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Patterns of change and stability in the gender division of household labour in Australia, 1986–1997

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Abstract

Recent research in Australia and overseas has suggested that we are witnessing a convergence of men's and women's time on domestic labour activities. But there is disagreement about whether this is due to women reducing their time on housework or men increasing their time on housework. This article addresses these issues using national survey data collected in Australia in 1986, 1993 and 1997. The results show some changes in the proportional responsibilities of men and women in the home with men reporting a greater share of traditional indoor activities. But overall both men and women are spending less time on housework. In particular, women's time on housework has declined by six hours per week since 1986. Hence, while the gender gap between men's and women's involvement in the home is getting smaller, it is not the result of men increasing their share of the load, but is due to the large decline in women's time spent on domestic labour. There is also evidence of change in the relationship between paid and unpaid work for women. Women's hours of paid labour had a greater impact on their involvement in domestic labour in 1997 compared to a decade earlier. The article concludes that women's increased labour force involvement in combination with changing patterns and styles of consumption is leading to some changes in the gender division of household labour, but not in the direction anticipated by earlier commentators on the domestic division of labour.

Keywords: change, gender division of labour, household labour, housework, time

Introduction

Feminist reformers in the 1960s and 1970s were optimistic that changes in the labour force participation rates for married women, in combination with increased awareness of the value of women's unpaid work in the home, would lead to an increased involvement of men in domestic labour and a more equal domestic division of labour between men and women (Oakley, 1974a, 1974b; Malos, 1980; Gavron, 1983). To a large extent, this has not happened. It is generally undisputed that women do approximately three quarters of household work, a pattern that is evident across all western nations (Szalai, 1972; Berk, 1985; Baxter, 1997). At the same time, though, there is debate about whether the amount of time that men and women spend on domestic labour has changed over time (Gershuny and Robinson, 1988; Shelton, 1992; Bittman, 1995; Bianchi et al., 2000; Sullivan, 2000). The results of the research are far from clear-cut. Most research tends to suggest that women's hours on housework are declining, but there are mixed views about whether men's hours on housework have changed. Some research has found that men's housework contribution has increased (Gershuny and Robinson, 1988; Robinson and Godbey, 1997; Bianchi et al., 2000; Sullivan, 2000), while others have found virtually no change in men's contribution (Shelton, 1992; Bittman, 1995).

The impetus for the debate stems from other social changes thought to impact upon the way men and women organize their household responsibilities. These include the increased participation of married women in paid employment, a much smaller but nevertheless significant decline in men's labour force participation rates, the decline in fertility levels, the delay in entering a marital relationship, increased rates of de facto cohabitation, and increasing divorce rates. In other words, the expectation has been that changes in patterns of family formation and dissolution, in conjunction with the changing gender distribution of paid work, would lead to changes in the distribution of work between men and women in the home. But it is unclear to what extent this has occurred.

This article investigates these issues by examining men's and women's participation in housework in Australia using repeated national cross-sectional data from 1986, 1993 and 1997. The aim is to examine change over time in men's and women's levels of participation in childcare and housework. Additionally, the article takes previous analyses one step further by examining the way in which the factors determining men's and women's levels of involvement in domestic labour may have changed over time. Australia has seen major changes in the labour force participation rates of married women, patterns of family formation and dissolution, changes in women's levels of economic independence and men's and women's attitudes to gender and family roles. But we know little about how these changes have impacted on the household division of labour.¹ For example, is the

relationship between paid and unpaid work changing for married women as they move into paid work in larger numbers and increasingly maintain involvement in the labour market throughout their life course? Are we witnessing increasing similarity in the links between paid and unpaid work for men and women as women's patterns of participation in paid work become more like men's?

Explaining household labour

Two kinds of models dominate attempts to explain the allocation of household labour.² On the one hand is the economic exchange model that argues that women perform housework in exchange for economic support (Walby, 1986; Brines, 1994). Under this model, the allocation of labour in the household is seen as fundamentally economic and rational. Men provide income for the household and, in exchange, women perform unpaid domestic labour. The expectation is that as women's time in paid labour increases and as their contribution to the household income increases, the division of labour in the home will become more equal. In other words, childcare and housework are performed in a rational and efficient manner in which the person with the most time, and the least economic resources, performs the most domestic labour.

From a feminist perspective the economic exchange model is fundamentally concerned with power differences. The partner who spends the most time in paid work and who contributes most to the household income will have the most bargaining power within the household. This power will be translated into reduced involvement in unpaid labour, since domestic work is thought of as unpleasant and unrewarding (Hartmann, 1981). Typically, the person with the most power will be the husband, since men tend to spend longer hours in paid work than women, and tend to earn more than their female counterparts.

While some support has been found for this model (Coverman, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Ross, 1987; Baxter, 1992), the results are less than clear-cut. There is evidence that women's time spent in paid labour impacts on the amount of time that women spend on domestic labour, with longer hours in paid employment leading to a reduction in women's time spent on domestic work (Baxter, 1992). But there is less evidence of a similar relationship between paid and unpaid work for men. Rather, some research has suggested that increasing amounts of time outside paid work lead to a reduction in time spent on domestic work by men. For example, unemployed or retired men have been found to do less domestic work than employed men (Shamir, 1986; Morris, 1990). This finding has prompted some researchers to suggest that periods of unemployment or a move to retirement challenge men's masculine identity as the family breadwinner (Warr and Payne, 1983; Shamir, 1986). During these periods it is unlikely

that men will challenge their identities further by performing increased amounts of domestic labour.

There are also variations in findings concerning the impact of economic contribution on the domestic division of labour. Some research on this issue shows that as women's level of economic contribution to the household increases, their level of contribution to domestic labour declines (Ross, 1987; Baxter, 1992). Similarly, there is evidence that the amount of domestic labour performed by men is related to the amount of economic support they provide to the household, with higher levels of support relative to their wives associated with lower levels of involvement in domestic work (Berk, 1985; Pleck, 1985; Ross, 1987; Baxter, 1992, 1993). But there is also research which suggests that economic contribution is not closely related to the domestic division of labour (Coverman, 1985; Hochschild, 1989) and some who argue that it is only important if men define their wives as 'co-providers' (Coltrane, 1996).

While the logic of the economic exchange model is gender neutral, a point which feminists have been critical of, the alternative model for understanding the allocation of household labour focuses precisely on the symbolic importance of gender for the organization of housework (Berk, 1985; West and Zimmerman, 1987; Ferree, 1990). The gender display model points to the symbolic construction of housework as women's work and as a display of a woman's love for her family and subordination to her husband (Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1990). West and Zimmerman (1987) specify the model by proposing an 'ethnomethodologically informed' account of gender as an accomplishment.

Rather than as a property of individuals, we conceive of gender as an emergent feature of social situations: both as an outcome of and a rationale for various social arrangements and as a means of legitimating one of the most fundamental divisions of society. (West and Zimmerman, 1987: 126)

Berk applied this model to housework, arguing that the current arrangements for the organization of domestic labour support two production processes: household goods and services and, at the same time, gender (1985: 201). She argued that the marital household is a 'gender factory' where, in addition to accomplishing tasks, housework produces gender through the everyday enactment of dominance, submission and other behaviours symbolically linked to gender. The process of 'doing gender' does not operate at a conscious level. Rather, gender, or gender identity, is produced as men and women carry out routine household tasks. Doing housework, then, is an important component of doing gender and helps to explain why gender far outweighs other factors in explaining who does housework; why housework is not allocated efficiently or rationally according to who has the most time and least resources; and why men and women are likely to see the

division of labour as fair even though it is objectively very unequally distributed (Ferree, 1990: 876-7).

In response to these two models of explaining household labour, the key variables generally included in analyses of the domestic division of labour are gender role attitudes, time spent in paid labour and level of economic contribution to the household.

Explaining change in men's and women's time spent on housework

There are diverging viewpoints about how much change has taken place in men's level of involvement in unpaid household work. Hochschild (1989) coined the phrase 'stalled revolution' to refer to men's lack of involvement in domestic work, while Gerson (1993) referred to 'men's quiet revolution' to describe that group of men who have rejected the male breadwinner model in favour of greater involvement in fathering and an increased share of domestic work. However, there is remarkably little research that directly examines change over time in men's and women's involvement in housework.

Generally speaking, analyses that consider time periods spanning several decades tend to find more evidence of change than those that examine shorter periods of time. For example, Gershuny and Robinson (1988), examining time diary data in the United States and the United Kingdom from the early 1960s to the mid 1980s, find a pattern of women doing less domestic work over time and men doing more (although still much less than women) in both countries. They suggest two possible explanations: the first is that domestic equipment may have improved household productivity with less time needed to produce the same outcomes. The second possible explanation is that households may have adjusted their standards downward.

Sullivan (2000) reports similar results using British time diary data from 1975 to 1997. Although women still perform the bulk of domestic work, she finds a significant increase in men's participation in domestic work and specifically in the areas of cooking, cleaning and childcare tasks. Like others she reports that the most impressive change is in the earlier period from 1975 to 1987, rather than from 1987 to 1997. She concludes that there has been a clear reduction of gender inequality in some normatively female tasks, a convergence in the proportional domestic labour contributions of men from lower socio-economic and higher socio-economic groups, and a substantial increase in the numbers of egalitarian couples, particularly amongst the full-time employed (2000: 453).

On the other hand, Shelton (1992), using United States data from the 1975-1981 Time Use Longitudinal Panel Study and the 1987 National Survey of Families and Households, finds that men's household labour time

increased only slightly from 1975 to 1987, especially when measured as a proportionate share of women's time. She concludes that women continued to spend significantly more time on household labour than men. But the most recent and comprehensive analyses of change in domestic labour patterns in the United States is the work of Bianchi et al. (2000). Using time diary data from repeated cross-sectional representative samples of American adults between 1965 and 1995, they found that women reduced their time on housework by about 12 hours per week (down from approximately 30 hours per week in 1965 to approximately 17.5 hours in 1995) while men's housework time doubled during this period (from approximately 5 to 10 hours per week) with the largest increases occurring prior to 1985. However, they conclude that the declining gender gap in housework has more to do with a decline in women's hours spent on housework than an increase in men's hours spent on housework. And like all other studies of housework, they find that the core housework activities – cooking, cleaning and laundry – are still primarily women's responsibility. Finally, they report that the activity which shows the greatest level of convergence is cooking, with 'women's reported hours 8.8 times higher than men's in 1965 but only 2.8 times men's in 1995' (2000: 207).

In Australia, research has been conducted using the 1992 Australian Bureau of Statistics Time Use Survey in conjunction with pilot time use surveys conducted in regional centres in Australia in 1987 and 1974 (Bittman, 1995). The key findings were that between 1987 and 1992 women reduced their time spent on housework by nearly three hours per week, primarily as a result of a reduction in the amount of time spent on cooking, and a reduction in time spent on laundry. In contrast, women spent an increased amount of time (an extra 21 minutes per week) on home maintenance and car care. For men, however, there were no significant changes in time spent on housework, but for both men and women there was a small but significant increase in the amount of time devoted to childcare.

Overall, previous studies tend to suggest that, to the extent that change in men's level of involvement in housework has taken place, it occurred primarily in the 1960s, 1970s, and early 1980s. After this period it appears that the rate of change for men may have slowed down and possibly even ceased. For women, the pattern appears to be a more consistent reduction in time spent on housework from the 1960s through to the 1990s. It may be that the period prior to the 1980s was most conducive to change because this was the time when women's participation in paid work began to increase most dramatically, family size declined considerably and the women's movement was at its peak. But why should the rate of change for men have slowed, while for women it continued? One possibility is that, for women, continued reduction in time spent on domestic labour was the result of sheer necessity. Faced with the continued dual burden of paid and unpaid work, and men's apparent reluctance to increase their share of

domestic work further, the only way for women to cope may be by continuing to reduce domestic work time. At the same time, changes in consumption patterns, for example the increased availability of pre-prepared foods and wash and wear clothes, in combination with changing attitudes to gender roles, changing family structures, declining levels of fertility and increased involvement in paid work may all have helped to produce a continued decline in women's time spent on domestic labour.

The current study

The current article examines the pattern of change in Australia since the middle of the 1980s. Consistent with the patterns observed in earlier studies, I hypothesize that since the middle of the 1980s there has been little change in men's level of involvement in domestic work, while for women I expect to find evidence of significant and consistent declines in time spent on domestic labour. Trends in the proportionate share of housework are not as easy to predict. However, Shelton's work suggests that women's declining time spent on domestic labour may also lead to an increase in men's proportionate share of domestic work. Given increased awareness of gender equity issues in the home, the changing nature of men's and women's relationship to employment and the changing culture of femininity and masculinity, it seems likely that, to the extent that change in the proportionate sharing of labour in the home is evident, it will be in the direction of men doing more rather than less. To examine these issues I present least squares means for men and women on a range of domestic labour tasks, in addition to several summary measures of the domestic division of labour.

I also investigate possible changes in the key factors determining involvement in household labour. Trends in levels of responsibility and hours spent on domestic labour are only one aspect of patterns of change and stability in household labour. A second aspect, which has not been examined in detail in the literature to date, is to what extent the factors determining domestic labour involvement have changed over time. The three main factors affecting the domestic division of labour emerging out of the economic exchange and the gender model, as discussed above, are time spent in paid work, relative economic contribution of men and women to the household, and gender role attitudes. As shown in my earlier work, and that of many other researchers in this area, economic power, gender attitudes and time spent in paid work have all been found to have a predictive relationship to the domestic division of labour (Baxter, 1992; Shelton, 1992; Brines, 1994). What is not known, however, is whether these factors are still salient in determining the domestic division of labour in the current economic, political and social climate. For example, has the feminization of the labour

force impacted on the relationship between hours spent in paid work and domestic work for men and women? As women move toward increased involvement in paid labour, have we observed a weakening or strengthening of the relationship between paid and unpaid labour for women? There are reasons why we might expect to find both trends. First, as women become more like men in terms of their involvement in paid labour, then we might expect that, like men, paid work will have less influence on women's domestic labour involvement. On the other hand, as women's involvement in paid work increases, we might observe a strengthening of the impact of paid work on women's domestic labour. Similar issues arise in relation to the changing impact of gender role attitudes and relative economic contribution. Evidence suggests that Australians have become more liberal in their attitudes toward gender roles (Evans, 2000). Have changing gender role attitudes affected the salience of gender attitudes in determining the domestic division of labour? If there is more widespread agreement that both men and women should participate equally in childcare and housework, are attitudes becoming less salient as a predictor of the domestic division of labour? And finally, as women contribute greater proportions of the household income, does this negate the influence of relative economic resources on the domestic division of labour?

Data

The data for this article come from three national cross-sectional studies – the 1986 Class Structure of Australia Project, the 1993 Class Structure of Australia Project, and the 1997 Negotiating the Lifecourse Project. All of the surveys are based on nationally representative samples, although all had differing parameters. The 1986 survey was based on a representative sample of the employed Australian population, the 1993 survey was based on a sample of the entire population, while the 1997 survey was restricted to the population between 18 and 54 years of age. In order to generate comparable estimates over time I have restricted all of the samples at each point in time to employed respondents (in either full or part-time employment) aged between 18 and 54 years. Additionally, in the 1986 survey the questions on housework were only asked of married or cohabiting respondents. I therefore confine all of the analyses on housework for each survey to this subgroup. Similarly, the childcare analyses are restricted to respondents with children under 10 years of age living in the household, since these questions were only asked of this group.

Table 1 shows the total sample size for each survey and the sample size once the above restrictions relating to marital status, employment, age of respondent and age of children are imposed. Note that in each survey only one member of the household was interviewed.

Table 1: Data, sample size and data collection method

<i>Project</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Total sample</i>	<i>Married/ Cohabiting sample</i>	<i>Married/ Cohabiting with children sample</i>	<i>Method of collection</i>
The Class Structure of Australia Project	1986	1195	754	329	Face-to-face interviews
The Class Structure of Australia Project	1993	2780	1081	789	Self complete mail-out questionnaire
Negotiating the Lifecourse	1997	2231	1116	596	Telephone interviews

Variables

The dependent variables in these analyses are a set of measures of the domestic division of labour relating to childcare and housework activities.³ In some of the surveys the range of tasks included was more comprehensive than in others. For reasons of comparability I have restricted my analyses to those items that are common across each of the surveys. For childcare I focus on the proportionate contribution of men and women to childcare tasks. For housework, however, I examine both the proportionate contribution of husbands and wives to particular activities, in addition to the amount of time spent doing them. The distinction between proportionate contribution to specific tasks and the amount of time spent doing tasks is important since taking major responsibility for a task may involve only a small amount of time. For example, taking out the garbage is a task that may be undertaken once a week or less and require very little time, whereas tasks such as cooking and cleaning up after meals are daily activities and considerably more time consuming. It is possible, therefore, to have an equal division of labour where both husband and wife each have responsibility for 50 percent of the domestic work, but in which women spend considerably more time than men on domestic labour.

The comparable childcare tasks across each of the surveys were bathing and dressing children, getting children to bed, and helping children with homework. The comparable housework tasks were preparing meals, cleaning up after meals, grocery shopping, cleaning the house, taking out the garbage, washing, ironing, mowing lawns, gardening and home maintenance/repairs. The response categories were: 'I do most' (100 percent); 'I do more' (75 percent); 'we share this equally' (50 percent); 'my partner does more' (25 percent); and 'my partner does most' (0 percent). These responses

were coded as percentages and then summed to create a scale ranging from 0 to 100 percent, reflecting the relative contribution of each spouse. For example, a respondent who reported doing most of a particular task was coded as 100, indicating that they take full responsibility for this task, while a respondent who reported that their partner had most responsibility for a task was coded as 0.

In the subsequent analyses I examine both the specific tasks as well as scales which combine the individual items into a total measure. The scales are constructed by summing the tasks for childcare and housework separately and dividing by the number of tasks. Mean scores are allocated to missing items to reduce the level of missing data. For example, the childcare tasks scale is the sum of each of the three specific childcare tasks divided by three. Respondents with one missing item were assigned a gender specific mean for that item.⁴ The housework tasks scale is the sum of the 10 housework items divided by 10. Respondents with three or fewer missing responses on these items were assigned a gender specific mean for those items.⁵

Respondents were also asked to indicate how many hours they spent on each of the 10 housework activities in an average week. Again I examine hours per week on each of the specific tasks as well as combine the items to create a housework hours scale with gender specific means assigned to those with up to three missing items.⁶

The independent variables included in the analyses measure factors found in previous research to be significantly related to the domestic division of labour, or are used as controls for key socio-demographic factors that may affect domestic labour involvement. The economic exchange model is examined with two variables – paid work hours, and the husband/wife income gap. Paid work hours is a measure of the number of hours worked in the week prior to the survey, including overtime. The husband/wife income gap is a measure of the percentage gap in annual income between the male and female partner in the household. This variable is operationalized as the husband's percentage contribution to the family income less the wife's percentage contribution. The equation used to calculate the gap variable is: $\text{Gap} = (\text{Husband's \% Contribution} - \text{Wife's \% Contribution})/100$.

For example, in a household in which the husband contributes 85 percent of the income and his wife contributes 15 percent, the earnings gap is 70 percent. For ease of interpretation this figure is subsequently divided by 100. This gives a range of -1 to +1. A score of -1 indicates that wives contribute 100 percent of the family income, while a score of 1 indicates that husbands contribute 100 percent of the family income.

The gender perspective is measured by a gender role attitudes scale based on four items. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement with the following statements: (1) If both the husband and wife work they should

share equally in the housework and care of the children. (2) There should be satisfactory facilities so that women can take jobs outside the home. (3) It is better for the family if the husband is the principal breadwinner and the wife has primary responsibility for the home and children. (4) Ideally, there should be as many women as men in important positions in government and business.

Responses to these items ranged from strongly agree (1) to strongly disagree (5). A principal components analysis of these four items identified one factor.⁷ Item 3 was reverse coded and the items were then summed and divided by 4 to create a scale ranging from 1 to 4 with a low score indicating a more egalitarian attitude. Gender specific means were assigned to those with up to two missing items on the scale.⁸

Socio-demographic variables included in the analyses are whether or not there are young children in the household, education, age of respondent, and whether or not the respondent is a homeowner. The presence of young children is both a measure of lifecycle stage and an indicator of the amount of time required for housework. It is measured with a dummy variable coded 1 if there are children under the age of 10 living in the household and 0 if not. Education is measured with two variables: one coded as years of schooling and a dummy variable measuring whether the respondent has a post-school qualification. Age is the respondent's age in years ranging from 18 to 54 years. Homeowner is scored 1 if the respondent owns or is buying their own home and 0 if they are in rental accommodation. We might expect that respondents who are homeowners will spend more time on household work than those who are in rental accommodation. Gender is coded 1 for men and 0 for women. Time is coded as number of years since 1986, the time of the first survey. The Appendix Table provides descriptive statistics for each of the independent variables in the analyses with the exception of time.

Results

The first analyses report least squares means, or predicted values, for men and women on each of the dependent variables at each point in time. These means are estimated with the covariates for the other independent variables set at their means. The significance of differences between the means are tested to examine changes over time.

Table 2 shows least squares means for the percentage distribution of childcare tasks for men and women at the three time points. The table shows the results for each of the individual items in addition to the childcare tasks scale. Overall, women report more responsibility for childcare than men at all time points – approximately 66 to 67 percent compared to 35 to 42 percent for men. All of the gender differences are statistically significant.

Table 2: Least squares means for percentage distribution of childcare tasks for men and women, 1986, 1993, 1997

	1986		1993		1997		Change over time ^b	
	Men ^a	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Bathing and dressing children	31	69	38	68	30	69	No	No
Getting children to bed	43	65	44	65	43	62	No	No
Helping children with homework	39	68	43	67	34	72	+5%	No
Child tasks scale	38	67	42	66	35	66	No	No
N	230	99	455	373	316	278		

Notes

^a All of the gender differences are statistically significant within each time period as indicated by *t*-tests of mean differences. *T* values not shown.

^b Results of significance tests for comparisons of least squares means for 1986 and 1997. Percentage change is recorded in the table only when change is statistically significant.

The table also reports the significance of the difference between 1986 and 1997. If the results are significant the change is noted in percentage points with a positive or negative sign indicating the direction of change. If the results show no significant differences, 'no' change is shown. The results show that there is virtually no change in the percentage share of childcare between husbands and wives over this time period. If anything, it appears that the gender gap in childcare may be increasing in relation to helping children with homework with men reporting 5 percent less responsibility for this task in 1997 compared to 1986. This contrasts with some previous research which has suggested that men's involvement in childcare is increasing more rapidly than men's involvement in housework (Bittman, 1995). However, Bittman's work indicates only that men are spending an increased amount of time playing with children. My research suggests that in terms of the day-to-day activities associated with very young children, men are not doing an increased share of the work. Additionally, it appears that men's involvement with school-age children may have declined since 1986.

Table 3 shows least squares means for the percentage distribution of housework tasks. The pattern suggests a clear gender division in the kinds of tasks performed by women and the kinds of tasks performed by men. Women still undertake the bulk of traditional routine everyday housework activities (cooking, cleaning, washing), while men still have most responsibility for traditional male outdoor activities (mowing lawns, garbage removal, home maintenance). For example, women do three quarters of the work of cleaning the house compared to between 18 and 28 percent for men. On the other hand, men do well over 80 percent of the work of mowing lawns compared to between 17 and 24 percent for women. Once again, all of the gender differences in the table are significant.

However, results of significance tests of differences between 1986 and 1993 suggest that men are doing an increased share of some domestic chores. The big area of increase for men is in preparing meals, up by 12 percentage points. Women, on the other hand, report doing 4 percent less of this activity. The other areas of increase for men are in cleaning up after meals, cleaning the house, washing and ironing. In sum, these changes in specific tasks add up to a 5 percent increase in the total proportionate contribution of men to housework tasks. Interestingly, the only area where women report a decrease in responsibility is preparing meals and, overall, women report no change in their total percentage share of housework, as indicated by the housework tasks scale.

Moreover, as Table 4 shows, women still spend at least twice as much time on selected routine housework chores. Note that although some of the surveys collected data on hours spent on many more tasks than this, only these three areas are comparable across all three surveys. While they do not give us a total picture of the amount of time men and women spend on domestic labour as a whole, they do represent some of the regular routine

Table 3: Least squares means for percentage distribution of housework tasks for men and women, 1986, 1993, 1997

	1986		1993		1997		Change over time ^b	
	Men ^a	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Preparing meals	23	74	31	73	35	70	+12%	-4%
Cleaning up after meals	35	62	42	61	43	63	+7%	No
Grocery shopping	27	72	32	72	31	74	No	No
Cleaning the house	18	76	28	75	25	78	7%	No
Taking out garbage	75	27	66	35	76	31	No	No
Washing	14	83	25	80	21	83	+7%	No
Ironing	11	81	20	82	21	83	+10%	No
Mowing lawns	87	17	81	24	89	19	No	No
Gardening	58	46	59	46	58	48	No	No
Home maintenance / repairs	87	23	80	28	88	24	No	No
Housework tasks scale	44	56	47	57	49	57	+5%	No
N	471	325	618	546	545	572		

Notes

^a All of the gender differences are statistically significant within each time period as indicated by *t*-tests of mean differences. *T* values not shown.

^b Results of significance tests for comparisons of least squares means for 1986 and 1997. Percentage change is recorded in the table only when change is statistically significant.

Table 4: Least squares means for hours per week on housework tasks for men and women, 1986, 1993, 1997

	1986		1993		1997		Change over time ^b	
	Men ^a	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women
Preparing meals and cleaning up after meals	7	14	6	16	5	10	-2%	-4%
Grocery shopping	1	2	1	3	1	2	No	No
Cleaning the house and washing	3	10	3	12	3	8	No	-2%
Housework hours scale	11	26	10	30	9	20	No	-6%
N	471	325	618	546	545	572		

Notes

^a All of the gender differences are statistically significant within each time period as indicated by *t*-tests of mean differences. *T* values not shown.

^b Results of significance tests for comparisons of least squares means for 1986 and 1997. Percentage change is recorded in the table only when change is statistically significant.

activities that all households need to accomplish in order to survive. The data indicate that women spent 10 hours per week preparing and cleaning up after meals in 1997, for example, compared to men's 5 hours per week. This compares with 14 hours and 7 hours respectively in 1986.

Overall, women are spending six fewer hours on these selected activities, with a large part of the decline coming from less time spent on preparing meals and cleaning up after meals (down by four hours). Note, though, that there is also evidence of a decline in men's time spent on meal preparation and cleaning up after meals. Thus, even though men are doing an increased proportionate share of preparing meals and cleaning up after meals, they are also spending less time on these activities. This is not a contradictory finding. The trend toward greater consumption of pre-cooked, pre-prepared foods and take away foods (see, for example, Bittman, 1999, and Bittman et al., 1999) may lead to an alteration in the way men and women share this activity, while simultaneously leading to less time spent doing the work for both men and women. In other words, broader changes in household consumption patterns may be the driving force leading to change in the distribution of work between men and women in relation to some activities, as well as a decline in time spent doing the task.

There is no change in men's time or women's time spent on grocery shopping, with women continuing to spend about twice as much time as men on this task. But women are spending less time cleaning the house and doing washing. Again, this decline may be due to either less work being done on these activities as a result of changing patterns of consumption in the kinds of clothes worn, for example changing fashion trends that have increasingly promoted more casual attire, or it may be the result of increasing trends toward consuming paid help for these tasks. However, data collected as part of the 1997 survey showed that only approximately 18 percent of the sample employed paid help with domestic labour, and overwhelmingly the tasks undertaken by paid help tended to be outdoor work such as mowing lawns, gardening and home maintenance/repairs. This fits with the results of Bittman et al. (1999). On the basis of household expenditure surveys in Australia, they found that the biggest increase in household outsourcing has occurred in meal preparation via take-away food and pre-prepared food, while the smallest increase has occurred in the outsourcing of household cleaning work. The level of outsourcing of gardening and lawn mowing work lay between these two extremes.

Another possibility is that technological interventions in the home have reduced the amount of time needed for domestic labour. For example, washing machines and clothes dryers may have reduced the time needed for laundry, while vacuum cleaners and dishwashers may have reduced time spent on other kinds of cleaning tasks. However, this issue was canvassed widely in earlier research and the prevailing conclusion was that rather than reducing time on domestic chores, these 'labour-saving' devices actually led

to an increase in time spent on domestic labour as they coincided with higher standards of domestic cleanliness (Vanek, 1974; Cowan, 1976, 1984). For example, it was argued that the introduction of washing machines meant that the weekly washday was replaced with the necessity of daily clothes washing. Similarly, it was argued that the introduction of the vacuum cleaner led to more frequent house cleaning rather than an annual 'spring clean'. It may be, however, that while these devices initially led to more time on some activities for some groups of women, in more recent times, particularly as married women move into paid labour in greater numbers and the consumption of these devices, such as washing machines and vacuum cleaners, becomes more widespread across all socio-economic groups, they may operate more as 'labour-saving' devices rather than as indicators of middle class domesticity or status symbols.

The next few tables investigate the source of change in the domestic division of labour more closely. They present the results of a series of ordinary least squares regression models in which the dependent variables are the three domestic labour scales – childcare tasks, housework tasks and housework hours. Each of the equations initially included all possible two and three way interactions between each of the independent variables and gender and time. Subsequent models progressively dropped insignificant interaction terms. With only two exceptions, the interactions with time were insignificant, indicating that there is virtually no change in the salience of the independent variables over time as predictors of the domestic division of labour. Therefore, I do not report separate coefficients for each time period, with the exception of the two cases where the time interaction terms were significant. On the other hand, in most cases, the gender interaction terms were significant, indicating that, as found in previous studies, many of the variables impact on responsibility for domestic labour differently for men and women. The tables therefore report the coefficients separately for men and women. Where the gender interaction term was not significant, the coefficients for men and women are identical.

Table 5 reports the results from the final regression model predicting percentage share of childcare. Most importantly, there are no changes over time in the impact of these variables on the distribution of childcare between husbands and wives. There are significant differences, however, relating to gender. For men, longer hours in paid work are related to a significantly smaller percentage share of childcare. But this is not the case for women. Paid work hours have no bearing on women's share of childcare in the home. Note, however, that all of the women in the sample are in paid employment, so these results do not take into account women who may have left paid work to take the major responsibility for childcare. In other words, these results show that when women are in paid employment, the number of hours per week spent at work have no impact on their share of childcare duties at home. The husband/wife income gap shows that

Table 5: Ordinary least squares coefficients for determinants of percentage share of childcare for men and women^a

	Men	Women
1993 ^b	2.03	2.03
1997 ^b	-1.15	-1.15
Weekly paid hours	-0.20***	-0.03
Husband/wife income gap	-4.23**	3.31*
Gender role attitudes	0.78	0.78
Education	0.73*	0.32
Post secondary qualifications	1.08	1.08
Age	-0.16	0.37**
Intercept	43.56***	57.13***
Adjusted R ²	0.53	
Total	954	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.*Notes*

^a The original model included all possible three-way interactions between gender, time and each of the independent variables. Successive models were run dropping insignificant interaction terms. Coefficients are presented separately for men and women for ease of interpretation.

^b Comparison is 1986.

economic power impacts on the division of childcare at home. As husbands' earnings increase relative to their wives' earnings, women's share of childcare increases and men's share of childcare declines. Gender role attitudes are not significant predictors of childcare responsibilities, although there is evidence that more educated men do more childcare, as do older women.

Table 6 presents the equivalent results for percentage share of housework. In this model there is one significant difference over time. For men, the results show that paid work hours significantly impact on percentage share of housework at all three time points. As expected under the economic exchange model outlined above, longer hours in paid work are significantly associated with a decreased share of housework tasks. For women, however, the pattern is different. In 1986 and 1993 there is no impact of paid work hours on share of housework, whereas in 1997 the results are similar to those for men. In other words, longer hours in paid work lead to less involvement in housework for women in 1997. This is an interesting and potentially important finding. It suggests that as women become more like men in terms of their involvement in paid work, paid work hours have the same impact on women's involvement in housework as they do for men. It also suggests that increased involvement in paid work for women is one means of reducing the gender gap in housework responsibility because it lowers women's involvement in housework.

Table 6: Ordinary least squares coefficients for determinants of percentage share of housework for men and women^a

	Men	Women
1993 ^b	2.87	2.87
1997 ^b	2.85	2.85
Weekly paid hours 1986	-0.15***	-0.02
Weekly paid hours 1993	-0.17***	-0.06
Weekly paid hours 1997	-0.12***	-0.10**
Husband/wife income gap	-6.98***	2.49***
Gender role attitudes	-3.33***	2.87***
Education	0.63***	-0.24
Post secondary qualifications	-0.50	-0.50
Child under 5 in household (1 = yes)	-1.45*	3.35***
Home owner (1 = yes)	-0.43	-0.43
Age	-0.11*	0.24***
Intercept	58.64***	45.87***
Adjusted R ²	0.34	
Total	2558	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.*Notes*

^a The original model included all possible three-way interactions between gender, time and each of the independent variables. Successive models were run dropping insignificant interaction terms. Coefficients are presented separately for men and women for ease of interpretation.

^b Comparison is 1986.

There is also support in this model for the other two key variables in the model relating to the economic exchange model and the gender model – the husband/wife income gap and gender role attitudes. As men's relative earnings compared to their wives increase, men do significantly less housework. And men and women with liberal gender role attitudes have a more equal division of housework chores than men and women with more conservative gender attitudes. Interestingly, the presence of a child under five years in the home significantly decreases men's share of housework, while significantly increasing women's share of housework. This result replicates findings from my earlier research (Baxter, 1993). A possible explanation is that when there are young children in the household women reduce hours of paid work and spend more time at home and hence more time on domestic labour, while men work longer hours in paid work to reduce the impact of women's lower earnings. It might also be the case that this period of the lifecycle, the early childrearing years, coincides with the period in which men are working longer hours to establish their careers. A less charitable

explanation would be that men who are forced to take on the extra child-rearing duties associated with young children compensate themselves by withdrawing from other forms of domestic labour, namely housework.

As with childcare, there is also evidence here that education and age impact on the domestic division of labour. More educated and younger men do more housework than less educated and older men. Although there is no effect of education on women's responsibility for housework, the results show that older women do more housework than younger women.

The final table reports the results for hours spent on housework. The pattern is very similar to those reported in the previous table, although there are no differences over time for paid work hours. The only significant interaction with time is education, showing that education has a much larger impact on women's hours of housework in 1993 compared to 1986 or 1997. In all cases, women with greater years of education spend less time on housework than women with fewer years of education, but in 1993 this effect is greatly increased. Moreover, education has no bearing on men's hours of housework. This pattern is difficult to explain. It is not

Table 7: Ordinary least squares coefficients for determinants of hours per week on housework for men and women^a

	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>
1993 ^b	-1.79	17.93***
1997 ^b	-1.79	-7.26
Weekly paid hours	-0.07**	-0.20***
Husband/wife income gap	-2.22**	1.93**
Gender role attitudes	-2.30***	2.01**
Education 1986	-.10	-.63*
Education 1993	-0.05	-1.84***
Education 1997	-0.02	-0.65***
Post secondary qualifications	0.26	0.26
Child under 5 in household (1 = yes)	0.83	6.78***
Home owner (1 = yes)	-0.58	-0.58
Age	-0.06	0.15***
<i>Intercept</i>	22.79***	29.75***
Adjusted R ²	0.46	
Total	2584	

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Notes

^a The original model included all possible three-way interactions between gender, time and each of the independent variables. Successive models were run dropping insignificant interaction terms. Coefficients are presented separately for men and women for ease of interpretation.

^b Comparison is 1986.

clear why the education variable should be so significant in 1997 for women.

As in the previous table, weekly paid hours, husband/wife income gap and gender role attitudes impact on hours spent per week on housework. For men, longer hours in paid employment, an increased share of the household earnings and more conservative gender attitudes lead to less time spent on housework. For women, the pattern is similar, although in this case, conservative gender attitudes lead to more time on housework. Additionally, having a child under five years of age increases women's time on housework by almost seven hours per week, and for each additional year of age of the woman, time spent on housework increases by 15 minutes per week.

Overall, it seems that both the economic exchange model, in terms of time availability and economic resources, and gender role attitudes are important for explaining the domestic division of labour. Furthermore, there is little evidence of change over time in the influence of the various elements in these models on the domestic division of labour. While change is occurring in the amount of time men and women devote to domestic labour and the proportional division of responsibilities between husbands and wives, there is little change in the way in which the domestic division of labour is determined.

Conclusions

The gender division of labour, in terms of both the gender gap in time spent on childcare and housework and gender differences in the kinds of tasks men and women do in the home, is still clearly evident. Women do about two thirds of childcare tasks, at least three quarters of the routine everyday indoor housework tasks, and spend about three times as many hours as men on the latter. If we consider the full range of domestic tasks, including traditional male outdoor activities, we see a more equal division of labour. Overall, however, as earlier research has indicated, the gender division of labour in the home appears to be one of the most enduring patterns in modern social life.

There is little evidence here of change over time in the division of childcare tasks, and if anything, the trends are in the direction of men doing less and women doing more. This differs from earlier research, but it may be that the very restricted number of tasks included here is influencing the results. For example, these data do not include questions about playing with children, or taking them on outings, which may be areas where some changes in men's level of involvement have taken place.

There is evidence that men are doing a greater share of housework, particularly preparing meals, but this does not seem to translate into greater time spent on housework. Rather, the data indicate that in some areas, such as preparing and cleaning up after meals, men may be spending less time

than in the past. Certainly there is clear evidence, in line with earlier studies, that women are spending less time on a range of tasks, resulting in a significant decline overall of six hours per week on housework. Overall, there is support for the hypotheses outlined earlier that men's time spent on housework has not increased since the mid 1980s while women's time on housework has continued to decline since this period.

Broadly speaking, it seems that we are witnessing changes in the domestic division of labour, but as others have noted, they are not the ones that we might have imagined. The gender gap in domestic labour involvement is getting smaller, but mainly because women are doing much less, rather than men doing much more. It may be that some of this change is the result of changes in consumption patterns, the way housework is performed as a result of technological devices, and changing household standards, rather than a deliberate attempt by men and women to eradicate gender inequality in their domestic division of labour. For example, women's reduced responsibility for preparing meals may have more to do with women's increased involvement in paid work and the fact that they have less time to prepare elaborate meals. At the same time, the increased reliance on the service economy to provide the goods formerly produced in the home may also lead to less time spent on certain activities.

For example, time spent cooking may have been reduced as a result of the rapid expansion of take-away food, and pre-prepared food. Schlosser (2001) has estimated that Americans spent \$6 billion on fast food in 1970 compared to \$110 billion in 2000. It is likely that a similar rate of expansion in the consumption of take-away food has occurred in Australia, although certainly not to the same levels. It is possible that changes in the kinds of food eaten and the level of preparation necessary have not only led to a reduction in time spent on cooking but also to a reorganization of men's and women's responsibility for certain tasks. For example, men may be more inclined to do meal preparation if it involves heating a jar of pasta sauce and cooking spaghetti than if it involves more elaborate or time-consuming preparation. In other words, we may be witnessing quite important changes in the kinds of work to be done in the home and these changes may be helping to lead to changes in who does the work, in addition to how much time is spent doing it.

Overall, this study indicates that the three key variables representing the economic exchange and gender models – gender role attitudes, time in paid labour, and relative economic contribution to the household – are key determinants of how domestic labour is divided between husbands and wives. Of course, it must be noted that gender itself remains the most important predictor of who does domestic labour. The amount of explained variance in the regression models is increased considerably by the presence of this one variable. There is only scant evidence of change in the way in which the domestic division of labour is determined. There is some evidence that paid

work time was more significant in determining women's share of housework in the late 1990s than in the earlier periods considered here, suggesting that as women move into paid work in greater numbers and remain in paid work for longer periods, paid work imposes constraints on their involvement in domestic labour in a similar way to men. The belief of many second wave feminists that the key to ending gender inequality in the home was to move women into paid work may then have some validity (Malos, 1980). But again the trend is not quite that predicted by these earlier agitators against women's oppression.

The effect of paid work for women is not apparent in terms of how much work men do in the home, but rather impacts directly on women's involvement in domestic labour, reducing the gender gap by reducing the amount that women do at home. Since the evidence from the 1997 survey is that most households do not employ paid labour to perform indoor housework tasks, this in turn suggests that some portion of domestic labour is being left undone in dual-earner households. Overall, changing standards of housework, in combination with changing patterns of consumption and changing methods of performing housework, may well be the driving force behind women's reduced time on domestic labour and the narrowing of the gender gap in household work.

Appendix Table: Means and standard deviations for independent variables

	1986	1993	1997
Gender	0.59 (.49)	0.52 (.49)	0.49 (.50)
Paid work hours	42.13 (13.42)	38.29 (16.96)	38.25 (19.31)
Sex roles attitudes	2.09 (.57)	2.05 (.49)	2.04 (.63)
Husband/wife income gap	0.48 (.52)	0.49 (.58)	0.30 (.45)
Age	36.29 (8.69)	39.49 (8.29)	38.20 (8.26)
Education	12.0 (2.26)	12.25 (2.11)	11.99 (2.82)
Post school qualification (1 = yes)	0.48 (0.44)	0.49 (0.50)	0.66 (.47)
Children under 10 in household (1 = yes)	0.44 (.49)	0.48 (.50)	0.53 (.50)
Home owner (1 = yes)	0.73 (.44)	0.86 (.34)	0.84 (.37)

Notes

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- 1 However see Bittman (1999) for an engaging discussion of the potential of the market and the state to resolve gender inequality in household work, and Bittman et al. (1999) for a review of trends in domestic outsourcing in household work in Australia.
- 2 Some earlier commentators have identified three main kinds of explanatory models – the time availability perspective, the economic resources perspective and the ideological, or attitudinal, perspective (see, for example, Baxter, 1992). But both the time availability perspective and the economic resources perspective fall within a broad theory of economic exchange, since both are arguing that a resource (either earnings or time) is being exchanged in return for unpaid labour.
- 3 While there is evidence that time use data provide more accurate estimates of time spent on household work than summary questions of household labour time, analyses of these two methods indicate remarkable comparability in the estimates obtained from both approaches (Baxter and Bittman, 1995). Moreover, the value of the survey data used in the current article lies in the broad range of independent variables included in the surveys that are not included in the ABS Time Use Surveys.
- 4 In 1986, 53 percent of the sample fell into this category with two rather than three valid responses on the childcare items, while 15 percent of the sample had one or fewer valid responses and were excluded from the final childcare tasks scale. In 1993, 30 percent of the sample had two valid responses and were assigned a mean score for one item while 43 percent were excluded from the final scale for having only one or fewer valid responses. In 1997, 31 percent had two valid responses and were assigned a mean score for one item, while 49 percent were excluded from the final scale. It is likely that the relatively high level of missing data on this scale is due to the questions relating to activities associated with very small children. For example, bathing and dressing children are activities primarily relevant to respondents with children under five. The high number of respondents with two rather than three valid responses may well be those for whom this question was not relevant. In relation to the childcare data, then, the childcare tasks scale may be less reliable than the specific childcare items.
- 5 In the 1986 sample, 5 percent were excluded from the housework tasks scale for having only six or fewer valid responses out of a possible 10, while 41 percent of the sample had three or fewer missing items and were allocated a mean score for at least one item. In 1993, 5 percent of the sample were excluded from the housework tasks scale and 32 percent were allocated a mean score for at least one item. In 1997, 3 percent were excluded and 41 percent were allocated a mean score for at least one item.
- 6 In 1986, 1 percent of the sample was excluded from the housework hours scale for having one or fewer valid responses, while 28 percent were allocated mean scores on at least one item. In 1993, 5 percent were excluded and 2 percent were allocated mean scores on at least one item. In 1997, 1 percent were excluded and .3 percent were allocated mean scores on at least one item.
- 7 The Cronbach's alpha score for these four items in 1986 was .7, in 1993 was .6, and in 1997 was .5.
- 8 In 1986, 10 percent of the sample were excluded from the gender role attitudes scale for having only one or fewer valid responses, while 1 percent of the sample had two valid scores and were assigned mean scores for at least one item in the scale. In 1993, 2 percent of the sample were excluded and 2 percent were assigned mean scores for at least one item. In 1997, 1 percent were excluded and 8 percent were assigned mean scores for at least one item.

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