Master Thesis

The Effect of Explicitly Talking About the Division of Unpaid Tasks and The Influence Of
Relative Income on the Perceived Division of Unpaid Tasks Among Dutch Parents: A Diary
Study

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June 24, 2022

May be made publicly accessible

Abstract

Dutch women are increasing the number of hours they spend on paid work and the wage gap with men is continuously narrowing. In contrast: the convergence in unpaid tasks at home is occurring much slower. This research aimed to investigate whether explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks among couples would lead to a more equal division of household tasks and childcare. Since most research about this topic is done in a qualitative manner, this research expands earlier findings because it is done in a quantitative manner. The question was to what extent explicitly talking about the unpaid tasks does lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare. The moderating role of women's relative income during these conversations was also examined. For eight days, we conducted a diary study among Dutch parents ($N = 142$). Unexpectedly, talking about the division of unpaid tasks did not predict a more equal division of childcare and household tasks. Women's relative income did also not moderate this relationship. Gender and relative income were significant predictors of the perceived division of childcare. Future research should focus on the desire of couples to divide the unpaid tasks equally and also look into within-person variance instead of solely between-person variance. Theoretical and practical implications of these findings are also discussed in the current research.

Keywords: explicit decision-making styles, division of domestic work, dual-earner couples, childcare

Introduction

The economic position of Dutch women has continued to improve in the last decades. Women are working more and more hours, and the wage gap with men is continuously narrowing (Van den Brakel et al., 2020). This is partly due to an increase in the educational level of women as well as a change in cultural norms and current policies that stimulate the position of women at work (Adema et al., 2019). As most top positions within big companies are still occupied by men (Van den Brakel et al., 2020), these policies help to stimulate a more equal representation of men and women in the business context. An example is the recent implementation of a female quota concerning high-status jobs in which a minimum of one-third of the board of directors within a company should consist of female employees (Dekker, 2021). However, these changes do not change the dynamic within families at home: even though some changes are made in the business context, it seems like the convergence in unpaid tasks is occurring much slower (Nyman et al., 2018). Women still take on most of the unpaid tasks at home, especially after the first child's birth (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Research shows that Dutch women still spend nine hours per week more than Dutch men on unpaid tasks at home, and men still spend more time working than women (Roeters, 2017; Wiesmann et al., 2008).

Capitalizing on this information, six out of ten Dutch parents with children at home say that they ideally want to distribute unpaid tasks in an equal way (meaning that both partners do 40% - 60% of the tasks (Van den Brakel et al., 2020; Ferree, 1991)). Yet the reality is different: when a child is born, couples retrieve to an even more traditional task division, where mothers increase the hours they spend on unpaid tasks even further, such as household tasks and childcare, and decrease the hours they are working outside their home (Endendijk et al., 2018; Yavorsky et al., 2015). Moreover, despite the improving economic position of Dutch women, the percentage of relationships where the woman earns more than her male partner also remains small (Vink, 2020), namely twelve percent. Scholars suggest that when these roles shift in a modern direction and deviate from the taken-for-granted division, decision-making dynamics become increasingly important (Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2005; Sillars & Kalbflesch, 1989).

This taken-for-granted division of unpaid tasks can be problematic for the economic position of women in the future because the threshold for returning to full-time work increases (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Furthermore, women still get fewer promotions and are paid less than men for doing the exact same work. Traditional divisions also promote gender

inequality in children (Van den Bremer & Frijters, 2019; Turner & Gervai, 1995). But also for Dutch men there are some negative consequences: they feel the pressure from others and feel obliged to provide for their family while also securing their masculinity (Stevens et al., 2001), even when they want to spend more time with their kids.

Based on this, we should not only implement policies in the work domain but also take into account the dynamics within families in understanding gender inequality. One explanation why the division of unpaid tasks remains traditional is given in qualitative research, namely that decisions about childcare are partly silently acquiesced by couples. These decisions about the division of unpaid tasks are based on an implicit and often traditional way of thinking (Rose et al., 2015). Qualitative work suggests that explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks at home could result in a more equally distributed division (Wiesmann et al., 2008).

However, the research showing this was qualitative in nature; therefore, we cannot be sure whether explicitly talking about the task division predicts a more equal division. Besides that, the frequency in which partners talk about the division of unpaid tasks remains unknown. For this reason, we will conduct a diary study to investigate the influence of explicitly talking about the task division on the perceived division of household tasks and childcare on a daily level. A diary study allows us to assess the extent to which partners talk about their task division more accurately because this can differ daily (Ohly et al., 2010). The repeated measurements also increase the validity and reliability of the answers (Rausch, 2013).

Research has also shown that the power differential in income between partners also still results in women doing more tasks at home (Bittman et al., 2003). This power differential in income partially derives from the fact that Dutch men earn more salary for doing the exact same work as Dutch women: seven percent more in the business sector and five percent more in the public sector (Van den Bremer & Frijters, 2019). Considering that the economic position of Dutch women is increasing, we also want to investigate whether explicitly talking about the unpaid tasks differs for couples where the woman earns more than her male partner. As dual-earner couples are required to spend a lot of time and energy at their jobs outside the home, while they also have to manage household tasks and childcare, a high premium is placed on how partners talk about the division of labor at home (Klein et al., 2007).

Social Role Theory

One of the main reasons why this traditional division is so stubbornly embedded in our society is because parents want to live up to their social roles as parents (Klein et al., 2007).

These roles are explained in the *Social Role Theory*, which implies that men and women have specific roles shaped by the society of what men and women 'ideally' should be doing based on their gender (Eagly, 1987). Masculine roles, such as achieving and competitive behavior fitted better into the business context, and feminine roles, such as showing empathy, were considered beneficial for household tasks and taking care of children (Ellemers, 2018). These gender roles told men and women exactly what they needed to do, and these gender roles enact social roles of how women and men should behave like parents or employees (Wiesmann et al., 2008; Eagly & Wood, 2012). Partly because of this, women spend more time doing household tasks and childcare and spend fewer hours on paid work. Conversely, men spend more time doing paid work since this aligns with their social roles and fitted better into the business context (Eagly et al., 2000).

The role of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks

Notwithstanding the above, women are still increasing the hours they spend on paid work and the number of dual-earner families is increasing as a result (Van den Brakel et al., 2020; Klein et al., 2007). Since these dual-earner couples need to invest a lot of time and effort into paid work, household tasks, and childcare, the way couples talk about this division is considered important (Klein et al., 2007). The decision-making dynamics between partners are also becoming more pervasive and frequent when partners want to deviate from the traditional way of dividing the unpaid tasks (Knudson-Martin & Rankin Mahoney, 2005). Sillars and Kalbflesch (1989) argue that this is because explicit decision-making demands the decision-making process to be more organized instead of spontaneous. Couples must also increase their awareness while making the decision, tolerate some conflict and reflect on the way decisions have been made. Therefore, it should be expected that couples who want to deviate from these patterns are increasingly talking explicitly.

Nonetheless, few couples do explicitly talk about the task division and unconsciously rely upon traditional gender roles using an implicit way of making decisions, which eventually leads to a traditional division of tasks (Alberts et al., 2011). This implicit decision-making style is impulsive, indirect, non-reflective and often based on internalized beliefs (Sillars and Kalbflesch, 1989). But, research from Wiesmann and colleagues (2008) already found through in-depth interviews that explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks can result in a more egalitarian division of tasks after the birth of a child. Explicit-decision making means that couples must have a deliberative and proactive decision-making style. Direct communication from both partners is needed to make changes in the traditional

division of labor (Klein et al., 2007). How couples communicate and the extent to which couples communicate about this is considered important (Carlson et al., 2020). Alberts and colleagues (2011) also suggest that explicit conversations about task allocation should find place before and after these tasks to address inequities. However, due to the qualitative nature of most studies, no firm conclusions can be drawn, and therefore we will conduct a diary study.

In the present study, we will build on this knowledge and investigate quantitatively whether explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks leads to a more egalitarian perceived division of household tasks and childcare among couples with children at home. We expect that explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks will lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare.

Women's relative income

According to the *Relative Resources Theories,* the partner with relatively higher education and income could more easily retreat from doing household tasks (Nyman et al., 2018). When a man prioritizes work more than his female partner, it is more convenient for couples to base the task division on traditional gender roles using an implicit decision-making style or by not talking about the division of household tasks and childcare at all (Wiesmann et al., 2008).

But with current developments and the improving economic position of Dutch women (Van den Brakel et al., 2020), the power differentials in income are weakened. When a woman earns as much or more compared to her male partner, traditional gender stereotypes no longer hold true (Ellemers, 2018). These dual-earner couples must talk more explicitly about the division of unpaid tasks since they have to manage their household besides their paid jobs (Klein et al., 2007). They also seem more aware of the traditional power differentials and related social roles (Haines et al., 2016).

In contrast to these dual-earner couples, we expect the division of tasks to be more traditional when a woman works and earns less than her male partner since couples do not have to explicitly talk about the division of unpaid tasks. Gender roles tell them what to do (Wiesmann et al., 2008). On the other hand, women with an equal or higher salary compared to their male partners have more power within these conversations because the household is more dependent on their salary. They also want to deviate from the traditional gender norms and task division (Miller & Carlson, 2016). Explicit-decision making about the task division, rather than implicit-decision making, is necessary. When a woman earns less compared to her

male partner, her influence within these conversations seems to be reduced since the woman has less power during the conversations. Couples could therefore fall back on traditional ways of doing things (Carlson et al., 2020). As the income of women increases compared to their partners, it seems like they gain more power within the conversations about the division of unpaid tasks. Relative income can be seen as a moderator: when the income of women increases, their power within the conversations about unpaid tasks also increases which could strengthen the relationship between talking about the unpaid tasks and the perceived division of childcare and household tasks.

Based on the above, we expect that the effect of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks will be larger for women who earn relatively more compared to their male partners.

Current study

Based on the abovementioned, we decided to quantitatively test our hypotheses since most research about this topic is examined qualitatively. This will be done with the help of a diary study since conversations about the unpaid tasks could find place on a daily basis (Wiesmann et al., 2008). When conducting a diary study for eight days, it is also possible to track changes in the participants' answers, states and opinions throughout the week (Ohly et al., 2010). We will be the first who examine these topics in a quantitative matter.

We will examine whether dual-earner partners that explicitly talk to a greater extent about unpaid tasks with their partner will report a more egalitarian division of childcare and household tasks at home. Contrary to implicit decision-making dynamics, explicit-decision-making dynamics are more frequent and pervasive which can lead to a more equal division of labor (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Therefore, the first research question is: does explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare? Based on the above, we expect that explicitly talking about the division of tasks will lead to a more egalitarian task division.

> **Hypothesis 1:** Explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks will lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare.

In the present study, we will also examine whether the relative income of Dutch women affects the influence of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks. Women earning relatively more than their male partners have more power within these conversations (Miller & Carlson, 2016). The second research question is: is the effect of explicitly talking

about the division of unpaid tasks larger for women who earn relatively more than their male partners? Based on the above, we expect the effect of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks to be larger for Dutch women who earn relatively more compared to their male partners.

> **Hypothesis 2:** The effect of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks will be larger for women who earn relatively more compared to their male partners.

Figure 1

The Research Model of the Current Study Including Independent, Dependent and Moderator Variables
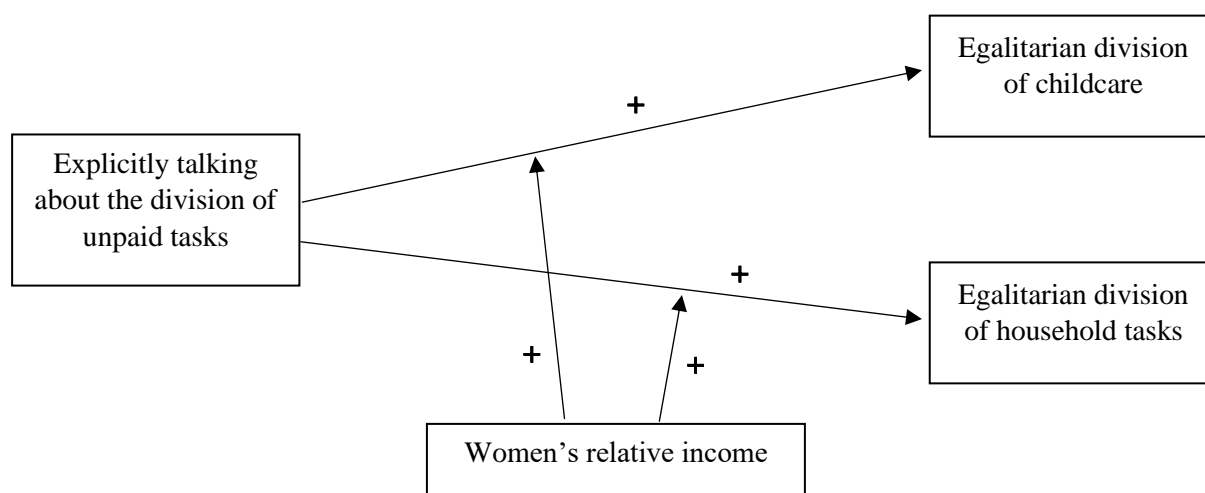
Method

Participants

The participants had to meet the following criteria to participate; they had to identify as male or female, they had to be in a romantic, heterosexual relationship in which they lived together with their partner for at least six months, and they had to have at least one child younger than 13 years. Based on sample criteria for diary studies, we intended to recruit a minimum of 100 participants (Ohly et al., 2010).

We included people who completed the starting questionnaire, the closing questionnaire and at least six out of eight daily questionnaires. In total $N = 142$ participants completed the daily diary study, of which $n = 46$ men (32.40%) and $n = 96$ women (67.60%).

We checked for outliers and removed participants if necessary (e.g., filling in the questionnaire with unusable data). The average age of the participants was 37.32 years ($SD = 6.28$), and the average age of the youngest child was 3.91 ($SD = 3.54$). On average, participants had been together with their partners for 13.68 years ($SD = 5.97$). The average relative income was -1.15 ($SD = 1.08$), which means that men earned roughly 60% of the joint income and women 40%. On average, men worked 39.17 hours per week ($SD = .78$) and women worked 29.17 hours per week ($SD = .68$).

Design and procedure

We conducted a diary study with which we gathered data on eight consecutive days. This allows us to assess people's answers on our topic multiple times since the extent to which partners communicate and their feelings about our subject can fluctuate daily (Nezlek, 2020). Participants were asked to participate in a diary study which consisted of two longer background questionnaires (one at the start and one at the end) and eight brief diary questionnaires. Before we started with the collection of data, the ethics committee of the University Utrecht gave ethical approval for this study.

Participants were recruited via convenience sampling. Participating was voluntary and completely anonymous, participants could stop at any time, and participants had the chance to win a voucher of 50 euros as a reward for their participation.

The starting questionnaire consisted of questions concerning basic demographics like gender, average working hours per week, relative income, and a more extensive question about who takes on what particular household and childcare tasks. The last questionnaire also consisted of additional questions concerning work status, and participants had to reflect on how the tasks were divided last week.

During the daily questionnaires, participants had to evaluate how many hours they had worked, to what extent they talked about the division of unpaid tasks, who initiated these conversations, how they experienced these conversations and the perceived division of household tasks and childcare of that day.

Measures

Besides basic demographics like age, gender and the average working hours per week of the participant, we measured the relative income of the participant compared to their partner, the daily perceived task division (in terms of household tasks and childcare) and the extent to which partners talked about the daily task division. Relative income was measured once in the starting questionnaire, and the other variables were measured daily for eight days.

Relative income

We assessed the participants contribution to the households' joint income based on the study of Endendijk and colleagues (2018). The question asked during this study was: 'Can you give us your best estimate of what percentage of your joint income is brought in by you and what percentage is brought in by your partner?' Answers ranged from 1 (0% by me, 100% by my partner) to 11 (100% by me, 0% by my partner). Later this variable was recoded into a different variable by gender ranging from -5 to 5 (*-5* = man earns 100%, woman earns 0%, *0* = man earns 50%, woman earns 50%, *5* = man earns 0%, woman earns 100%).

The perceived division of childcare and household tasks

The question about the perceived daily task division is based on a preexisting questionnaire from Meier and colleagues (2006). We used a shortened version on a daily level from Yerkes and colleagues (2020) to prevent dropouts. The questions stated were as follows: 'How did you and your partner divide household tasks today?' and 'How did you and your partner divide childcare today?' A 7-point Likert scale is used (*1* = My partner did the most, *4* = We both did as much, *7* = I did the most). The question needed to be answered for the two tasks separately. After we recoded this variable (*-3* = The man did the most, *0* = We both did as much, *3* = The woman did the most), the correlations ranged between $r = .32$ and $r = .67$. The correlations ranged from low to high; correlations were lower during the weekend and higher during the week. Participants could probably divide the unpaid tasks better during the weekend because fewer people spent time on paid work, so the answers given were less associated than during the week, and the correlations decreased (Ragsdale & Beehr, 2016).

Explicitly talking about the division of (unpaid) tasks

The way to what extent couples talk about their division of unpaid tasks is, to our knowledge, not yet quantitatively investigated. Therefore, our questions are based on Wiesmann and colleagues' (2008) qualitative study. The measure consisted of three items, one for each task (household tasks, childcare and paid work). 'To what extent did you talk with your partner today (e.g., talk, call, or text) to coordinate who does what household chores?' (*1* = Did not discuss at all, *4* = Discussed somewhat, *7* = Discussed thoroughly). We also asked this for childcare tasks and paid work. The reliability of all eight days ranged from $\alpha = .61$ to $\alpha = .73$, which means the reliability could be described as acceptable (Gliem & Gliem, 2003).

Analysis

IBM SPSS Statistics 28 is used to perform the statistical analysis. For the analyses, we calculated the averages of the daily measures into new variables per participant. We did this for talking about the unpaid tasks and the perceived division of the household tasks and childcare separately for each task. We combined the variables talking about childcare and talking about household tasks into the variable; talking about unpaid tasks, in order to test our research model. First, we conducted a *correlation* analysis between the abovementioned variables and the background variables consisting of gender, age, working hours of the participant and their partner, relationship length, age of the youngest child and educational level of both the participant and their partner. We calculated z-scores for relative income and for talking about the unpaid tasks. We calculated our interaction variable (moderator) by multiplying these z-scores.

To answer the research questions, we conducted two separate *regression analyses*. We used the enter method, with relative income as a moderator, to investigate whether the effect of explicitly talking about unpaid tasks will be larger for women who earn relatively more compared to their male partners. We conducted two separate regression analyses since we have two different dependent variables: the perceived division of childcare and the perceived division of household tasks. The age of the youngest child could influence the extent to which partners talk about their task division, so we wanted to control for this variable. This is because childcare becomes less physical when a child gets older (Meier et al., 2006), so the extent to which partners talk about this also changes. First, the control variables will be included in the regression analysis as covariates. After that, we added our independent variables relative income and talking about the division of unpaid tasks. Lastly, we added the interaction variable (moderator) of relative income and talking about the unpaid tasks.

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Results

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Correlation analysis showed that the division of childcare was negatively associated with working hours, which means that the more the participant worked, the less time they spent on childcare. Besides that, educational level was positively associated with talking about unpaid tasks. Just like working hours, relative income was negatively associated with the perceived division of childcare. Relative income was also positively associated with the participants' educational level and working hours. The analysis also showed that women

perceived to do more childcare-related tasks, which is in line with the average division of childcare where female participants perceived to do slightly more childcare tasks. Lastly, the perceived task division of childcare was strongly associated with the perceived division of household tasks. See Table 1 for a complete overview.

As the gender of the participant was significantly associated with the perceived division of childcare, we decided to include gender as a covariate in the regression analyses. We excluded the age of the youngest child as a covariate because this was not associated with any of our dependent variables. Since the correlation analysis showed that working hours and educational level were highly associated with the relative income, we analyzed if *multicollinearity* occurred within our sample by adding the VIF values in the *regression analysis*, but this was not the case. We still decided not to include them in the regression analyses to prevent overlap with relative income.

Table 1

Correlation Analyses between Dependent, Independent and Background Variables

		M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1.	Age of the youngest child	3.91	5.54	-											
2.	Age participant	37.32	6.28	.74**	-										
3.	Education participant			.03	.16	-									
4.	Working hours participant	32.41	7.81	.18*	.25**	.09	-								
5.	Education partner			-.09	.13	.48**	.11	-							
6.	Working hours partner	35.89	8.26	-.05	-.08	.20*	-.32**	.09	-						
7.	Relative income	-1.15	1.08	-.08	-.01	.22**	.23**	.04	-.07	-					
8.	Relationship duration	13.86	5.97	.68**	.57**	-.08	.09	.01	-.06	-.15	-				
9.	Gender			-.13	-.20*	.13	-.60**	-.13	.54**	.07	-.03	-			
10.	Division childcare	.52	.88	.09	.01	-.17	-.27**	-.17	.15	-.23*	.09	.18*	-		
11.	Division household tasks	.56	.90	.05	-.06	-.14	-.16	-.10	.17	-.11	-.04	.13	.47**	-	
12.	Talking about unpaid tasks[1]	3.63	.98	-.11	-.02	.02	.04	.27**	-.13	.09	.01	-.06	-.08	-.09	-
	12A. Talking about childcare	3.96	1.02												
	12B. Talking about household tasks	3.29	1.08												

* *p* < .05. ** *p* < .01.

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[1] We added talking about childcare and household tasks separately in the table, since the averages show that participants talked more about childcare. Talking about unpaid tasks was used in the regression analysis in order to test our research model. We conducted separate analyses for the influence of talking about childcare on the perceived division of childcare. We also did this for household tasks. No significant effects were found and results of these analyses are available on request.

Does explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare?

To answer the research questions, we conducted two separate *regression analyses,* both for the perceived division of childcare and the perceived division of household tasks. In the first block of the regression analyses, we added our covariate gender. Next, in the second block of the regression analyses, we added our predictors relative income and talking about the unpaid tasks. We included our interaction variable in the third and last block of the regression analyses. We calculated our interaction variable (moderator) by multiplying the z-scores of relative income and talking about the division of unpaid tasks and did the regression analyses both for childcare (see Table 4) and household tasks (see Table 5).

Firstly, gender was significantly related to the perceived division of childcare ($\beta = .21$, $t(125) = 2.36$, $p = .020$) but not to the perceived division of household tasks ($p = .118$), indicating that women perceived to spend more time on childcare relatively to their partner but not on household tasks. See Tables 2 and 3.

Talking about the unpaid tasks is neither a significant predictor for the perceived division of childcare ($p = .574$) nor for the perceived division of household tasks ($p = .448$; see Tables 2 and 3). The model without the moderator concerning childcare was found to be significant ($R^2 = .097$, $F(2,122) = 4.28$, $p = .016$) but the model without moderator concerning household tasks was not ($R^2 = .038$, $F(2,122) = 1.30$, $p = .277$).

Concluding, our data did not offer support for our first hypothesis. We did not find evidence in our study to support the idea that explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks changed the perceived division of household tasks and childcare, which eventually could lead to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare. Hence, hypothesis 1 is not supported.

However, we did find that the participants' relative income significantly predicted the perceived division of childcare ($\beta = -.22$, $t(125) = -2.81$, $p = .006$). This means that when women earned relatively more than their partners, their relative contribution to childcare decreased. See Table 2 for a complete overview.

Table 2

Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients Model Without Moderator

	b	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-.13	.29		-.46	.646
Gender	.38	.16	.21	2.36	.020
Talking about Unpaid Tasks	-.04	.08	-.05	-.56	.574
Relative Income	-.22	.08	-.24	-2.81	.006

Note. The perceived task division of childcare is the dependent variable.

Table 3

Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients Model Without Moderator

	b	SE	β	t	p
Constant	.10	.30		.34	.733
Gender	.27	.17	.14	1.57	.118
Talking about Unpaid Tasks	-.06	.08	-.07	-.76	.448
Relative Income	-.11	.08	-.12	-1.34	.182

Note. The perceived task division of the household tasks is the dependent variable.

Lastly, adding the moderator of relative income showed that women's relative income did not influence the relationship between explicitly talking about unpaid tasks and the perceived division of childcare tasks ($p = .228$). See Table 4 for an overview. The model with the moderator ($R^2 = .108$, $F(1,121) = 1.47$, $p = .228$) did not significantly improve compared to the model without the moderator, which was already found to be significant.

Adding the moderator of relative income showed that women's relative income also did not significantly influence the relationship between explicitly talking about unpaid tasks and the perceived division of household tasks ($p = .272$). See Table 5 for an overview. Besides that, the model with the moderator for the perceived division of household tasks ($R^2 = .048$, $F(1,121) = 1.22$, $p = .272$) again did not improve significantly compared to the model without a moderator.

Our data did not support our second hypothesis that the effect of talking about the

division of unpaid tasks is larger for women who earn relatively more compared to their male partners. Hence, hypothesis 2 is also not supported. Relative income is not significantly related to the perceived division of childcare as an interaction variable, but it is thus significant as a predictor variable.

Table 4

Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients Model With Moderator

	b	SE	β	t	p
Constant	-.09	.29		-.32	.747
Gender	.36	.17	.19	2.17	.032
Z Score Talking about Unpaid Tasks	-.05	.08	-.06	-.69	.490
Z Score Relative Income	.20	.09	-.22	-2.54	.012
Interaction Variable Talking About Unpaid Tasks and Relative Income	.09	.08	.11	1.21	.228

Note. The perceived task division of childcare is the dependent variable.

Table 5

Standardized and Unstandardized Coefficients Model With Moderator

	b	SE	β	t	p
Constant	.14	.31		.46	.644
Gender	.25	.18	.13	1.41	.163
Z Score Talking about Unpaid Tasks	-.07	.08	-.08	-.88	.382
Z Score Relative Income	-.09	.08	-.10	-1.12	.265
Interaction Variable Talking About Unpaid Tasks and Relative Income	.09	.08	.10	1.10	.272

Note. The perceived task division of the household tasks is the dependent variable.

Discussion

This study aimed to gain insight into the influence of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks on the perceived division of childcare and household tasks. In this study, we examined whether explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks was related to a more egalitarian division of household tasks and childcare and whether this effect was larger for women who earned relatively more compared to their male partners.

We found that gender predicted the perceived division of childcare, where women took on more childcare-related tasks compared to their male partners. For hypothesis 1, we expected the division of unpaid tasks to become more egalitarian when couples increasingly talked about this, but this was not supported. We also found no significant influence of women's relative income on the relationship between talking about the division and the perceived task division. Therefore, hypothesis 2 was also not supported. However, we did find that relative income predicted the division of perceived childcare. As the relative income of the female partner increased, her perceived contribution to childcare decreased.

Explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks and the influence of relative income

As expected, in this sample, women perceived to do more unpaid tasks. However, contrary to the expectations, we did not find the task division to become more equally divided when partners were increasingly explicitly talking about the task division. In this study, we only measured the extent to which participants talked with their partners about their task division (i.e., quantity). We did not measure the ambiance in those conversations. However, it could have been the case that the effect of having conversations about the task division was only present when these conversations were constructive, positive and focused on equally dividing the unpaid tasks. For example, Eerola and colleagues (2021) found that couples do explicitly talk about their task division, but within these conversations they emphasized agreement about childcare for example, regardless of whether the tasks were equally divided or divided by gender. Besides that, Wiesmann and colleagues (2008) suggest that couples who wish to achieve equality need to implement explicit decision-making dynamics. The desire within couples to achieve an equal task division is not measured during this study and should be considered for future research. Future research could also focus on within-person variance, instead of between-person variance, to track changes within the participants' answers during the week. The tasks could for example be more equally divided on days where participants increasingly talked about the task division compared to days where they did to a lesser extent (Hoffman & Stawski, 2009).

Also, contrary to what was expected, women's income did not moderate the relationship between talking about the task division and the perceived task division. Research pointed out that a woman's income gives her power within these conversations to reduce the time she spends on household tasks but not to increase the time her male partner spends on household tasks (Bittman et al., 2003). If male partners were not increasing the hours they spent on household tasks, it could have become challenging for couples to make the perceived task division divided equally. Bittman and colleagues (2003) also suggested that women who earn significantly more than their male partners violate gender norms, which could have led to men even decreasing the hours they spent on household tasks. As a result, the task division could become even more unequally divided. In addition, Carlson and colleagues (2020) suggest that creating common awareness of these gender norms and roles could tackle this phenomenon since it happens unconsciously. Future research should measure awareness of gender and social norms within couples and what happens when these norms and roles are violated.

However, we found that when women's relative income increased, their contribution to the perceived division of childcare decreased. Relative income was not significant as a moderator but was significant as a predictor. This complemented the earlier mentioned *Relative Resources Theories* by clarifying that the partner with a relatively higher income could have probably more easily retreated from doing household tasks (Nyman et al., 2018). The present study also confirmed previous findings that most of the childcare is done by women, from which we can carefully conclude that to this day, gender roles still told men and women what to do (Wiesmann et al., 2008). Both income and gender are fruitful subjects for follow-up research within this field of research. Future research could for example investigate whether the desire for a more equal division of unpaid tasks differs between gender and if relative income also influences this desire.

Strengths, limitations and future research

One thing that must be acknowledged is the design of this study. Since the task division and feelings and thoughts about our topic fluctuated daily, this diary study allowed us to assess peoples' answers multiple times (Nezlek, 2020). In addition, since most research about this topic is examined qualitatively, we are the first to quantitatively examine these topics with the help of a diary study. We can state that this can be of great value for behavioral sciences.

Besides strengths, there were also some limitations we should address. First, we

calculated averages of talking about the unpaid tasks and the perceived task division of household tasks and childcare over eight days. Future research should also focus on within-person differences to investigate whether explicitly talking about the division of tasks on a particular day can lead to a more equal division during that day, compared to other days. This data got lost by calculating averages to focus on differences between persons. To clarify our choice: scholars suggested that repeated measurements increase the validity and reliability of the answers (Rausch, 2013).

Besides that, talking about the division of unpaid tasks was a new and not yet validated measure. The reliability was therefore acceptable but could be improved. Future research should investigate whether this measure can be validated and become a reliable measure for other research.

In addition, many participants were highly educated. 76.80% of the participants and 69.10% of their partners finished Higher Vocational Education (HVO) or higher. The question arises to what extent our results are generalizable to the Dutch population. Maslowski (2020) states that forty percent of the Dutch population finished their HVO or higher. Thus, care must be taken with generalizing the results. Future research should focus on gathering a more diverse sample using other sampling methods to ensure that the generalizability increases. Yavorsky and colleagues (2015) suggested that a higher educational level is often associated with more equal divisions of unpaid tasks. The effect of explicitly talking about the division of unpaid tasks among lower educated participants could have therefore been more substantial since their task division is often more traditional.

Conclusion

Earlier findings could explain the current research that the quality of communication between partners, rather than the number of conversations, shaped the division of unpaid tasks at home (Carlson et al., 2020). Eerola and colleagues (2021) also suggest that the number of conversations did not necessarily have to lead to a more equal perceived division of unpaid tasks since partners could be confirming social roles and why the tasks are divided the way they are. In addition, couple partners do, to some extent, unanimously agree that the male partner does not have the competency to participate in childcare, even if he is willing to do so (Eerola et al., 2021). But, creating gender equality is seen as a fundamental element for women and men to achieve a sustainable environment that encourages equity and growth (Romero et al., 2020).

Suppose Dutch couples want to deviate from the taken-for-granted division of unpaid

tasks. In that case, they should probably focus on the way how they communicate rather than the extent to which they communicate. In addition, big companies and the government should encourage gender equality within the family context rather than only focusing on the business context. In Sweden, couples are given 480 days of paid parental leave after their child's birth, which they are free to arrange how they want (Van Rosenthal, 2017). It is essential to mention that both partners must take on at least three months of parental leave. Otherwise, they will miss the opportunity to be paid while taking this parental leave. Legislations like this could stimulate more gender equality within the family context in the Netherlands, but only if big companies and the Dutch government are willing to implement this.

In short, our hypotheses are not supported by the current research. Still, it is essential to mention that to this day, income and gender played a significant role in predicting the division of unpaid tasks at home. When striving for gender equality within the family context, men and women should also focus on the quality, rather than the quantity, of the conversations about the division of unpaid tasks.

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