



The reproduction of gender: housework and attitudes towards gender equality in the home among Swedish boys and girls¹

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Abstract

The housework Swedish girls and boys age 10 to 18 do, and their attitudes towards gender equality in the home are studied. One aim is to see whether the work children do is gendered and if so, whether they follow their parents', often gendered, pattern in housework. A second aim is to see whether children's attitudes are influenced by their parents' attitudes and practices. When it comes to issues like these, Sweden is of special interest because in 1995, Sweden was appointed the most gender equal country in the world by the United Nations.

The data used were the Swedish Child Level of Living Survey 2000 (see <http://www.sofi.su.se/LNU2000/english.htm>), a data set that includes extensive first-hand information from both children and their parents. The results indicate that girls and boys in two-parent families are more prone to engage in gender atypical work the more their parent of the same sex engages in this kind of work. The fact that girls still do more housework than boys in all families independent of, among other things, the parental division of housework and the mother's educational level indicates that housework to some extent signifies gender also to children. However, no clear relation is found between the parents' division of work and the child's attitude towards gender equality in the home. Neither is there any clear relation between the parents' attitude towards gender equality in the home and the children's attitude to the same topic.

Keywords: Children's housework; gender equality; gender attitudes

Introduction

Children get their first impressions of how family life can and/or should be organized by watching their parents. As a consequence, most children conceptualize 'male' and 'female' household tasks already at a young age (Fagrell 2000; Wernersson 1977). The – often unequal – division of work among adults

in the household is central to the construction of gender within the family (Fenstermaker Berk 1985; Hochschild and Machung 1989). If housework is also perceived of as a gendered activity among children, the likelihood is great that an unequal division of work will be reproduced among them. The overall purpose of this paper is to study the reproduction of gender in Swedish households. To what extent is the division of housework between parents related to their children's participation in housework and these children's attitude towards such work? The analyses focus on Sweden, which was established as the most gender equal country in the world by the UN in 1995 (Human Development Report 1995). However, evidence from earlier studies do not unequivocally show that housework is more gender equally distributed in Sweden than in other countries (see e.g. Baxter 1997; Gershuny and Sullivan 2003). Even if the division of work in Swedish households is still lop-sided, about 80 per cent of both women and men in our sample state that gender equality in the home is something to strive for.

The overall purpose of this study requires a database containing extensive information on both adults and children in the household. The data used here include interviews with children 10 to 18 years of age from the Swedish Child Level of Living Survey 2000, and first hand information from their parents from the Swedish Level of Living Survey 2000. The combination of these surveys offers a unique opportunity to study parental influences on children's housework and attitudes towards gender equality.

The paper includes two empirical parts. The first focuses on whether boys' and girls' household tasks are gendered, and if so, to what extent such differences are related to their parents' division of household tasks. The second part focuses on children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home. The purpose here is to study in what way children's views on housework are related to their parents' attitudes towards housework and/or their actual division of such work. However, before turning to the results, I will briefly discuss theories and previous research on children's housework and attitudes towards gender equality.

The division of labour in the home

The gendered character of housework and the relation between parents' and children's housework

Although men's time spent doing housework has increased during recent years, women still do the majority of the housework in Sweden (e.g., Evertsson and Neramo 2004; Flood and Gråsjö 1997; Neramo 1994; Statistics Sweden 2003). The gender difference in housework is particularly large in families with small children (Ahrne and Roman 1997; Flood and Gråsjö 1997; Hörnqvist 1997;

Statistics Sweden 2003). The fact that this difference even remains when time spent in paid labour, human capital and other factors are taken into account suggests, according to some, that housework is so traditionally linked to women and women's work that it functions as an area within which gender is symbolically created (Fenstermaker Berk 1985; West and Fenstermaker 1993; West and Zimmerman 1987). At a fairly young age children learn that there are differences between what women and men do in the household (for Sweden see Fagrell 2000; Wernersson 1977). The experience of these differences becomes part of children's gender competencies and something they consider when they form their own gender identities (cf., Connell 2002). In this process, the division of work between the mother and father can serve as a positive model, but it can also function as a deterrent (Goodnow and Bowes 1994). Cunningham (2001a) found, however, that children's apprehension of the ideal division of housework often mirrors their parents' division of work. He takes this as indicative of the significance of parents as mediators of gender-appropriate behaviour. In Sweden many children are exposed to conflicting messages as the gendered division of labour clashes with the general attitude that gender equality in the home is something to strive for (my own calculations from the Swedish Level of Living Survey, see also Ahrne and Roman 1997).

According to earlier research, if the parents' division of labour is unequal, this can contribute to a gender difference in what the children do (Hilton and Haldeman 1991). This difference may either indicate the significance of parents as models for gender appropriate behaviour and/or it may be a result of children more often spending time and taking part in joint activities with same-sex parents than with parents of the opposite sex (cf., Crouter, Manke and McHale 1995; Harris and Morgan 1991; McHale, Crouter and Tucker 1999; Tucker, McHale and Crouter 2003). The parental division of labour can also have consequences for the work children do as adults: Cunningham (2001b) found that the father's housework when the child was very young was of significance for the sons' housework when they were in their thirties, whereas the daughters' housework at the same age appeared to be explained by factors other than the division of housework in the family of origin. In the long run, more and more children should grow up in families in which parents' division of work is less unequal and as they do, norms about domestic behaviour gradually will change. The result is what Gershuny, Godwin and Jones (1994) refer to as 'lagged adaptation', i.e. the growth in women's employment is followed by a lagged adaptation of domestic practices.

Previous research on children's housework

Previous research has shown that girls do more housework than boys (e.g., Benin and Edwards 1990; Brannen 1995; Fenstermaker Berk 1985; Gill 1998; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Hilton and Haldeman 1991; Manke et al. 1994).

Girls more often do indoor work and traditionally female chores such as cooking, washing up and cleaning, whereas boys more often do outdoor work and more traditionally male tasks, such as taking out the garbage and doing repairs (Benin and Edwards 1990; Brannen 1995; Gill 1998; McHale et al. 1990; White and Brinkerhoff 1981). When the amount of housework needed is great, e.g. in families where the mother is a full-time wage earner and/or the sole guardian, girls often experience a significantly heavier housework burden than do boys (e.g., Benin and Edwards 1990; Gill 1998; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; Hilton and Haldeman 1991). In two-parent families, children, and especially girls, tend to substitute for their mother in housework (Goldscheider and Waite 1991). Girls often contribute wherever needed and carry out self-, as well as family-care work, whereas boys find it easier to skip family-care work² (Brannen 1995; Grusec, Goodnow and Cohen 1996). The effect of this unequal division of work could be that girls are socialized deeper into the family-role (White and Brinkerhoff 1981). According to White and Brinkerhoff (1981), this risk may be especially great in families where the mother is working outside the home during a large part of the day. This assumption is partly contradicted by Cunningham (2001b), who found that the mothers' labour market work hours when their daughters were very young had a weak but significant reductive effect on the daughters' housework at age 30.

The gendered pattern in housework is often evident despite the parents' expressed intention not to discriminate between the children on the basis of sex (Gill 1998; cf., Manke et al. 1994). In a study by Brannen (1995), parents seldom gave the impression of asking girls and boys to do different things. It was nevertheless more common among boys to report that their parents did not expect them to help at home. Most successful in achieving the goal of letting their children carry out all tasks independent of sex were highly educated parents with an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles (White and Brinkerhoff 1981; see also Goldscheider and Waite 1991).

Attitudes towards gender equality among parents and children

Parents' attitudes towards gender roles and equality can, as already indicated, affect their children's behaviour, but it can also influence the children's well-being. In a study by McHale et al. (1990), fathers in one-provider families reported a more traditional attitude towards gender roles than did fathers in two-provider families. Boys in two-provider families who performed a relatively large number of so-called female tasks reported less stress, greater competence and better relations with their parents than did boys who carried out fewer such tasks. In one-provider households the relation was the reverse. For girls there were no significant differences between the families, although there was a tendency for girls who carried out fewer masculine tasks to receive greater acceptance from the father than did those who carried out more such

tasks. The latter result is partly in line with earlier research indicating that fathers are more prone than mothers to reinforce gender stereotypical behaviour in their children (e.g., Harris and Morgan 1991; McHale, Crouter and Tucker 1999).

Cunningham (2001a) found that mothers who hold egalitarian beliefs were likely to influence their children's beliefs accordingly with respect to how labour should be divided in the home (no measure of fathers' attitudes was obtained). Cunningham (2001b) also found a significant association between the mothers' attitudes towards equality between the sexes when their sons were in their teens and the sons' attitudes towards equality when they were in their thirties.

The division of work and attitudes towards gender equality among Swedish boys and girls 10 to 18 years of age: Research questions and hypotheses

Summing up, the division of work in the family of origin provides children with one example of how work can be divided: as it is a daily experience for children, it is likely to be important. Children learn rather early in life that there are differences between male and female work and behaviour, and the significance of housework as a gendered activity is therefore likely to play a role also in boys' and girls' gender performance. If boys and girls more often take part in joint activities with same-sex parents than with parents of the opposite sex, the probability is great that they will engage in gender-typical tasks. In the process, gender differences are reinforced as boys and girls learn how to perform different tasks differently well.

A large majority of the studies referred to above are based on US data. It is therefore interesting to address the questions of household work and gender attitudes also in a case where more favourable conditions for gender equality appear to exist. In Sweden, almost as many women as men participate in paid labour³ and, according to Ahrne and Roman (1997), there are a number of parallel ideologies concerning women's and men's work. The ideal among other things varies with the way in which the division of labour in the home is organized in practice. Because a majority of all Swedish women and men claim to support an even distribution of housework, Ahrne and Roman (1997) suggest that the importance of housework for the construction of gender in Sweden should not be taken as given. This makes a study of Swedish boys' and girls' housework appealing. If housework does not signify gender, there should be small or no differences in the tasks boys and girls perform. In the event that there are gender differences in the housework children do (a scenario that doesn't seem implausible as women still do the lion's share of all housework), the next step would be to see whether the degree to which boys' and girls' tasks are gendered varies with, among other things, the division of work among the adults in the household and/or their attitudes towards gender equality in the

TABLE I: *Hypotheses*

Hypotheses about Swedish boys' and girls' family-care and outdoor work:

1. a) If the father does the majority of all housework, both girls and boys will do more family-care work than in families where the division of work is fairly equal (i.e. they act as a substitute for their mother).
b) The substitution effect is greater for girls than for boys.
2. Children are less gender-typical in their family-care and outdoor work in families where
a) the mother is highly educated.
b) the parent states that gender equality in the home is important.
3. a) Girls are more likely to do traditionally male (outdoor) work in families where the mother is the one doing most traditionally male (repair and maintenance) work.
b) Boys are more likely to do traditionally male (outdoor) work in families where the father is the one doing most traditionally male (repair and maintenance) work.

Hypotheses about children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home:

4. Children are more likely to state that gender equality in the home is important if their parents' division of housework is fairly equal.
 5. Children are more likely to state that gender equality in the home is very important if the interviewed parent also believes so.
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home. Parental influences on children's perceived ideal division of labour in the home are also of interest. The overall research questions are:

- a) To what extent do children follow their parents' division of work in the household?
- b) To what extent is parents' division of work and attitudes towards gender equality related to children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home?

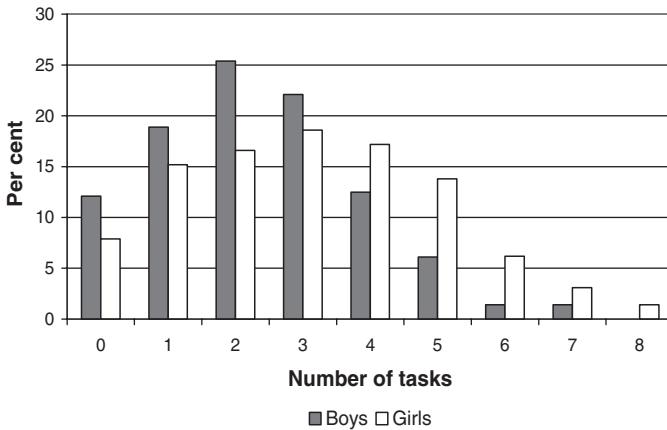
On the basis of the (non-Swedish) studies referred to above, a set of hypotheses are formulated (Table I).

In the empirical analyses, the household work boys and girls do is divided into traditionally female work, as indicated by family-care work, and traditionally male work, as indicated by outdoor work. Attitudes towards gender equality in the home are studied in the third and final analysis.

Data

The Swedish Level of Living Survey (LNU) is a panel survey that was first conducted in 1968, with subsequent waves in 1974, 1981, 1991, and 2000. The aim is to collect information on individuals' level of living in a broad sense. The basis for the survey is a random sample of 1/1000 of the Swedish population 18 to 75 years of age (for details, see <http://www.sofi.su.se/LNU2000/english.htm>). The 2000 survey was extended with a special survey of children and adolescents between 10 and 18 years of age living in the respondents' household at the time of interview (Child-LNU) (Jonsson and Östberg 2001). In order to be

FIGURE I. *The proportion of boys and girls aged 10 to 18 in two-parent families who carry out (number of) family-care tasks at least once a week*



included, the child had to spend at least ten days a month (or a third of their time) in the household of the sampled adult person.⁴ Children were given an ‘audio-questionnaire’ (see Scott, Brynin and Smith 1995), i.e. they heard the questions on a tape-recorder (a Walkman) and noted their answers in a booklet with pre-printed response alternatives. Information on children was also gathered from the adult respondent. The adult respondents’ partner – if any – was asked to fill out a postal questionnaire. In total 1304 children from 878 different families participated (a response rate of 85.3 per cent). Among all adults in the main survey, the response rate is 76.6 per cent.⁵ Considering the aim of this study, only children in two-parent heterosexual families are included in the analyses.⁶ This means excluding about 12 per cent⁷ of the children in our sample (i.e., those who live with one parent only or with two parents of the same sex). In the survey, all children 10 to 18 years of age in the household were interviewed and are included, leading to a range from one to five children per household. Because there is more than one child in some families, the linearization/Huber/White/sandwich (robust) estimate of variance (and thus standard errors) is used. These variance estimates are robust to any type of correlation within the observations of each family (see *Stata Users’ Guide* 1999 or www.stata.com).

Variables

Figure I and Table II present descriptive statistics of the dependent variables. Table II also includes some factors that are of importance when initially describing Swedish children’s housework (although they are not used in the

TABLE II: *Housework among Swedish boys and girls 10–18 years of age in two-parent families. Standard deviations are reported for averages in parenthesis (n = 1152 where nothing else is noted)*

Task	Boys (ref.)	Girls	Total
<i>Self-care work:</i>			
Making one's own bed	70	82***	76
Cleaning one's own room	61	77***	69
<i>Family-care work:</i>			
Cleaning someplace other than one's own room	22	36***	29
Cooking	21	31***	26
Laying or clearing the table	66	72**	69
Doing the dishes or loading/emptying the dishwasher	45	57***	51
Washing, ironing, hanging or folding clothes	10	29***	20
Watering plants	16	36***	26
Taking care of siblings ¹	46	47	46
Buying groceries	25	24	24
Average number of family-care tasks	2.4 (1.5)	3.1*** (1.9)	2.7
Outdoor work	34	14***	24
Number of hours help at home	1–2	1–2	1–2
Do not usually help at home	5	1***	3
Important that the child helps at home (according to child)	77	80	78 (n = 1148)
Proportion of children who feel that equality in the home is very important	43	58***	50 (n = 1146)

Notes:

*** = Sex differences statistically significant at the 1%-level; ** = 5%-level;

¹ Among those with any sibling younger than themselves.

multivariate analyses). Descriptions of independent variables are shown in Table III. In the operationalization of variables below, four variables are dichotomized because of their skewed distributions (*viz.*, parents' and child's attitudes towards gender equality in the home, the quality of the relationship between each parent and child, and the importance of the child helping at home).

Dependent variables

Family-care work is used as an indicator of traditionally female work. It is constructed as a summated index with values from 0 to 8, where an individual gets a value of 1 for each of the following tasks he or she performs at least once a week: 1) Do the dishes or load/empty the dishwasher, 2) clean someplace other than their room, 3) cook, 4) lay or clear the table, 5) wash, iron, hang or fold clothes, 6) water plants, 7) take care of siblings, or 8) buy groceries. These tasks are those in the survey that are most clearly of a family-caring character, *i.e.*, they characterize work that benefits not only the individual performing the tasks but also others in the family (in contrast to self-care work) (*cf.*, Brannen 1995; Goldscheider and Waite 1991; White and Brinkerhoff 1981). In the survey we have no information regarding the extent to which children get paid

TABLE III: Descriptive statistics for explanatory factors. Boys and girls in two-parent families aged 10 to 18. Standard deviations are reported for averages in parenthesis

	Boys	Girls	All
Age (average)	13.5	13.5	13.5 (2.5)
Has siblings < 7 years of age	16	18	17
Number of younger siblings (average)	0.9	1.0	1 (1.1)
Has siblings of the opposite sex at most 3 years older/younger	30	29	30
Proportion children living in detached houses	84	80	82
Mother's education, number of years (average)	12.7	12.6	12.7 (3.2)
Mother highly educated i.e. ≥ 15 years of education	28	27	28
Mother is wage working ≥ 35 hours per week	50	50	50
Father spends more time in housework than does mother	8	8	8
Father and mother spend about the same amount of time doing housework	17	20	18
Mother spends between 5 and 15 hours more per week doing housework than father	39	39	39
Mother spends 16 hours or more per week doing housework than does father	36	33	34
Proportion of children whose parents spend 1 hour or more doing repairs or maintenance work each week	88	86	87
Mother and father do equally much repair work	8	9	9 ¹
Father spends more time doing repairs than does mother	79	82	80 ¹
Mother spends more time doing repairs than does father	13	9	11 ¹
Proportion who get along very well with their mother	48	48	48
Proportion who get along very well with their father	45	43	44
Proportion of children whose parents feel it is very important that the children help out at home	14	18	16
Proportion of children whose parent feel that gender equality in the home is rather or very important	80	79	80

Note:

¹ For families who spend some time doing repair and maintenance work.

for the family-care and outdoor work they do. However, a Swedish study of children and youth indicate that even if some do get paid for carrying out housework or, more often, outdoor work, the majority do not receive pocket money or pay based on the amount of work they do (Näsman and Gerber 2003). Also, and more important, according to Näsman and Gerber (2003) there appear to be no large gender differences in the extent to which children get paid for their work.

Outdoor work is a dummy variable indicating traditionally male work. It takes the value 1 if the child states that he or she usually helps with outdoor work at least once a week. Unfortunately, this is the only indicator of traditionally male work in Child-LNU. Worth noting is also that even outdoor work (such as mowing the lawn or arranging the garden) is often of a family-caring nature.

The child's attitude towards gender equality in the home is based on the child's answer to a question about how important it is that the adults in the family share responsibility for housework and children equally. In the analysis, I compare those who think this is 'very important' with the others.

Independent variables

The parents' housework is measured from information about the number of hours per week the adult respondents estimated that they spend on 1) buying groceries, cooking and washing dishes, 2) laundry, ironing, and other care of clothes, as well as 3) cleaning. The number of hours the adult respondent's partner spends on housework is calculated by subtracting the estimate of the respondent's hours from the estimated total hours spent on a certain task. In the event that it is indicated that someone outside the household carries out work in the home, that time has been subtracted from the total number of hours spent on housework. We have no information about the time children spend on each of the above-mentioned household tasks. This is, however, not a substantial problem, as the average amount of time children spend on indoor and outdoor work each week is fairly low: between 1 and 2 hours (Table II). What might be a problem is that the main adult respondent is sometimes a woman and sometimes a man. One can assume that the reporting on the amount of time spent on housework for women and men would differ depending on the sex of the respondent. If we compare the gender distribution of housework when the respondent is a woman compared to a man, it seems as if men underestimate the time women spend on housework by about half an hour while women underestimate the time men spend on housework by about an hour. This might bias the results in the regression models and therefore, a dummy for sex of the respondent was tested. Including this dummy did not change any of the main results and once we categorize the time spent in housework (see Table III) the difference in reporting does not affect the relation between parents and children's housework.

We have information about the number of hours per week the parents spend doing traditionally male *repairs and maintenance work*.⁸ Information concerning the non-interviewed person (the partner of the sampled person) is calculated from the adult interviewee's information.

Parent's attitude towards gender equality in the home is based on one of the parent's (i.e., the respondent in the main survey) answer to the question 'What do you think of the idea of aiming for a society where men take as much responsibility as women for children and the household?' In the analysis, those who answered that they think it is a 'rather' or 'very good' idea are compared with the others. The adult main respondents are grouped by sex as there might be differences in response to this question – and its relation to children's practices and attitudes – due to sex of the parent.

The mother's education is estimated as her total number of years of full-time schooling and vocational education. A dummy variable indicates whether the *mother has 15 years or more education* and is *highly educated*. This dividing line has been chosen because 15 years of education corresponds to a Bachelor's degree.⁹ In the analysis of attitudes towards gender equality, *mother's education in years* is used because it proved to have a larger effect on children's attitudes than did whether or not the mother was highly educated.

Information about whether the parents feel it is *important that the child helps at home* is taken from the child's answer to this question. Those who answer that it is 'very important' are compared with the others.

The quality of the relationship between child and parent is estimated from the child's answer to the question 'How well do you and your mother/father (stepmother/-father) get along?' Those who answer that they *get along very well* are compared with the others.

If a girl has a brother at most 3 years younger or older than herself her family-care work could increase – and the brother's decrease – if parents divide work in the family according to traditional gender patterns (cf., McHale, Crouter and Tucker 1999). Having a *sibling of the opposite sex* is controlled for in the analysis of family-care. Also, the *number of younger siblings*, together with the presence of any *sibling younger than 7 years of age* tends to increase work in the family (cf., Blair 1992) and these factors are controlled for in the analyses.

The child's *age* is controlled for in all analyses as the number of family-care tasks done in an average week increases with age. The attitude towards gender equality in the home may also change with age.¹⁰

Finally, no missing data have been replaced. Instead individual observations have been excluded as this reduced the sample only marginally.

Children's distribution of housework and the attitude towards gender equality in the home: results

Table II gives information about the percentage of boys and girls who usually help with various household tasks. The most common tasks performed by children 10 to 18 years of age are making their own beds, cleaning their own rooms and laying or clearing the table. More than two out of three children help with this at home at least once a week. Boys and girls about equally often take care of siblings and buy groceries, but for other activities there are considerable differences between the sexes. It is more common that girls make their own beds, clean their own rooms, clean someplace other than their room, cook, do the dishes or load/empty the dishwasher, wash, iron, hang or fold clothes and water plants. Boys do outdoor work more often than girls. In total, girls do more family-care work than boys, even if the variation is large within the sexes (Figure I). These initial results show that housework is gendered even among Swedish children.

Children devote on average between one and two hours per week to helping at home, and here there are no differences between the sexes (Table II). The number of tasks done increases slightly during the ages studied here from about two tasks a week for both boys and girls at age 10 to three and four tasks respectively at age 18 (not shown).¹¹ A large majority of children (78 per cent) report that their parents think it is 'rather' or 'very important' that they help out at home and here there is likewise no significant difference between boys and girls. With respect to boys' and girls' attitudes towards gender equality in the home, however, there are clear differences; 43 per cent of the boys feel that it is very important that the adults in the family share responsibility for housework and children equally as compared to 58 per cent of the girls (Table II). These figures also compare well with the proportion of fathers and mothers who state that gender equality in the home is very important; 39 and 55 per cent respectively (not shown).

Even if 77 per cent of the fathers and 82 per cent of the mothers state that gender equality in the home is very or rather important (not shown), in reality the situation does not look so promising. The mothers in our sample work on average 19 hours per week in the home, whereas the fathers work about 7 hours. In families where both parents work 35 hours or more per week in paid labour, mothers spend on average 17 hours per week on housework – the corresponding figure for fathers is 7 hours. It should be noted that fathers more often do repairs or maintain the house, the car or other property. However, adding these tasks does not bridge the difference between women and men, although it reduces it with about two hours.

Children's family-care work – what factors predict the number of tasks?

So what then predicts the number of family-care tasks girls and boys aged 10 to 18 perform in the home? Is children's family-care work related to the activities in which their fathers and mothers engage, and/or to the parents' attitudes towards gender equality in the home? In order to try to answer these questions, OLS regression analyses of number of family-care tasks on a number of independent variables are estimated for boys and girls separately (Table IV).¹²

Table IV shows that girls who have younger siblings do more family-care work (here with each additional sibling) than do other girls. Family-care work also increases for boys, but only if they have siblings of pre-school age. We assumed that an opposite-sex sibling close in age to oneself could influence the number of family-care tasks boys and girls do (i.e. by increasing the family-care work girls do and decreasing the family-care work boys do). This is, however, not supported in the analysis.

Compared to families where the distribution of housework is relatively even, boys and girls do more housework if they belong to the 8 per cent of

TABLE IV: OLS regression coefficients of the effect of family-care work (number of tasks) on background variables. Boys and girls aged 10–18. Significance tests from a model with robust standard errors

	Boys	Girls	Boys	Girls
	Model 1		Model 2	
Age	0.09***	0.21***	0.09***	0.21***
Has siblings < 7 years of age	0.42*	0.25	0.46*	0.27
Number of younger siblings	-0.04	0.25***†	-0.06	0.25***†
Has sibling of the opposite sex at most 3 years younger/older	0.18	0.13	0.22	0.15
Father does more housework than mother	0.48*	1.06***†	0.50*	1.07***†
Father ≅ mother (ref.)	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Mother does 5–15 hrs > father	0.10	0.05	0.10	0.11
Mother does 15+ hrs > father	0.14	0.10	0.18	0.12
Mother works ≥ 35 hrs/week	0.04	0.39***†	0.07	0.42***†
Mother is highly educated	-0.07	-0.49***†	-0.04	-0.45***†
Gender equality in the home is important according to mother			0.25	-0.13
Gender equality in the home is important according to father			0.11	-0.10
Get along very well child–mother			0.20	-0.32*
Get along very well child–father			0.18	0.56***
Intercept	0.92**	-0.18	0.50	-0.25
	n = 518	n = 537	n = 512	n = 528
	R ² = 0.03	R ² = 0.16	R ² = 0.05	R ² = 0.17

Notes:

*** = Statistically significant at the 1%-level; ** = 5%-level; * = 10%-level, two-tailed tests.

† The difference between boys and girls is significant at the 5% level, two-tailed test.

children whose father does more housework than the mother. The increase is, however, greatest for girls who do on average one task more per week. This supports Hypotheses 1a and b (Table I), and suggests that children – and particularly girls – tend to substitute for their mother in housework. This assumption is also strengthened by the finding that girls, but not boys, do significantly more family-care work if the mother works more than 34 hours per week in gainful employment.

According to earlier research, parents who are well educated and/or have an egalitarian attitude towards gender roles are those who are most successful in distributing activities in a gender-neutral way (Hypothesis 2a and b). Having a highly educated mother lowers girls' household workload by a little more than half an activity, whereas it has no effect on boys' activities. One reason for this reduction in girls' activities might be that the higher educated mothers can afford to – and do – buy household services to a higher extent than low educated mothers. However, in Sweden it is rather expensive (and to some extent politically incorrect) to buy household services, so even if some highly educated women do buy such services, it is more the exception than the rule.¹³

Contrary to what is expected according to Hypothesis 2b, parents' attitudes towards equality in the home have no significant effect on the housework children do when other factors are included in the model, although the signs of the coefficients are in the expected direction (Table IV, Model 2).

McHale et al. (1990) found a positive relation between the amount of female tasks done by boys in two-provider families and the boys' relationship with their father. As a consequence, we expected a positive correlation between the number of family-care tasks done by boys and their relationship with their parents. No such connection is found here. Instead, girls who claim that they get along very well with their mother do somewhat less family-care work than do other girls, whereas those who get along very well with their father do more. The latter could indicate that fathers tend to reinforce gender typical behaviour on the part of their daughters (cf. Harris and Morgan 1991; McHale, Crouter and Tucker 1999).

Finally, it is worth noting that the model in Table IV is significantly less powerful with regard to predicting boys' housework as compared to predicting girls', something that can be recognized from studies of adults' distribution of housework: for girls the model has an explanatory value of 17 per cent of the variation in housework, while for boys it explains only 5 per cent. All in all it seems as if girls are more responsive than boys to the need for housework. The fact that boys often are able to escape this work might indicate that housework is still considered as mainly women's work, both by children and by adults.

Children's outdoor work

To what extent can children's outdoor work – supposedly a 'manlier' type of work – be explained by factors such as the parents' attitude towards equality in the home and/or the division of male work between them? As the dependent variable outdoor work only has two values, logistic regression is used and the estimates in Table V are odds ratios. Because relatively few do outdoor work at all in a week, boys and girls are kept in the same model and interaction terms are used to test for gender differences. Families in which parents do not do any repair and maintenance work are excluded (due to the central importance of this variable as an indicator of traditionally male work among the adults), as are families living in blocks of flats or apartment houses (i.e., that do not live in detached houses and are unlikely to have a garden).¹⁴

From Table V, it is obvious that girls do significantly less outdoor work than boys even after controls for other variables. The parents' division of male work appears to be partly related to the male work children do, as the probability that daughters do outdoor work is higher if the mother does most repairs. Hence Hypothesis 3a is supported, whereas Hypothesis 3b receives no support: there is not a corresponding significant relation between the male work fathers and sons do.

TABLE V: Odds ratios from a logistic regression of outdoor work on background variables among children aged 10–18. Significance tests from a model with robust standard errors

	Boys and girls
Age	1.01
Boy (ref.)	1.00
Girl	0.15**
Father and mother do equally much repair work (ref.)	1.00
Father does most repairs, the child is a girl	2.43
Father does most repairs, the child is a boy	1.92
Mother does most repairs, the child is a girl	4.91**
Mother does most repairs, the child is a boy	2.27
Total number of household tasks (outdoor work excluded)	1.35***
Gender equality in the home is not important (ref.)	1.00
Gender equality in the home is important according to the father, the child is a girl	0.93
Gender equality in the home is important according to the father, the child is a boy	0.74
Gender equality in the home is important according to the mother, the child is a girl	0.50*
Gender equality in the home is important according to the mother, the child is a boy	0.51**
	n = 847
	Pseudo R ² = 0.12

Notes:

*** = Statistically significant at the 1%-level; ** = 5%-level; * = 10%-level, two-tailed tests.

The likelihood of the child doing outdoor work increases with the number of tasks they do in the home. Hence this does not suggest, contrary to expectations, that children who perform indoor work do not do any outdoor work and vice versa. If the mother is the person reporting, and she feels that gender equality in the home is very important, the probability lessens that her child/-ren will do male work in comparison to children whose mothers or fathers do not feel it to be as important. This is the case independent of whether the child is a boy or a girl. The result is as expected for boys, but not for girls (see Hypothesis 2b). The fact that a positive attitude towards equality in the family has a negative effect also on girls' outdoor work may indicate that outdoor work is not considered as particularly male work. On the whole, however, the results from Table V have little to offer to our understanding of why it is more common for boys to do outdoor work than it is for girls. In addition to the variables reported in Table V, having a sibling at least 3 years younger or older than oneself, mother's education and the quality of the parent-child relationship were also tested without showing significant results.

Children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home

Is there any relation between the parents' division of work and the child's attitude towards gender equality in the home? To what extent are children's

TABLE VI: *Odds ratios from a logistic regression of the attitude towards gender equality in the home on background variables. Boys and girls aged 10–18. Those who think that gender equality is 'very important' are contrasted to all others. Significance tests from a model with robust standard errors*

	Boys	Girls
Age	0.90***	0.98
Has siblings < 7 years of age	0.56**	1.24
Important that the child helps at home (according to the child)	3.12***	1.49
Mother's education (in years)	1.06*	1.07**
Mother works \geq 35 hrs/week	0.92	1.51**
Mother > 5 hrs more housework than the father per week	0.81	1.00
Gender equality in the home is not important (ref.)	1.00	1.00
Gender equality in the home is important (according to mother)	1.12	1.21
Gender equality in the home is important (according to father)	1.35	1.50
	n = 515	n = 532
	Pseudo R ² = 0.05	Pseudo R ² = 0.03

Notes:

*** = Statistically significant at the 1%-level; ** = 5%-level; * = 10%-level, two-tailed tests.

attitudes towards gender equality in the home affected by the corresponding attitudes of the parents? To address these questions, Table VI shows the results of a logistic regression where the dependent variable is the importance the child places on the adults in the family sharing responsibility for housework and children equally. Those children who have answered that gender equality in the home is very important are contrasted in the model to others.¹⁵

Initially, it is worth noting that boys appear to be somewhat less likely to state that equality in the home is important the older they are. Why this is remains to be answered. Families with young children are expected to be more traditional in their distribution of work because it often is the mother who takes parental leave and works part-time. This can affect the picture the older children get of equality between women and men. Boys who live in households where there are children under 7 years of age are also less convinced that it is important that the adults share responsibility for housework and children equally. However, there is no direct relation between the time the mother spends doing housework and the child's attitude towards equality in the home (i.e., Hypothesis 4 receives no support).¹⁶

If parents think it is very important that children help at home, it may be expected that they will encourage common responsibility for the household, which could have a positive effect on children's attitude towards gender equality in the family. In Table VI this assumption receives support as regards the sons. As expected, the higher the mother's level of education, the greater the probability that both girls and boys will feel that equality in the home is

important. Also, if the mother works 35 hours or more per week, the likelihood increases that the daughter will state that equality in the home is important.

Even if there is a positive correlation between parents' and children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home, the relation is not significant in the model estimated here (cf., Hypothesis 5). In a reduced model (not shown), we find a significant positive relation between the parent's attitude towards gender equality in the home and the daughter's attitudes. For boys however, factors such as age, the presence of young siblings, whether their parents are strict about them helping at home, as well as the mother's level of education, play a greater role for their attitude towards equality in the home than do the parents' attitudes.

Concluding discussion

Most earlier studies on the division of housework between young boys and girls are based on US data. This is the first large-scale quantitative study on nationally representative Swedish data. Child-LNU 2000 has the comparative strength, also in an international perspective in that it has information on both parents' and children's housework and gender attitudes, as reported by themselves. A shortcoming is, however, that traditionally female tasks are better measured than are male tasks, and the fact that we have to rely on a single indicator of traditionally male work among children may be one reason for difficulties in understanding the mechanisms behind such work. Apart from this, however, the data provide unusually good opportunities for testing a number of hypotheses on potential factors that can predict the division of housework among Swedish boys and girls 10 to 18 years of age. In Table VII, results from the empirical analyses are summarized and related to the hypotheses in Table I.

Even if most Swedish children aged 10 to 18 help out at home to some extent, there are few who spend a great deal of time on housework. On average, both boys and girls do one to two hours per week. Also, this work does not increase dramatically by age. One reason for this might be that older girls and boys spend more time away from the parental home than younger boys and girls do. With regard to different household activities there are, however, considerable differences between the sexes. Girls carry out more indoor, family- and self-care work than do boys, and the only work sons help with more often than daughters is outdoor work. Hence the gendered division of work in the family is apparent not only among the adults, but also among their children. This seems to indicate that, also in Sweden, the notion of housework as a gendered activity is transferred from parents – and the surrounding society – to children.

The analysis of family-care work gave weak support to the assumption of a connection between children's housework and the work of the same-sex

TABLE VII: *Summary of the hypotheses and their support*

Hypotheses about Swedish boys' and girls' family-care and outdoor work:

1. a) If the father does the majority of all housework, both girls and boys will do more family-care work than in families where the division of work is fairly equal (i.e. they act as a substitute for their mother).	Supported
b) The substitution effect is greater for girls than for boys.	Supported
2. Children are less gender-typical in their family-care and outdoor work in families where	a) Weak support: Girls do less family care work in families where the mother is highly educated.
a) the mother is highly educated.	b) Weak support: Boys – and girls – do less outdoor work when the mother thinks that gender equality in the home is important
b) the parent states that gender equality in the home is important.	a) Supported.
3. a) Girls are more likely to do traditionally male (outdoor) work in families where the mother is the one doing most traditionally male (repair and maintenance) work.	
b) Boys are more likely to do traditionally male (outdoor) work in families where the father is the one doing most traditionally male (repair and maintenance) work.	b) No support.

Hypotheses about children's attitudes towards gender equality in the home:

4. Children are more likely to state that gender equality in the home is important if their parents' division of housework is fairly equal.	No support
5. Children are more likely to state that gender equality in the home is very important if the interviewed parent also believes so.	Weak support for girls.

parent, because both girls and boys helped more in the home if the father was the parent doing most of the housework. The difference in the number of activities the children in these families carry out was greater for girls than for boys, when compared to families where both parents spend about the same amount of time doing housework. This is in line with earlier research and suggests that girls, more often than boys, substitute for their mother in housework. It also indicates that girls carry a heavier burden in families where the workload is great, an assumption that is strengthened by the fact that daughters help out more in the household the more younger siblings they have.

A majority of all Swedish men and women state that equality in the home is something to strive for. Still, this does not appear to affect the way work is divided among the adults in the family to any great extent. Neither does it appear to affect the children. The respondent parent's attitude towards gender equality in the home does not significantly affect the amount of family-care work done by boys and girls.

It appears to be easier to motivate sons to help in the home when the father is the one who spends more time doing housework than the mother. The fact that the number of activities girls help with diminishes if the mother is well educated can – together with the effect of the father's housework on the son's – be interpreted as indicating that gender-atypical behaviour on the part of the parents is what has the greatest influence on children's behaviour. This interpretation also receives some support in the analysis of children's outdoor work where girls more often help with this 'male' work if the mother is the one who carries out most of the maintenance and repair work. Hence the analyses here indicate that if mothers and fathers show in action that doing housework is not necessarily equal to doing gender (cf., Fenstermaker Berk 1985; West and Zimmerman 1987), the probability lessens that their children will find these tasks important when it comes to adopting – and manifesting – a gender identity of their own.

Sons who report that parents are very conscientious that the children help at home more often claim that gender equality in the home is very important. Still, neither the parents' division of housework nor their attitudes towards gender equality in the home appear to have any decisive effect on son's attitudes towards equality in the home. When it comes to girls, the parent's attitude towards gender equality in the home appears to be positively related – although rather weakly – to the daughters' attitudes towards equality in the home (results from a reduced model, not shown). Also, the more educated the mother is, the higher the odds for both girls and boys to state that gender equality in the home is very important. Perhaps mother's education is a better indicator of the extent of gender-egalitarian attitudes among the parents than is the question of whether we should strive for a society where equality in the home prevails. All in all we have managed to explain a very modest part of the variance in the amount of work girls and boys do in the household as well as in their attitudes towards gender equality (see R^2 for the multivariate analyses). More indicators of male work together with more and better indicators of gender egalitarian attitudes might have improved the models.

In sum, although the link between the housework the same-sex parent does and the housework the child does is somewhat weak, housework among Swedish children is still distinctly gendered. It appears as though girls – like women – are more responsive to the need for housework and this means that the default option when the household workload is high is that the daughters step in and do part of the housework. Whether the fact that boys often do not step in is due to their resistance or to the way the parents distribute housework among the children cannot be determined from our data. What we know, however, is that those parents who act gender atypically have children who more often perform gender atypical tasks in the household. Also, if parents are conscientious when it comes to children helping at home, the chances increase that boys will feel that equality between the sexes is important. Whether such

an attitude is realized in behaviour and remains also into adulthood is a question for future research.

(Date accepted: December 2005)

Notes

1. Earlier versions of this paper have been presented at the ECSR workshop 'Gender Inequality' in Stockholm, Sweden, August 2001, and at the Population Association of America meeting in Atlanta, Georgia, USA, May 2002. I wish to thank participants at these conferences for useful comments. I also want to thank Jan O. Jonsson, Mick Cunningham, Magnus Nermo, Eva Sundström and the late Rachel A. Rosenfeld for helpful comments at different stages of the process. I am also grateful to three anonymous BJS reviewers. Financial support from The Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research (Grant 2001-2881 and 2001-2921) is gratefully acknowledged.

2. Self-care refers to work in which children clear up after or take care of themselves, whereas family-care includes work that also benefits others in the family.

3. As a comparison, in the year 2000 the economic activity rate among women 15–64 years of age in Sweden was 74.13 % (compared to 78.70 for men), in the UK 67.05 % (compared to 81.60 for men) and in the US 68.38 per cent (compared to 78.46 for men) (figures drawn from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) statistics data base in Nov. 2003: <http://www.unece.org/stats/gender/web/welcome1.htm>).

4. Worth noting is that children with separated parents who live part of the time with the mother and part of the time with the father are twice as likely to be included in the sample as those who live in only one household. In order to compensate for this, the percentages given in Table II and Table III are weighted.

5. Unfortunately, we cannot establish a response rate among families with children,

as we do not know how many of the non-respondents in the main survey have children.

6. Earlier research has found differences in a number of areas between children living with both their biological parents compared to those living with one biological parent and a step-parent (Jonsson and Östberg 2001). With respect to gender differences in children's family-care and outdoor work and attitudes toward gender equality, however, there appears to be little difference between them (according to results from my own tests of excluding step-families from the analyses).

7. The corresponding figure in the population – that is the weighted estimate – is 18%.

8. The question reads: 'On average, about how many hours per week are spent altogether on repair and maintenance of your residence, motor vehicle and other property belonging to your household?' and 'About how many of these hours do you do this work yourself?'

9. The alternative of using the dominant (highest) education in the family has also been tested, but did not reach significance, which is why the woman's level of education has been chosen.

10. Because there are great differences between children aged 10 and 18 in a number of respects, all analyses were rerun excluding the youngest children (10 to 12 years of age). The exclusion of these groups did not change the results to any great extent, although significance in some cases was reduced.

11. Worth noting is that the number of tasks the children state that they do is related to the number of tasks asked about

in the questionnaire. Hence it might be that girls and boys help out with other activities than those asked about here.

12. The reason for using OLS instead of a count model is that the dependent variable is fairly normally distributed (Figure I) (estimates from a Poisson model can be provided by the author on request).

13. In an earlier and extended version of this study, the socio-economic status of the family was tested as a factor that might be related to the boys' and girls' family-care work. However, this factor did not reach significance once mother's education was

included in the model and it is therefore left out in the above analysis.

14. The exclusion of these families lowers the sample with 267 children or about 24 %.

15. A model where parent's attitude towards gender equality in the home is left out did not result in any changes in the estimates for other variables (e.g., education) and as a consequence, only the final model is presented.

16. The more fine-graded measure of the division of housework (see the analysis of family-care work) was initially tested but did not reach significance.

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