3.12		5		1.03		38
Mothers' employment status		.05		.09		.10	
Employed	4.81		8		2.88		202
Nonemployed	4.11		7		1.83		93



**TABLE 4**  
**Regression Models of Daughters' and Sons' Total**  
**Household Labor, All Households and Dual-Earner Households**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Daughters</i>		<i>Sons</i>	
	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>
Age of child	.254*** (.324) <sup>a</sup>	.255** (.315)	.258*** (.370)	.264*** (.372)
Presence of children 4 years of age or younger	-.164* (-2.298)	-.148 (-2.236)	-.017 (-.310)	-.045 (-.864)
Allowance	-.166** (-1.878)	-.116 (-1.195)	.156** (1.873)	.129 (1.575)
Fathers' sex role orientation	-.094 (-.213)	-.042 (-.090)	-.254*** (-.560)	-.227** (-.496)
Mothers' sex role orientation	.155* (.340)	.211* (.424)	.025 (.058)	.046 (.114)
Mothers' employment status	-.050 (-.674)		.054 (.719)	
Mothers' weekly hours in paid labor force		.204** (.093)		.087 (.048)
Fathers' weekly hours in paid labor force	.001 (.000)	-.094 (-.059)	-.056 (-.046)	-.018 (-.016)
Fathers' education	.007 (.014)	.067 (.113)	-.166** (-.345)	-.334*** (-.722)
Mothers' education	-.023 (-.058)	-.057 (-.130)	.026 (.062)	.123 (.308)
Fathers' total household labor	.032 (.020)	-.052 (-.029)	.272*** (.191)	.185** (.125)
Mothers' total household labor	.271*** (.101)	.134 (.052)	.065 (.024)	.081 (.032)
$R^2$	.27	.26	.31	.30
$F$	4.66***	2.93***	6.61***	4.01***
$N$	149	104	176	115

a. Unstandardized coefficients are shown in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

explains a considerable amount of the variance of sons' and daughters' total labor, ranging from 26% to 31%. Yet there are obvious differences between the sexes.

The children's age has a strong relationship with their total labor, regardless of their sex. The presence of younger siblings, however, has a considerably larger impact on daughters' labor contributions than on sons' ( $\beta = -.164$  vs.  $-.017$  in all households). Here again, this implies that daughters, more than sons, are assigned to caretaking tasks within the family.

As within the bivariate results, the provision of an allowance by parents has a strong association with children's labor, yet it operates in different directions for boys and girls. Daughters perform greater amounts of labor in all households when they receive an allowance ( $\beta = -.166$ ), whereas sons receiving an allowance perform less total labor ( $\beta = .156$ ). Yet the degree of sex-typing is made most apparent in the relationship between parental sex role orientations and children's labor. Here, fathers' sex role orientation has a stronger effect on sons' labor ( $\beta = -.254$  and  $-.227$ ) than on daughters, whereas mothers' sex role orientation has a stronger impact on daughters' labor ( $\beta = .155$  and  $.211$ ). This association is also true in regard to parental employment, such that mothers' employment hours has a strong association with daughters' labor ( $\beta = .204$ ) but is only slightly associated with sons' labor ( $\beta = .087$ ). This again lends support to the hypothesis that the direct influences of parents are strongest in relationship to the same-sex child. This conclusion is also supported in the results of parental educational attainment.

Indirect parental influence also appears to operate strongly with same-sex relationships. Fathers' total household labor has the strongest association with sons' household labor ( $\beta = .272$  and  $.185$ , respectively, for all households and dual-earner families), whereas mothers' total household labor is more strongly associated with daughters' labor ( $\beta = .271$  and  $.134$ ). Hence, as was the case with direct parental influences, the role model portrayed by parents also appears to represent a significant determinant of children's household labor behavior.

#### CHILDREN'S PERCENTAGE OF ALL HOUSEHOLD LABOR

The results shown for children's total household labor are, by and large, replicated in the results shown for children's percentage of all household labor, as presented in Table 5. Here again,

**TABLE 5**  
**Regression Models of Daughters' and Sons' Percentage of All Household Labor, All Households and Dual-Earner Households**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Daughters</i>		<i>Sons</i>	
	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>
Age of child	.332*** (.006) <sup>a</sup>	.318*** (.007)	.334*** (.006)	.359*** (.006)
Presence of children 4 years of age or younger	-.144 (-.031)	-.087 (-.023)	.023 (.006)	-.002 (-.001)
Allowance	-.142* (-.025)	-.076 (-.014)	.139* (.021)	.197** (.029)
Fathers' sex role orientation	-.078 (-.003)	-.014 (-.001)	-.315*** (-.009)	-.275*** (-.007)
Mothers' sex role orientation	.118 (.004)	.181 (.006)	-.018 (-.001)	.002 (.000)
Mothers' employment status	-.077 (-.016)		.083 (.014)	
Mothers' weekly hours in paid labor force		.191** (.001)		.079 (.001)
Fathers' weekly hours in paid labor force	.026 (.000)	-.059 (-.001)	-.114* (-.001)	-.094 (-.001)
Fathers' education	-.009 (.000)	.034 (.001)	-.083 (-.002)	-.173 (-.005)
Mothers' education	-.035 (-.001)	-.042 (-.002)	.038 (.001)	.111 (.003)
Fathers' total household labor	-.115 (-.001)	-.207** (-.002)	.104 (.001)	-.017 (.000)
Mothers' total household labor	-.090 (-.001)	-.186* (-.001)	-.187*** (-.001)	-.107 (-.001)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.31	.35	.29	.32
<i>F</i>	5.61***	4.59***	6.01***	4.49***
<i>N</i>	149	104	176	115

a. Unstandardized coefficients are shown in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

children's age accounts for a large amount of variation. However, several of the sex-differentiated effects revealed in Table 4 are also present in the model of children's percentage of all household labor.

As in the bivariate results, the presence of younger siblings is also associated with a significant decrease in daughters' percentage of all labor ( $\beta = -.144$  and  $-.087$ ) yet is only weakly associated with sons' percentage of all labor. The effect of the same-sex parents' sex role orientation also is apparent in its relationship to sons' and daughters' percentage of all labor. That is, fathers' sex role orientation has a much greater impact on sons' labor, whereas mothers' sex role orientation has a stronger association with daughters' labor.

One noteworthy result, however, is in regard to parental household labor within dual-earner families. As shown, both fathers' and mothers' total household labor is strongly associated with daughters' percentage of all labor within dual-earner families ( $\beta = -.207$  and  $-.186$ , respectively), whereas neither is significantly associated with sons' labor within dual-earner families. This implies that daughters, much more than sons, are used as a source of "replacement labor" when the parents themselves reduce their total labor contributions. Parents thus differentially allocate household tasks to daughters rather than to sons, particularly when the demand for labor increases.

#### CHILDREN'S LABOR SPENT IN FEMALE-DOMINATED CHORES

A more focused examination of sex-typing is shown in Table 6, which presents results of children's labor spent in female-dominated chores. Again, the effect of children's age is considerable, yet it is much stronger among daughters than sons ( $\beta = .252$  vs.  $.169$ , in all households). The presence of younger siblings again maintains a stronger effect on daughters' labor than on sons' labor.

It would appear that qualities of the same-sex parent have the strongest association with children's labor spent in female-dominated chores. Parental sex role orientations and educational attainments have their strongest relationships with the same-sex child. One interesting anomaly, however, is the association between mothers' educational attainment and sons' labor within dual-earner families ( $\beta = .172$ ). Although the effect is not statistically significant within this model (perhaps because of the sample size), it nonetheless implies that an increase in mothers' education is associated with an increase in sons' participation in female-dominated tasks. Interest-

**TABLE 6**  
**Regression Models of Daughters' and Sons'**  
**Household Labor Spent in Female-Dominated Chores,**  
**All Households and Dual-Earner Households**

<i>Independent Variable</i>	<i>Daughters</i>		<i>Sons</i>	
	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>	<i>All Households</i>	<i>Dual-Earners</i>
Age of child	.252*** (.291) <sup>a</sup>	.254** (.282)	.169** (.171)	.163 (.180)
Presence of children 4 years of age or younger	-.155* (-1.966)	-.131 (-1.775)	.045 (.591)	.003 (.050)
Allowance	-.188*** (-1.925)	-.138 (-1.326)	.079 (.668)	.113 (1.076)
Fathers' sex role orientation	-.097 (-.199)	-.039 (-.076)	-.204*** (-.319)	-.208** (-.355)
Mothers' sex role orientation	.155* (.307)	.186 (.335)	.000 (.000)	.091 (.176)
Mothers' employment status	-.039 (-.476)		-.049 (-.465)	
Mothers' weekly hours in paid labor force		.219** (.089)		.172 (.074)
Fathers' weekly hours in paid labor force	-.006 (-.004)	-.097 (-.054)	-.116 (-.068)	-.109 (-.075)
Fathers' education	.004 (.007)	.069 (.103)	-.129 (-.190)	-.265** (-.446)
Mothers' education	-.011 (-.025)	-.042 (-.087)	.044 (.076)	.172 (.336)
Fathers' total household labor	.033 (.019)	-.057 (-.029)	.257*** (.128)	.178* (.093)
Mothers' total household labor	.264*** (.089)	.135 (.047)	-.012 (-.003)	.067 (.021)
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	.27	.25	.20	.21
<i>F</i>	4.52***	2.74***	3.81***	2.51***
<i>N</i>	149	104	176	115

a. Unstandardized coefficients are shown in parentheses.

\* $p < .10$ ; \*\* $p < .05$ ; \*\*\* $p < .01$ .

ingly, however, mothers' sex role orientation is only weakly associated with sons' participation ( $\beta = .091$ ).

Finally, parental household labor patterns are shown to maintain stronger associations with the labor participation of the same-sex child. The results shown here are directly comparable to those shown in the models of children's total labor. Hence the role model effect of parents does not appear to vary greatly when applied specifically to female-dominated tasks.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Given the results here, it appears that—even in the late 1980s—the sex-typing of children's household labor is common among American households. Indeed, the distribution of children's household labor by sex is quite similar to that found among adults. Daughters perform more labor than sons, and their greater labor contributions are disproportionately allocated to those tasks traditionally defined as "women's work." These qualities of daughter's labor, as compared to that of sons, again typify the sex-based division of household labor found among adults (Blair & Lichter, 1991).

One finding that is cause for concern is the relationship between children's labor and the presence of younger siblings. Although the findings that the presence of younger siblings brings decreases in daughters' household labor, a possible implication is that daughters are being assigned to child caretaking tasks. Unfortunately, these data cannot assess this area of labor, but the tacit meaning is too strong to ignore or dismiss.

The association between parental factors and the division of children's household labor was a central issue. Parents apparently influence the labor assignments of their children in both direct and indirect ways. The analyses indicated that qualities such as sex role orientation and educational level influenced children's labor. The role models portrayed by parents through their own household labor performance were also significantly associated with children's labor. However, the finding deserving of greater investigation is that of the relationship of parental factors to the same-sex child.



For each dependent variable, father and mother effects were consistently strongest in relation to the child of the same sex. Daughters were affected most by maternal variables (e.g., mothers' employment status), whereas sons were influenced by parental variables. This implies that mothers and fathers have their strongest influence on children of the same sex.

The implications of the results contained herein are nontrivial for children. An obvious question is, Is there some form of intergenerational continuity in the sex-based division of household labor? Does the division of housework exhibited by parents affect the family work behaviors of their children, which are then carried into adulthood when they form households of their own? Given the strong same-sex relationship found between parental variables and children's household labor, this study provides sound evidence of such an intergenerational continuity.

Indeed, a basic tenet of the social learning perspective utilized here is that those lessons learned early in life will form the foundation for values and attitudes in adult life. The strong linkage shown between indirect parental factors (parental household labor performance) is of particular concern, as this implies that parental behaviors, perhaps even regardless of parental attitudes or intent, have a significant impact on children's own understanding of the sex-based division of household labor. The adoption of sex-typed behaviors displayed in the home environment may also affect children's understanding of sex-based inequalities in the larger society (e.g., wage gap between the sexes and discrimination).

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