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**„ What contributes to the (im)balanced division of family work
in young dual-earner couples?“**

Sonja Jagoditsch, Harald Lothaller & Gerold Mikula

University of Graz
Department of Psychology – Division of Social Psychology

Universitaetsplatz 2/III
A-8010 Graz/Austria

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**What contributes to the (im)balanced division of family work in
young dual-earner couples?¹**

Sonja Jagoditsch, Harald Lothaller and Gerold Mikula
Department of Psychology
University of Graz

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Address for correspondence: Sonja Jagoditsch, Department of Psychology, University of
Graz, A-8010 Graz, Austria. Phone +43-316-3808512. E-mail: so.jagoditsch@uni.graz.at

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"Family life and professional work: Conflicts and synergy" (HPSE-CT-2002-00147).

Our presentation deals with the division of family work within dual-earner couples with young children. Due to the increased participation of women in the paid labor force, the division of family work has become a challenge in our society. Women still perform the majority of family work regardless of their employment status (e.g. Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Baxter, 2002; Evertsson & Neramo, 2004; Nordenmark, 2004; Winquist, 2004; for reviews see Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996; Sikic-Micanovic, 2000). In addition women generally do more of the time consuming and repetitive tasks, whereas men do more of the sporadic, non-routine, and less time consuming tasks. The division of family work is an important part of the problem of reconciling family and professional work. The division of family work is also relevant to the individual well-being, the relationship between the partners, and the family climate (e.g., Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, & Siero, 2000; Grote, Frieze, & Stone, 1996; Perry-Jenkins & Folk, 1994; Yogevev & Brett, 1985; for reviews see Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). Thus, it seems important to know more about variables that contribute to the way in which the family work is divided between the partners.

Method:

The present study uses data from 213 Austrian dual-earner couples with at least one preschool aged child. The data were collected as part of a large research project on reconciliation of family life and professional work supported by the European Commission².

We consider domestic work (e.g. cleaning, cooking, shopping, maintenance and repair tasks) and child care (e.g., feeding, bathing, playing, helping with homework). Most of the theoretical models and most previous studies have focused on the division of domestic work and disregarded child care. But it is by no means self-evident that the variables that contribute to the division of domestic work also contribute to the division of child care, and that the same theoretical models apply to both areas of family work, respectively. Empirical findings for example suggest that domestic work is seen more negatively than child care (e.g., Aldous, Mulligan, & Bjarnason, 1998; Gager, 1998).

We have data from both partners of a couple. Therefore, our measure of the divisions of domestic work and child care are arithmetic means of the statements of both partners. This reduces subjective biases and provides more objective data. The availability of data from both partners has another advantage. We can define variables that refer to characteristics of the couple.

The variables were chosen in accordance with five major theoretical perspectives to explain the imbalanced division of family work: The relative resource theory, the doing

² EU-Project „Family life and professional work: Conflict and synergy“ (HPSE-CT-2002-00147)

gender or construction of gender perspective, the demand-response model, the gender role ideology model, and the life course perspective.

The *relative resource theory* assumes that the partner who has more resources in the relationship like education and income will do less family work as compared to the other (Blood & Wolfe, 1960). The *doing gender or construction of gender perspective* partly suggests contrary hypotheses. This perspective assumes that if women have more resources relative to their partner, women will do even more family work to symbolically show their femininity (Brines, 1994). For men, the same holds the other way around. More generally speaking, if women and/or men deviate from the traditional female or male roles in one area (e.g., the woman is the main-provider, or the man is financially dependent on the woman because he earns less than she earns), they will compensate this gender role deviance by an especially gender role typical behavior in another area (Arrighi & Maume, 2000). The *demand-response model* assumes that a person does more family work when there is a greater need for it and when one has more time available to do family work. The *gender role ideology* model argues that attitudes about gender roles play an important role for the way in which family work is divided between the partners. The more traditional the partners' attitudes are, the more of the family work will be done by the women. And finally, the *life course perspective* focuses on the effect of the timing and duration of certain life events and – in broader approach – on characteristics of the family system and situation.

Based upon these theoretical perspectives we used the following variables as potential predictors of the division of family work in our analyses.

- ⇒ differences between the partners concerning
 - income
 - education
- ⇒ number of children
- ⇒ number of preschool aged children
- ⇒ hours per week that the woman spends for her professional work
- ⇒ hours per week that the man spends for his professional work
- ⇒ in addition to the additive effect of professional working hours of both partners, we considered the interaction between both partners' working time as an additional variable
- ⇒ the traditionalism of both partners
- ⇒ in addition, the interaction between both partner's traditional attitudes were included
- ⇒ marital status
- ⇒ and duration of the relationship

Results:

We calculated two separate regression analyses to analyse which variables contribute to the division of domestic work and child care, respectively. The mean percentages of the respective tasks done by the woman relative to the man were used as criteria. The above mentioned variables were used as predictors.

Child care:

With respect to the division of child care, the results show the following. The woman does a higher percentage of the child care relative to the man,

- the more the man earns relative to the woman ($\beta = .33, p < .01$),
- the more hours per week the man spends for his professional work ($\beta = .31, p < .01$),
- the less hours per week the woman spends for her professional work ($\beta = -.17, p < .01$),
- and, the more traditional the man is ($\beta = .20, p < .01$)

The variables together explain 35% of the variance. The results provide support to three of the five major theoretical perspectives mentioned above, i.e. the relative resource theory, the gender ideology perspective, and the demand-response model.

Domestic work:

The results for the division of domestic work are similar to those obtained for child care. Again, women do the more domestic work relative to men, the more the man earns relative to the woman ($\beta = .22, p < .01$), the more hours per week the man spends for his professional work ($\beta = .28, p < .01$), and the more traditional the man is ($\beta = .17, p < .05$). But, additionally, the interactions between woman's and man's professional working hours ($\beta = .16, p < .05$) and between woman's and man's traditionalism ($\beta = -.14, p < .05$) are significant. The effect of the hours that men spend for professional work upon the size of women's share of domestic work is the larger, the less time the woman spends for her professional work (see figure 1). The effect of the men's traditionalism upon the size of the women's share of domestic work is the larger, the less traditional the woman's attitudes are (see figure 2). The predictors together explain 27% of the variance of the division of domestic work.

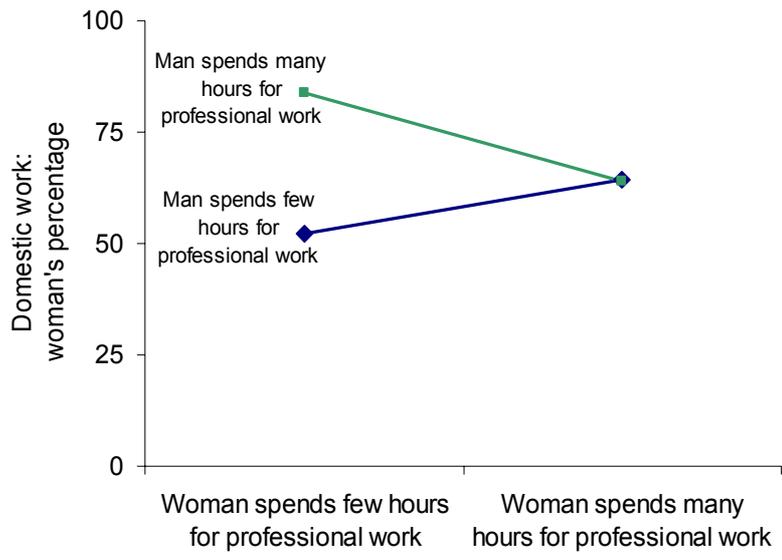


Figure 1: Interaction between woman's and man's professional working hours.

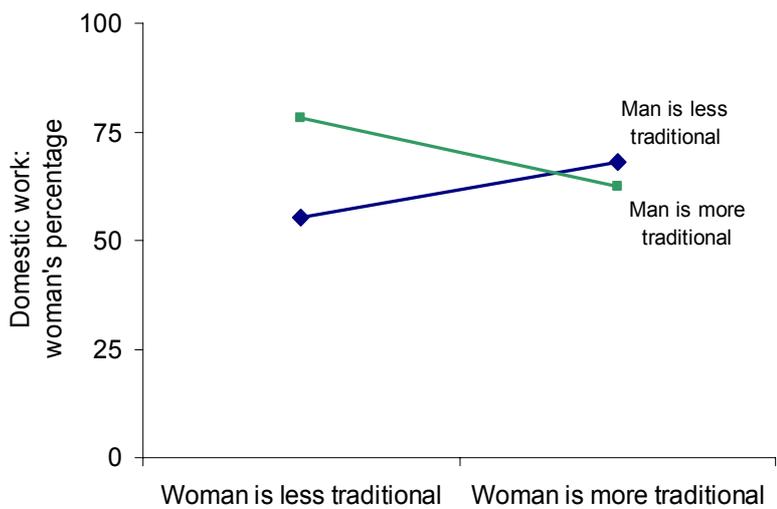


Figure 2: Interaction between woman's and man's traditionalism.

We have calculated the same analyses with data from additional samples from Germany and Switzerland. In general, the results are very similar to those obtained for the Austrian sample (see Appendix, tables 1-4). With one exception the same theoretical perspectives are supported in the two additional samples. However, the gender role ideology perspective was only supported for the division of child care but not for the division of domestic work with the Fribourg and the Munich data.

Conclusions:

In conclusion, the results provide support to three theoretical models, i.e. the relative resource theory, the demand-response model, and the gender role ideology model. The results indicate that the division of family work is related to differences between the partners with respect to the resources they bring into the relationship, to the attitudes they have, and to the time that is available for doing family work. No support was obtained for the doing gender or construction of gender perspective and the life course perspective. With respect to domestic work, the results show that not only the individual characteristics of the partners account for the division of work but also the interactions between them.

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Appendix

Table 1: Hierarchical regression analyses of the percentage of child care done by the women with data from Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

	Austria	Germany	Switzerland
	β	β	β
Step 1			
Woman's traditionalism	-.02	.14*	-.05
Men's traditionalism	.17*	.12	.21**
Woman's professional working hours per week	-.22**	-.33**	-.26**
Men's professional working hours per week	.45**	.44**	.58**
<i>R</i> ² adjusted	.26	.35	.49
<i>F</i>	18.23**	27.75**	45.35**
Step 2			
Woman's traditionalism	-.05	.12*	-.06
Men's traditionalism	.20**	.11	.20**
Woman's traditionalism X man's traditionalism	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Woman's professional working hours per week	-.17**	-.23**	-.28**
Men's professional working hours per week	.31**	.35**	.60**
Woman's professional working hours X man's professional working hours	n.e.	n.e.	.13*
Number of children	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Number of preschool aged children	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Differences between the partners concerning income	.33**	.26**	n.e.
Differences between the partners concerning education	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Marital status	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Duration of the relationship	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
<i>R</i> ² adjusted	.35	.40	.50
<i>F</i>	21.93**	27.62**	38.30**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, n.e. not entered into the equation.

Table 2: Hierarchical regression analyses of the percentage of domestic work done by the women with data from Austria, Germany and Switzerland.

	Austria	Germany	Switzerland
	β	β	β
Step 1			
Woman's traditionalism	-.02	.07	.08
Men's traditionalism	.14	.14*	.06
Woman's professional working hours per week	-.18**	-.23**	-.38**
Men's professional working hours per week	.40**	.26**	.56**
<i>R</i> ² adjusted	.19	.15	.47
<i>F</i>	12.40**	9.96**	42.38**
Step 2			
Woman's traditionalism	-.03	.06	.05
Men's traditionalism	.17*	.13	.05
Woman's traditionalism X man's traditionalism	-.14*	n.e.	n.e.
Woman's professional working hours per week	-.09	-.14*	-.30**
Men's professional working hours per week	.28**	.18*	.48**
Woman's professional working hours X man's professional working hours	-.16*	n.e.	.14**
Number of children	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Number of preschool aged children	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Differences between the partners concerning income	.22**	.25**	.19*
Differences between the partners concerning education	n.e.	n.e.	.12*
Marital status	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
Duration of the relationship	n.e.	n.e.	n.e.
<i>R</i> ² adjusted	.27	.19	.53
<i>F</i>	11.27**	10.69**	30.79**

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, n.e. not entered into the equation.

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY
Department of Psychology

UNIVERSITY OF GRAZ

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Background 1/2

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- Women still perform the majority of family work regardless of their employment status
- The division of family work is an important part of the problem of reconciling family and professional work
- The division of family work is related to
 - Individual well-being
 - Relationship quality and family climate

Background 2/2



- It seems important to know more about variables that contribute to the way in which the family work is divided between the partners.

Method



- 213 dual-earner couples with at least one pre-school aged child
- Domestic work (e.g., cleaning, cooking, shopping, maintenance and repair tasks)
- Child care (e.g., feeding, bathing, playing, helping with homework)

Analyses



- Measurement of the division of work:
 - Arithmetic means of the statements of both partners
 - Reduces subjective biases and provides more objective data
- Predictors:
 - Variables from both partners
 - Variables that refer to characteristics of the couple
 - Variables chosen in accordance with five theoretical perspectives

Theoretical perspectives



- Relative resource theory
- Doing gender or construction of gender perspective
- Demand-response model
- Gender role ideology model
- Life course perspective

The relative resource theory



The one who has more resources in the relationship does less family work as compared to the other

Doing gender or construction of gender



If women and/or men deviate from the traditional female or male roles in one area (e.g., the woman is the main-provider), they will compensate this gender role deviance by an especially gender role typical behavior in another area

Demand-response model



A person does more family work when it is needed and when one has more time to do it

Gender role ideology model



- The division of family work depends upon attitudes about gender roles
- The more traditional the partners' attitudes are, the more family work the woman does relative to the man.

Life course perspective



Effects of

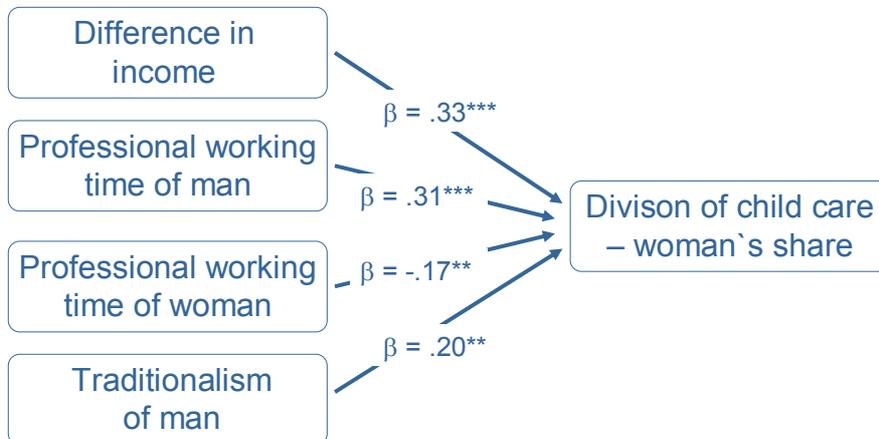
- Timing and duration of certain life events and
- Characteristics of the family system and situation

Potential predictors



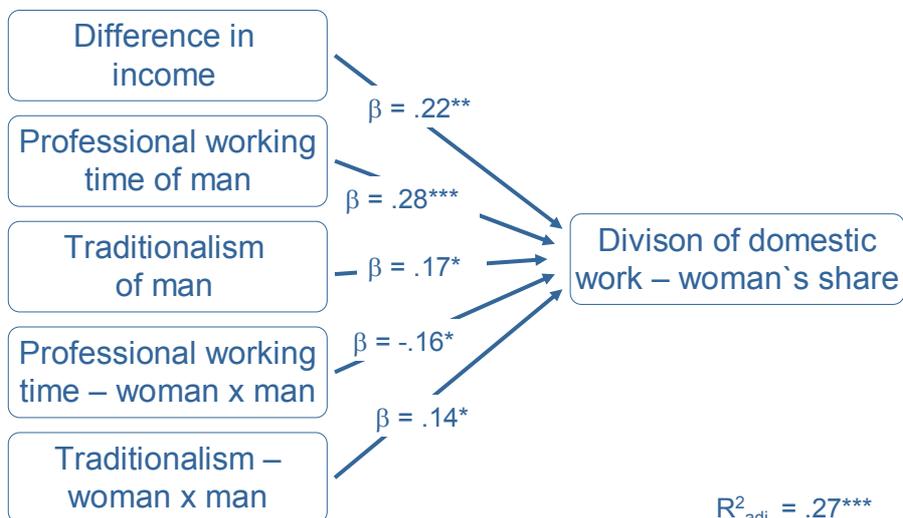
- Differences between the partners concerning
 - Income
 - Education
- Number of children and of preschool aged children
- Woman's professional working hours
- Men's professional working hours
- Interaction between both partners' working time
- Women's traditionalism
- Men's traditionalism
- Interaction between woman's and man's traditionalism
- Marital status
- Duration of the relationship

Results – child care



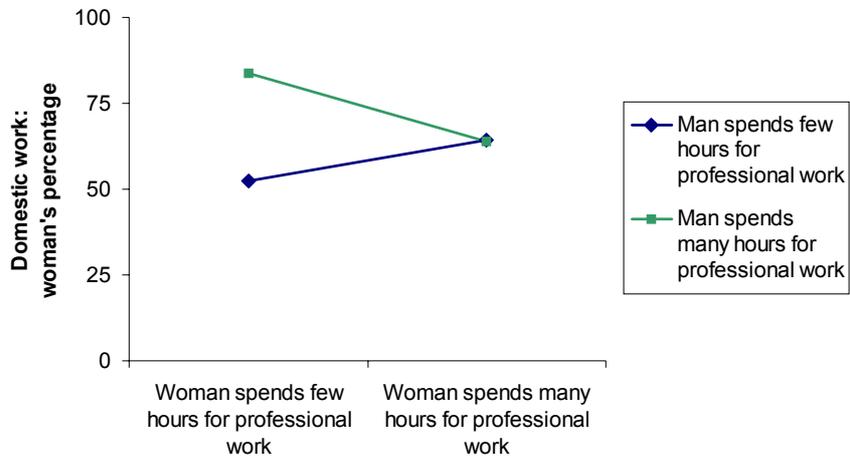
$R^2_{adj.} = .35^{***}$

Results – domestic work

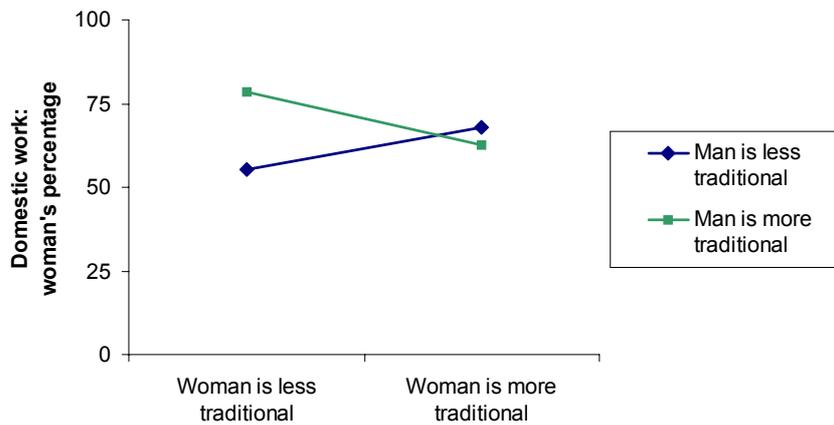


$R^2_{adj.} = .27^{***}$

Interactions



Interactions



Results for additional samples



Similar results for Austria, Germany,
and Switzerland

Conclusions (1/2)



- The results provide support to three theoretical models:
 - the relative resource theory
 - the gender role ideology model
 - the demand-response model
- The division of family work is related to:
 - differences between the partners' resources
 - the traditionalism of the partners' attitudes
 - the time that is available for doing family work

Conclusions (2/2)



- No support was obtained for
 - the doing gender or construction of gender perspective
 - and the life course perspective
- Individual characteristics of the partners as well as the interaction between them account for the division of domestic work.



Thank you for your attention!