

The effect of talking about the unpaid task division on dual-earner couples and the role of gender role attitudes and gender: A diary study

Master thesis

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Abstract

Women have become more involved in the workforce throughout the years, leaving their position as complete homemaker. Even though more women participate in paid labour, the Netherlands still has the highest percentage of parttime working women in the world.

Maintaining a traditional task division can be problematic as it negatively influences women's career success and earnings. Couples with modern gender role attitudes find it more important to talk about this division with each other. This study aims to investigate the effect of talking about the unpaid task division on dual-earner couples, and looks at the role of gender role attitudes and gender. To test the hypotheses that gender role attitudes would lead to talking, which in turn would lead to a more perceived egalitarian task division, and that the effect of talking on the perceived task division would be stronger for women, an eight days diary study was conducted. This was done among Dutch parents, who were in a romantic heterosexual relationship, lived together with their partner and had a child under the age of 13 years old. The results showed no significant mediating effect of talking about the task division on gender role attitudes and the perceived task division. A partially moderating effect for gender was found. Current study merely focused on the quantity of the talking, which could be an explanation for the lack of significant effects. Future research should focus more on the quality of these conversations.

Introduction

Over the years there has been a shift of the position of women as a complete home maker to becoming more involved in the workforce. In 1990, the total percentage of working women was 44,7%, rising to 64,2% in 2020 (CBS, 2021). Women's increased involvement in the workforce has spill-over effects in the preferences of the home sphere (Sundaresan, 2014; Chung & van der Lippe, 2020): in the Netherlands six out of ten parents with a child under the age of 18 advocates for an equal division on household tasks and childcare. However, only 25% of this group manage to do so (van den Brakel et al., 2020). Even though more women participate in paid labour, the Netherlands still has the highest percentage of parttime working women in the world. 73,4 % of Dutch women work parttime, compared to 47,8% Austrian women (van den Brakel et al., 2020).

As a consequence of this one and a half earner model, as it is called, most couples divide the tasks at home according to traditional gender roles, where men prioritize the role of breadwinner and women the role of homemaker and caregiver (van den Brakel et al., 2020). This even occurs despite women being more and higher educated than men, and could therefore earn more money per hour (Merens & Bucx, 2018). Women are still the ones who take up most of the household tasks and childcare, regardless of their worker status (Boye, 2009). The task division at home becomes even more traditional over time after the birth of their first child (Wiesmann et al., 2008), as mothers are more likely to increase the time they spend on housework and childcare (Endendijk et al., 2018). Parenthood also influence the work status of women as they reduce their work hours, whereas men work more (Lundberg & Rose, 2000).

Maintaining a traditional task division can be concerning as it negatively impacts women's career success (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2016) and earnings (Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2018). It can increase the potential for discrimination amongst employers who

believe female employees will be less productive due to their domestic responsibilities (Noonan, 2001). Finally, it promotes gender inequality in future generations, as children can create misconceptions on how men and women should behave (MacDonald et al., 2005). Qualitative research shows that talking about the division of tasks with your partner can help achieve a more egalitarian division (Wiesmann et al., 2008). However, this topic has only been researched qualitatively. The division may vary on a daily basis (Känsälä & Oinas, 2016; Dechant & Schulz, 2014) and can be influenced by the kind of attitudes people have towards gender roles (van der Horst, 2014). In the current study we will therefore investigate, with the help of a diary study, if those who talk about the division of tasks also perceive a more egalitarian task division. And if their gender and the kind of attitude they have towards gender roles are of influence.

Social role theory

A possible explanation for the occurrence of a traditional role division is that people actively seek meaning of the social groups that they belong to and they do this with the help of self-stereotyping (Branscombe et al., 1999). This also applies to gender roles and stereotypes which influence individuals in how to act and what is or is not appropriate. Both men and women act according to certain ways since the social roles that they have are associated with different expectations (Vogel et al., 2003). Social role theory explains how men and women confirm gender stereotypes because they act fitting to their social roles (Eagly, 1989). Women are often seen as caregivers for their children, more often than men are. Therefore they exhibit more traditionally feminine behaviours such as being nurturing and developing personal relationships (Vogel et al., 2003).

Gender role attitudes

Ascribing of roles creates gender role attitudes, which refers to views being held by individuals considering behaviours, responsibilities and activities appropriate for women and men (Williams & Best, 1990). A traditional gender role attitude refers to viewing men in the role of breadwinner and women as the home maker. An egalitarian attitude refers to the woman taking up more working hours and the man helping out more with domestic tasks (Corrigan & Konrad, 2007). Scholars suggest the dynamics of decision-making becomes key when couples think more modern of gender roles, thus deviating from traditional dynamics (Sillars & Kalbflesch, 1989). According to van der Horst (2014) couples with traditional gender role attitudes often settle for a traditional task division. They feel like it is unnecessary to talk about who does what, as traditional gender roles tell men and women what they have to do (Wiesmann et al., 2008). These couples are often satisfied with dividing the tasks this way (van der Horst, 2014). And even though this traditional division creates inequalities, it is seen as reasonable as they relieve couples from further negotiations (Dechant & Schulz, 2014). People do not perceive it as unfair, regardless of how unequal it is, due to their traditional gender ideologies (Baxter et al., 2015).

Couples with modern gender role attitudes find it more important to talk about the division with each other (Kim & Lee, 1989; Käsälä & Oinas, 2016). It is crucial for them to talk since they might fall back on traditional divisions of tasks if they do not (Dechant & Schulz, 2014). The attitude towards gender roles influence if couples talk about this division. And when couples talk more, this could lead to a more egalitarian division of tasks at home (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Based on this we expect that egalitarian gender role attitudes will lead to talking about the task division with the partner.

Talking about the task division

Considering the amount of energy, time and responsibilities dual income couples have at their jobs and at home, negotiating the division of tasks becomes important (Klein et al., 2007). Therefore it should be expected that the task division is increasingly explicitly negotiated between partners (van Lenning & Willemsen, 2000). Some even say it is expected that negotiation is crucial to understanding how a modern couple navigate their life together (Evertsson & Nyman, 2009).

However, the only qualitative research that has been done shows that the unpaid task division between couples is most often formed implicitly, which refers to them not explicitly talking about it (Wiesmann et al., 2008). This causes couples to fall back on dividing tasks according to gender stereotypes, which leads to a more traditional division over time (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Talking about the task division explicitly means solving issues regarding the division pro-actively and organised by making direct, conscious and oral agreements about household tasks, childcare and paid work (Wiesmann et al., 2008). An example of an explicit conversation is when couples sit down to talk and negotiate about the task division (Sillars & Kalbflesch, 1989). And in current study talking about the task division is defined as talking, calling or texting.

When couples do not talk about the task division, their chances on an egalitarian division, which is a division where neither partner does more than 60% nor less than 40%, becomes smaller (Ferree, 1991). Research on specifically talking about the task division on the perceived task division is very scarce. But one quantitative study by Carlson and colleagues (2020) about constructive communication in general shows that better communication leads to a more egalitarian task division. Therefore we expect that talking about the task division to a greater extent will lead to a more perceived egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare.

Gender

Research shows that there are gender differences in perceiving the task division (Wiesmann et al., 2008; Poortman & van der Lippe, 2009). These gender differences rely on factors, such as working hours, the power difference between couples and gender role ideologies (Bianchi et al., 2000). Therefore, we will look exploratively at gender and its effect. We expect that the effect of talking about the task division on the perceived division of household tasks and childcare will be stronger for women than for men.

Current study

Although the literature provides insights in that talking about the task division could help couples in achieving or maintaining an egalitarian task division, the evidence is scarce and mostly based on qualitative research. In the current study we will investigate whether daily conversations in regard to the division of tasks take place and to what extent they influence the perceived task division. Thus far merely qualitative and cross-sectional research has been done on talking about the task division among dual earner couples (e.g. Wiesmann et al., 2008). With this diary study we will be the first to examine this topic quantitatively. We will examine whether gender role attitudes leads to talking about the daily task division (i.e., childcare, household tasks and paid work), which in turn leads to a more perceived egalitarian task division. This diary study will provide a reliable measure of the variables used, such as the task division in itself and talking about this division. We will be able to collect and investigate what couples feel and think of the division of tasks. This will explain why the division is divided in a certain way, as these thoughts can vary on a day-to-day basis (Ohly et al., 2010). As the variables are measured daily there are less factors that can have an influence, such as waking up agitated after a bad night of sleep (Ohly et al., 2010).

Research question and hypotheses

In the current study we will investigate the following research question:

Do gender role attitudes lead to talking about the task division of household and childcare tasks, which in turn leads to a more egalitarian task division? And does the effect of talking about the task division on the perceived division of household tasks and childcare depend on gender?

With the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Egalitarian gender role attitudes will predict more talking about the task division.

Hypothesis 2: Talking about the task division to a greater extent will predict a more perceived egalitarian division of household and childcare tasks.

Hypothesis 3: The effect of talking about the task division on the perceived division of household and childcare tasks will be stronger for women than for men.

Figure 1

Research model visualizing the hypothesized relationships between the independent variable, mediator and dependent variables. .

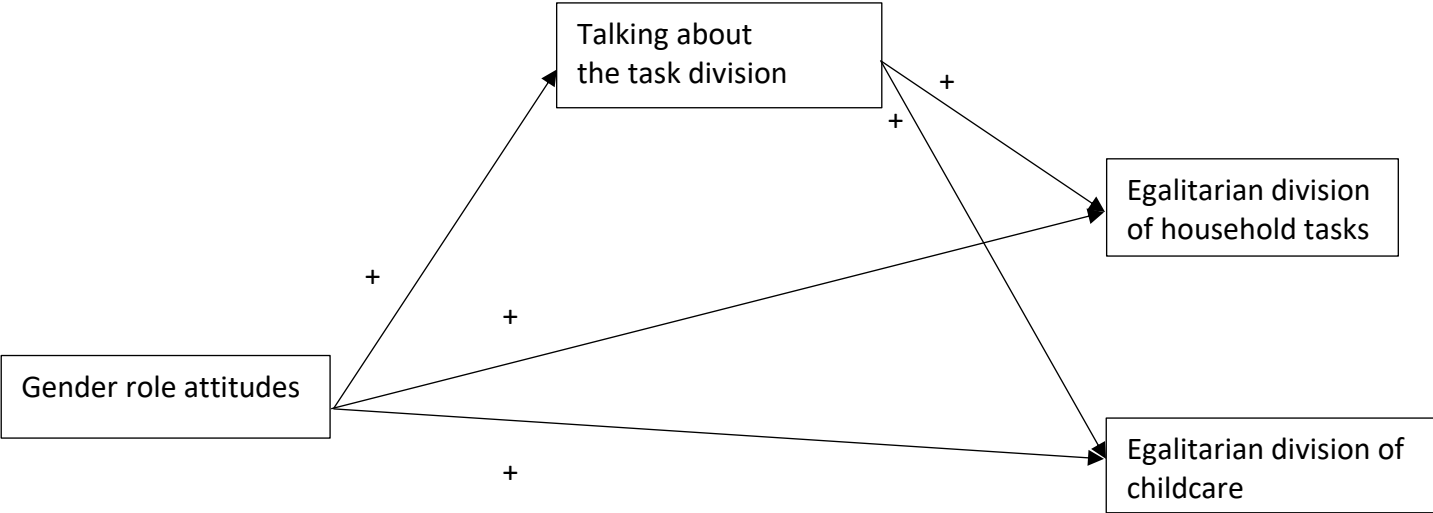
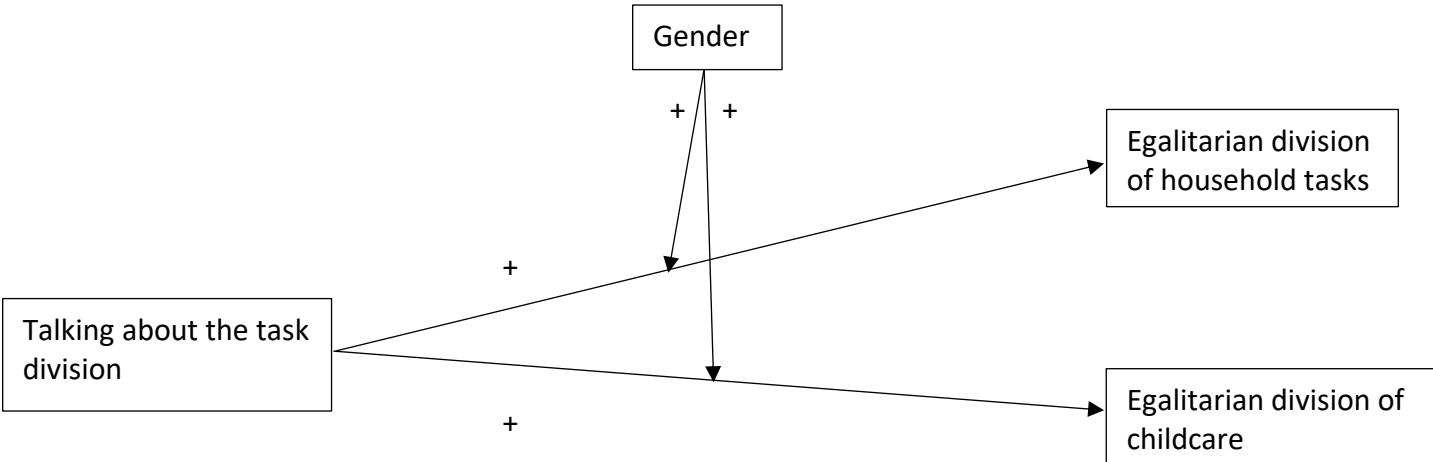


Figure 2

Research model visualizing the hypothesized relationships between the independent variable, moderator and dependent variables. .



Methods

Participants

Participants could join the study if they were Dutch parents in a romantic, heterosexual relationship, who lived together with their partner and have at least one child younger than 13 years old. Our dataset started with 154 participants. First, we cleaned up the data by removing participants who completed less than five surveys. At first hand we left in participants who completed every survey. However, only 115 remained then. Therefore we chose participants with five surveys completed at minimum. Next, we removed participants that did not meet our inclusion criteria (not working due to a burnout / holiday) or filled in peculiar answers (414 work hours per week).

In total 142 participated in the study of which 67.6% were women ($N = 96$) and 32.3% men ($N = 46$). Women worked on average $M = 29.56$ hours per week ($SD = 6.65$) and men worked on average $M = 39.17$ hours per week ($SD = 5.32$). The demographic information of participants is illustrated in Table 1.

Table 1

Demographic information of participants

Measures	Men		Women	
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
Duration relationship	13.91	8.29	10.83	8.40
Age youngest child	4.54	4.10	3.70	3.25
Age	39.13	6.65	36.47	6.05
Number of children	1.78	.66	1.97	.95

Procedure

Participants were recruited through a convenience sample. This was done with the help of social media platforms such as LinkedIn, Facebook and word of mouth. We mentioned that we were searching for participants who were willing to participate in this diary study about working heterosexual parents. The diary study consisted of filling in a start survey, eight daily surveys and an end survey.

Before doing research we received ethical approval for our study via the Utrecht University Student Ethics Review & registration site. Participants had to read an informed consent first which stated that participating was anonymous, voluntary and that their responses would be treated confidentially.

Participants started with the first survey which consisted of demographics about the participant and their partner, inclusion criteria and relationship characteristics.

In the daily surveys participants were asked about their daily working hours of themselves and their partner. Next, we asked to what extent they have talked about the household tasks, childcare and paid work on that day and evaluations of those conversations. Furthermore we asked them how they divided the tasks for that day and how satisfied and fair they thought this division was. Participants were asked questions about overload and the harmony of the relationship with their partner that day. Finally, we asked participants to rate their relationship and if there were any important things to mention about that day.

In the last survey gender role attitudes were assessed. This was only asked once in the final survey as attitudes are shown to remain stable over time (Luttrell & Togans, 2021) and also to avoid priming. Evaluative questions were added about participants' experiences of the study. Afterwards participants read a debriefing where they were thanked for participating. Participants had a chance to be rewarded with a voucher worth €50. On average the first

survey took 15 minutes to complete, the daily surveys around 5 minutes to complete and finally, the eighth survey took 10 minutes to complete.

Measures

In order to perform analyses on our data we computed averages over the eight days of the variables of our research model, as this increases reliability (see Table 2).

Explicitly talking about the task division

To examine the extent to which participants talked about the task division with their partners on a daily basis we formulated a scale with three items regarding household tasks, childcare and paid work. As this has not been measured quantitatively before, items were based upon the qualitative research of Wiesmann and colleagues (2008). An example item is: “To what extent did you talk with your partner today (for example talking, calling or texting) to coordinate who does which household tasks?”. This is measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Not at all discussed, 4 = Somewhat discussed, 7 = Extensively discussed). Over the eight days the reliability of this scale varied from Cronbach’s $\alpha = .60$ to $\alpha = .74$. And according to the criteria of van Hoof (2012) this is considered a questionable to reliable scale. The reliability was low on the weekends and high during the week. This indicates that participants talked more about the division of household tasks and childcare during the weekend. This could be because parents who spend the most time on the unpaid task division during the week feel it is fair that their partner takes up some of these tasks during the weekend, therefore initiating a conversation (Nordenmark & Nyman, 2003).

Perceived daily task division

We measured the perceived daily task division with items based on Yavorsky and colleagues

(2015) to ask participants how they have divided tasks on that day. The division of household tasks was asked with one item, as well as the division of childcare. The question we asked was: “How did you and your partner divide the 1) household tasks, 2) childcare and 3) paid work today? “Paid work (for example working hours, commuting time, overtime)”. This is measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = My partner did the most, 4 = We both did equally as much, 7 = I did the most). However, we recoded the values in order to distinguish which partner did more (-3 = The man did the most, 0 = We both did as much, 3 = The woman did the most). Over the eight days the correlations of this scale varied from $r = .35$ to $r = .66$. The correlations ranged from low on the weekends and high during the week. This indicates that participants were able to divide the household tasks and childcare better during the weekend, as parents spend less time on paid work (Neilson & Stanfors, 2014).

Gender role attitudes

Finally, we measured gender role attitude with 7 items with the scale of Baxter, Buchler, Perales & Western (2015). We asked this in the final questionnaire to avoid priming. An example item is: “Mothers who do not really need the money should not work”. This is measured with a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Completely disagree, 4 = Not disagree, not agree, 7 = Completely agree). For analyses we recoded the values (1 = Completely agree, 4 = Not disagree, not agree, 7 = Completely disagree). This scale has a Cronbach’s $\alpha = .42$ and based on the criteria of van Hoof (2012) this is an unsatisfactory reliability. After deleting one item the reliability increased to $\alpha = .44$. We chose not to delete any more items as the reliability did not increase significantly anymore.

Data analysis

All statistical analyses have been performed with SPSS 28 in order to test our theoretical models (see Figure 1 and 2). We merged the data of eight days into one file. Next, a Pearson correlation analysis was performed to show relations between the background variables of the participants and the research variables. After that, we computed averages of all the relevant data over the eight days and performed a mediation and moderation analysis to answer the research question: Do gender role attitudes lead to talking about the task division of household and childcare tasks, which in turn leads to a more egalitarian task division? And does the effect of talking about the task division depend on gender?

For the mediation analysis we used the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022). We used model 4 and performed two analyses for our dependent variables; household tasks and childcare. Gender role attitudes was our independent variable and talking about the task division was our mediator. For control variables we added the age of the youngest child, as childcare differs for babies and older children (Meier et al., 2006). We also added work hours as a covariate. If a woman has more working hours than her partner, the division at home becomes modern which can influence the division of tasks (Dechant & Schulz, 2014). Furthermore we controlled for level of education, as a high level of education may lead to a more equal division of tasks at home (Antonides, 2015).

For the moderation analysis we used household tasks and childcare as our dependent variables, we added the control variables in step 1. For step 2 we added our predictor and independent variables; gender role attitudes and talking about the division of tasks. And for step 3 we added gender as our moderator.

Results

Correlations between background variables, predictors and outcome variables were firstly analyzed (see Table 2). The division of household tasks and the division of childcare are positively associated with each other, meaning that the higher participants score on these outcome variables, the more traditional the division is. Furthermore, gender role attitudes is also positively associated with higher levels of the division of childcare. This indicates that participants with traditional gender role attitudes, score high on women doing a larger share of childcare.

Next, we look at our background variables. The higher the partner is educated, the more participants will talk about their task division. Women have more traditional gender role attitudes than men. Furthermore, the older somebody is, the more traditional their gender role attitudes are. And the more hours the partner works, the more traditional participants' gender role attitudes are. Lastly, lower educated participants have more traditional gender role attitudes.

We decided to include age and working hours as covariates in the regression analyses. We excluded educational level and age of the youngest child as covariates since we did not find any correlation with our dependent variables (see Table 2).

Table 2*Correlation analyses of relevant background variables, moderator, independent and dependent variables*

	M	SD	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.
1. Age	37.33	6.35	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
2. Gender	-	-	-.20*	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
3. Age youngest child	3.98	3.55	.73**	-.11	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
4. Duration of relationship	11.83	8.46	-.02	-.17*	-.04	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
5. Educational level participant	5.61	1.42	.20*	.15	.07	-.02	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
6. Work hours participant	32.68	7.69	.26**	-.59**	.21*	.08	.06	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
7. Educational level partner	5.39	1.70	.14	-.12	-.10	-.01	.52**	.12	-	-	-	-	-	-
8. Work hours partner	35.89	8.33	-.08	.54**	-.03	.06	.21*	-.30**	.08	-	-	-	-	-
9. Talking about the task division	3.61	.98	.05	-.04	-.06	.16	.05	.03	.32**	-.09	-	-	-	-
10. Household task division	.52	.90	-.05	.14	.04	-.08	-.11	-.13	-.09	.18*	-.07	-	-	-
11. Childcare division	.51	.88	.01	.21*	.07	.01	-.13	-.26**	-.18*	.20*	-.08	.47**	-	-
12. Gender role attitudes	2.89	.69	-.20*	-.18*	-.04	-.09	-.24**	-.03	-.11	-.17*	-.11	.16	.23*	-

** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$

Do gender role attitudes lead to talking about the task division of household and childcare tasks, which in turn leads to a more egalitarian task division?

To answer the research question, a mediation analysis was performed using the PROCESS macro (Hayes, 2022), with model 4. We did separate analyses for the division of household tasks and the division of childcare. The predictor variable was gender role attitudes and the mediator variable was talking about the division. Firstly, analysing the direct effects of gender role attitudes on the perceived task division and on talking. Gender role attitudes have no significant effect on talking about the task division ($p = .250$). And it does not predict the division of household tasks ($p = .076$). However, it does predict childcare ($B = .31, z = .11, p = .006$). This indicates that the more traditional the gender role attitude is, the more childcare women do. So, a partially direct effect was found.

Next, we analyzed the indirect effects of gender role attitudes on the perceived task division via talking about the task division. The results show that talking about the task division does not mediate the relationship between gender role attitudes and the perceived division of household tasks ($B = .01, 95\% \text{ C.I. } [-.04, .06]$) and childcare ($B = .01, 95\% \text{ C.I. } [-.03, .05]$). Therefore we reject hypothesis 1 that egalitarian gender role attitudes will predict more talking about the task division.

The results further show that talking about the division had no significant effect on the perceived division of household tasks ($p = .583$) and childcare ($p = .567$). This means that talking about the task does not lead to a more perceived task division. Hence, we also reject hypothesis 2.

Does this effect depend on gender?

For our second model we looked at gender as a moderator and found no effect on the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived division of household

tasks ($p = .920$) and of childcare ($p = .236$). Therefore we reject hypothesis 3 that the effect of talking about the task division on the division of household and childcare tasks will be stronger for women than for men.

However, we do see that gender is a significant predictor of the perceived division of childcare ($R^2 = .06$, $F(3,119) = 2.52$, $p = .020$). This means that women report more than men, that they do more childcare than their partner.

Supplementary analysis

After finding no mediation effect between gender role attitudes and the perceived task division, we exploratively looked at gender role attitudes as a moderator on the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived division of household tasks and childcare. Research shows that gender role attitudes influence whether couples talk about this division. And when couples talk more, this could lead to a more egalitarian division of tasks at home (Wiesmann et al., 2008).

We found that gender role attitudes do have a significant effect on the relationship between talking about the task division and the division of household tasks ($R^2 = .15$, $F(3,119) = 6.84$, $p < .001$). There is a negative relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived division of household tasks and childcare. When participants report to talk more about the task division, men do more household tasks. And traditional gender role attitudes strengthens this negative relationship even more. Gender role attitudes have no significant effect on the relationship between talking about the task division and the division of childcare ($p = .571$).

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of talking about the task division on dual-earner couples. We examined whether gender role attitudes lead to explicitly talking about the task division of household and childcare tasks, which in turn lead to a more egalitarian task division. And if the effect of talking about the task division on the perceived division of tasks depended on gender. We expected that egalitarian gender role attitudes would lead to talking about the task division, which in turn was associated with a more perceived egalitarian task division and that the effect of explicitly talking about the task division on the division of household and childcare tasks would be stronger for women than for men. However, all three hypotheses were rejected.

Results showed that gender role attitudes had no significant effect on talking about the task division, and that talking about the task division also did not lead to a more perceived egalitarian task division. The relationship between gender role attitudes and the perceived task division was not mediated by talking about the task division. Furthermore, we also found that gender had no significant effect on the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived task division, meaning that gender was not a moderating variable like we expected in our second research model.

Although we could not accept any hypotheses, our exploratory follow-up analyses showed that even though gender role attitudes did not affect talking, they did predict the perceived division of childcare. In our case this indicates that traditional gender role attitudes leads to women being more responsible for childcare compared to their partner. And according to scholars (van der Horst, 2014; Wiesmann et al., 2008) couples with traditional gender role attitudes often settle for a traditional task division. Although this traditional division creates inequalities, these traditional gender roles tell couples what to do and therefore relieve them from further conversations about the task division (Dechant & Schulz,

2014). Research shows that couples with modern gender role attitudes find it more important to discuss the division with each other (Kim & Lee, 1989; Känslä & Oinas, 2016). And when couples explicitly talk about the task division, this could lead to a more egalitarian division of tasks at home (Wiesmann et al., 2008).

Furthermore, we found that gender and gender role attitudes were significant predictors of the perceived childcare division. We saw that women report more than men, that they do more childcare tasks than their partner. It could be because women feel more responsible for doing more house work than their husbands (Poortman & van der Lippe, 2009). As for gender role attitudes we found that traditional gender role attitudes leads to women doing more childcare, which is in line with previous research (van der Horst, 2014; Rose et al., 2015).

The responsibility of doing the household tasks and childcare still seems to lie with women. Perhaps men should be more involved in the process of dividing tasks in order to achieve gender equality. This might be the reason why we did not find any significant effects.

Talking about the task division

Our data did not offer support for the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived task division. According to Wiesmann and colleagues (2008), couples do not explicitly talk about the division of unpaid work, as tasks are taken for granted and they do not see any reason to change them. Oftentimes couples do not verbalize when they disagree with the division, but rather disagree in silence (Sillars & Kalbflesch, 1989).

But perhaps talking might not be the solution. Research shows that couples do negotiate about the division of labour at home, but in ways that actually confirm gendered divisions of tasks (Rose et al., 2015; Eerola et al., 2021). For example, fathers might say that

mothers are better at certain nurturing childcare tasks and leave those tasks for mothers (Ralph, 2016). And therefore try to justify why the task division is not equal. This confirms our finding that gender role attitudes moderate the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived division of household tasks. Even if participants talked, the division was still unequal, as men were the ones who did more household tasks in our study. And this negative relationship was strengthened by traditional gender role attitudes.

In current study we merely looked at if a conversation on the task division took place that day, not at the content of these conversations. As we found no effects on the perceived task division, we can conclude that it is not about the quantity of the conversations. Future research should therefore focus more on the in-depth content of these conversations. More research is needed to investigate what effects the content of these conversations might have on the perceived task division. Focusing on constructive communication might be the key as was investigated before by Carlson and colleagues (2020).

Implications

The findings of this study indicate that talking about the task division to a bigger extent is not the solution to unequal divisions. It is not the quantity of these conversations that matters but it might be the quality. Furthermore, creating more awareness surrounding role patterns could also be a solution. As women in this study were the ones who took up most of the tasks, men could be less aware of their traditional gender role attitudes and therefore opt for a traditional task division. And this can become problematic for women as a traditional division negatively impacts their career success and earnings (Kosakowska-Berezecka et al., 2016; Khoudja & Fleischmann, 2018). Not to mention the promotion of gender inequality in future generations (MacDonald et al., 2005).

Limitations and directions of future research

This study has some strengths and limitations. A strength of this study is that it is the first one that investigated talking about the task division among dual earner couples quantitatively. Another strength is that the daily task division was measured with a diary method, hereby avoiding the problems regarding the use of retrospective data for assessing activities over longer time periods (Smith et al., 1999). However, this study also has some limitations. For the analyses we used averages of the scores over the eight days, which lead to a lot of data being lost. Most diary studies use other analyses, such as a hierarchical linear modeling approach. This is an appropriate method for dealing with dependence of day-level measurements within each person (Snijders & Bosker, 2011). There might be effects of talking on the task division, for example on days that partners talk more with each other, they report a more egalitarian task division. Future research should focus on more reliable methods of analyses and also on couple data to get a better understanding of the perceived task division from both partners.

Furthermore, the external validity of this study is low as the sample was a convenience sample and is not representative for the Dutch population. Of our sample 109 participants were highly educated and the average work hours per week were relatively high, namely 32.68 hours. Future research should focus more on a representative sample to be able to generalize the findings to the population. Another limitation is the validation of the quantitative measure, since this was done for the first time. Future research should focus more on what a good valid quantitative way of measuring is.

Conclusion

Our study showed that talking about the task division to a greater extent does not lead to a more egalitarian task division, but that traditional gender role attitudes do lead to women

doing more household tasks and childcare. Women are still the ones who take up the majority of the household tasks and childcare, but this could be because men are just not aware of these (subconscious) role patterns. Making men more aware might nudge them in the right direction of talking about the task division. Just talking about it is not the solution to unequal divisions but creating more awareness surrounding (subconscious) role patterns and having constructive conversations could be. If we focus on these (subconscious) role patterns and the content of these conversations, it might solve the fact that most couples in the Netherlands are still constricted to a traditional division of household tasks and childcare. Our study contributed scientifically as it is now clear that it is not about the quantity of talking about the task division but that it is much more complicated than that. If we focus more on the in-depth content of the conversations surrounding the task division, it might help achieve gender equality.

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