

# **Gender, Justice, and the Family: Time Use Within Central New York Households**

Report on Research conducted as part of Student-Faculty Collaborative Challenge Grant 2004-2005, SUNY-Oswego (July 2005)

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## **I. Introduction**

This project consisted of a time use study conducted by a survey to determine the relative amount of work performed by women and men both within the home and outside of the home. This data has implications for philosophical and feminist arguments which question the justice of a gendered division of labor within the household. Philosophers, sociologists, economists, and others have asked whether gender affects the division of labor within the household. That is, do women perform a greater proportion of the tasks in the household (e.g. cooking, cleaning, laundry, childcare) as compared with men? Is there any effect on the amount of household work performed by men versus women if we look at variables such as (e.g.) relative amount of hours worked in the paid labor force, relative level of earnings by each partner, or professed gender ideology? It is sometimes said that women work the "second shift" by working outside the home as well as completing the majority of the (nonpaid) household labor. Susan Moller Okin's well-known book *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (1989) suggests that the division of labor within the home may have effects on the bargaining power and status of women both within the home and in the labor market, thereby raising questions about the justice of gender roles.

## **II. Methodology**

The participants in this study completed a four-page survey questionnaire which

was sent to them by postal mail. After examining the available alternatives, given the limited number of options and a small budget, the sample was generated by referring to a recently published phone book. While this methodology has its limitations, there is not sufficient reason to believe that this will invalidate the results of this survey. The rule for selection of participants was simply to pick the first dual listing appearing in the last three columns of the phone book. The survey is sent only to adults, whether married or cohabiting, since all participants have phone service in their name. We sent out eight hundred surveys, along with a one-page cover letter and a self-addressed stamped envelope, in order to solicit anonymous feedback. The surveys were sent out in September 2004, and we began to organize and analyze the data late in the Fall semester when the surveys stopped coming in. The comparisons drawn from the data are based on two hundred sixty surveys (response rate of approximately thirty three percent). Due to the vagaries of gathering data via surveys, in some cases (e.g. incomplete surveys) the comparisons drawn do not include the total number of surveys. The summary of the data analysis includes the number of surveys utilized for each comparison (See Appendix for summary of data.).

There are three general methods for conducting a time-use study: home observation, the time diary method, and surveys. Conducting a home observation is incredibly expensive and difficult to perform. The American Time Use Study (ATUS), the first federally funded study of its kind, has recently gotten underway (first results were released by the Bureau of Labor Statistics on September 14, 2004) and it utilizes the time diary method. As it is employed in the ATUS, this method can be criticized on the basis that it produces puzzling and unhelpful results. For instance, the ATUS report states

that "On an "average day" in 2003, persons in the U.S. age 15 and over slept 8.6 hours, spent 5.1 hours doing leisure and sports activities, worked for 3.7 hours, and spent 1.8 hours doing household activities." [<http://www.bls.gov/tus/home.htm>; accessed September 17, 2004] The unexpected figure of 3.7 hours arises because the time diary method employed in the ATUS reports the average distribution of time across all persons on all days of the week, whether or not the person engaged in that activity on their diary day (i.e. the day about which they were interviewed). In addition, the ATUS data makes it difficult to draw the comparisons necessary for determining whether or not a gendered division of labor exists within the family in the United States. Utilizing a survey is an acceptable method, and the present study has been organized to provide regional data (as well as to allow for comparative U.S. data) that bears on this important question in family policy and social/political philosophy.

### **III. Findings and Concluding Remarks**

The findings of our study are surprisingly unsurprising. This project was motivated in part by the reaction of many students in my Philosophy, Public Policy, and Public Affairs course (PHL 307): they find it hard to believe that gender significantly determines one's life prospects and has effects within the family, if this conflicts with their personal experiences. A familiar criticism posed by students is that the data cited in Okin's book is in many cases over twenty years old. The findings of this study tend to support the thesis (one supported by Okin) that gender plays a role in the distribution of unpaid labor in the family.

Our findings only support conclusions for the Central New York region, and in what follows we discuss only a few of the most salient results. Our survey finds that sixty-two percent of respondents consider their household to be 'traditional' (defined as

one in which housework, childcare, etc. are performed primarily by the woman) while only thirty-eight percent consider their household to be 'nontraditional' (defined as one in which housework, childcare responsibilities, etc. are shared equally between partners, or are performed primarily by the man). When comparing who earns more income and the professed gender ideology of the household, we learned that in households in which males earn more, approximately *fifty* percent of these households are traditional, while in households in which females earn more only approximately *twelve* percent of these households consider themselves to be traditional. In households that report themselves to be traditional (married couples), women work approximately 2.9 times as many hours in nonpaid domestic labor as men (32.34 versus 11.23 hours), while in households that report themselves to be non-traditional (married couples), women work only 1.2 times as many hours in nonpaid domestic labor (23.94 versus 20.12 hours).

The adoption of a non-traditional gender ideology has significant effects on the distribution of domestic nonpaid labor, effects which are compounded and supported by the relative earnings of the partners. In households in which the male earns more (married couples), females work approximately 2.3 times as many unpaid domestic labor hours as men (30.01 versus 13.02 hours), while in households in which the female earns more (married couples), women work 1.6 times as many nonpaid domestic hours as compared with men (24.95 versus 15.91 hours). Who earns more is a significant factor bearing on the distribution of unpaid domestic labor, but it is not equally powerful for males and females. This may be due to the interaction between this factor and the profession of a 'traditional' gender ideology. (Recall, as mentioned above, that in households in which males earn more, approximately fifty percent of such households are traditional.) This

summary statement of findings from this grant suggests that Okin's thesis withstands empirical scrutiny: gender ideology and income-earning power have significant effects on the distribution of unpaid labor within Central New York households.

Administering this grant has been a meaningful and rewarding experience. It has allowed for greater depth in the student-faculty relationship than that which is possible in a classroom setting. It has also afforded the student with an opportunity to gain insight into how an extended research project works. If I had to do anything differently, I would request a greater number of hours for the project, with some of these in the form of a course reduction. One hundred paid hours were budgeted for the student collaborator's participation, yet staying within this budget required a constant series of tradeoffs on the part of a faculty member with a full teaching load, advising load, and scholarly research program. If this grant is truly intended to provide a mentoring experience for students, then something must be done to allow faculty members who receive the grant sufficient time to work with students. Collaborative research is time-intensive.

Graduate studies require that students work on projects that span a period of time longer than a semester--yet the typical undergraduate experience does not include such projects. (The collaborator on this project, an active student, has engaged in research spanning at most a one to two month period.) One main value of the Student-Faculty Collaborative Challenge Grant is that it provides a way for interested students to bridge the gap between undergraduate and graduate studies. This experience not only enriches the professional lives of faculty, but is also very likely to enhance students' possibilities and academic performance after receiving their undergraduate education.

**Appendix: Data Analysis**

1. Hours worked in labor market per week: **males:** 40.87 hours **females:** 28.51 hours  
(includes 233 males and 236 females)
  
2. Hours spent doing leisure activities per week: **males:** 17.96 hours **females:** 15.78 hours  
(includes 237 males and 240 females)
  
3. % filling out survey: **males:** 21.15% **females:** 78.85%  
(all 260 surveys used)
  
4. % by ideology: **traditional:** 62% **non-traditional:** 38%  
(including 250 surveys)
  
5. % by marital status: **married:** 96.92% **divorced:** 1.92% **widowed:** .77%  
(all 260 surveys used) **single:** 0% **cohabiting:** .38%
  
6. % of households with and without children: **with:** 63.53% **without:** 36.47%  
(including 255 surveys)
  
7. % owning or renting home: **own:** 95.72% **rent:** 3.89% **both:** .39%  
(including 257 surveys)
  
8. Average age of person filling out survey: 46.17 years old  
(all 260 surveys used)
  
9. % ethnicity of person filling out survey: **white:** 99.61% **black:** 0% **hispanic:** 0%  
(including 259 surveys) **asian:** .39% **other:** 0%
  
10. Gender earning more vs. ideology: **males earning more and traditional:** 49.76%  
(including 211 couples) **females earning more and traditional:** 11.85%  
**males earning more and non-traditional:** 27.01%  
**females earning more and non-traditional:** 11.37%



<b>17. Household labor time by reported gender ideology: married couples</b> (including 217 surveys)	<b>males</b>	<b>females</b>	
	<b>traditional</b>	11.23 hours	32.34 hours
	<b>non-traditional</b>	20.12 hours	23.94 hours
<b>18. Household labor time by who earns more: married couples</b> (including 193 surveys)	<b>males</b>	<b>females</b>	
	<b>male earns more</b>	13.02 hours	30.01 hours
	<b>female earns more</b>	15.91 hours	24.95 hours
<b>19. Household labor time by age: married couples</b> (including 222 surveys)	<b>males</b>	<b>females</b>	
	<b>20-29</b>	13.78 hours	20.83 hours
	<b>30-39</b>	12.34 hours	30.64 hours
	<b>40-49</b>	15.24 hours	29.11 hours
	<b>50-59</b>	12.69 hours	26.61 hours
	<b>60-69</b>	20.90 hours	33.55 hours
	<b>70-79</b>	18.00 hours	38.17 hours
<b>20. Household labor time by education: married couples</b> (including 213 surveys)	<b>males</b>	<b>females</b>	
	<b>less than high school</b>	21.67 hours	21.11 hours
	<b>high school</b>	14.71 hours	31.11 hours
	<b>some college/college</b>	14.47 hours	28.52 hours
	<b>specified graduate degree</b>	16.56 hours	29.94 hours



