

Hipp, Lena; Leshchenko, Olga; Sauermann, Armin

Article — Published Version

Who shoulders the mental work? Evidence on the distribution of mental work in different-sex couples in Germany

Social Problems

Provided in Cooperation with:

WZB Berlin Social Science Center

Suggested Citation: Hipp, Lena; Leshchenko, Olga; Sauermann, Armin (2026) : Who shoulders the mental work? Evidence on the distribution of mental work in different-sex couples in Germany, Social Problems, ISSN 1533-8533, Oxford University Press, Oxford, Iss. Advance articles, pp. 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/socpro/spaf080>

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/337877>

Standard-Nutzungsbedingungen:

Die Dokumente auf EconStor dürfen zu eigenen wissenschaftlichen Zwecken und zum Privatgebrauch gespeichert und kopiert werden.

Sie dürfen die Dokumente nicht für öffentliche oder kommerzielle Zwecke vervielfältigen, öffentlich ausstellen, öffentlich zugänglich machen, vertreiben oder anderweitig nutzen.

Sofern die Verfasser die Dokumente unter Open-Content-Lizenzen (insbesondere CC-Lizenzen) zur Verfügung gestellt haben sollten, gelten abweichend von diesen Nutzungsbedingungen die in der dort genannten Lizenz gewährten Nutzungsrechte.

Terms of use:

Documents in EconStor may be saved and copied for your personal and scholarly purposes.

You are not to copy documents for public or commercial purposes, to exhibit the documents publicly, to make them publicly available on the internet, or to distribute or otherwise use the documents in public.

If the documents have been made available under an Open Content Licence (especially Creative Commons Licences), you may exercise further usage rights as specified in the indicated licence.



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Who shoulders the mental work? Evidence on the distribution of mental work in different-sex couples in Germany

Lena Hipp^{1,*} , Olga Leshchenko²  and Armin Sauermann³ 

¹University of Potsdam, Faculty of Economics and Social Sciences, Campus Griebnitzsee August-Bebel-Str. 8914482 Potsdam, Germany & WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Research Professorship “Work, Family, Social Inequality”, Reichpietschufer 50, 10785 Berlin, Germany

²Cluster of Excellence: The Politics of Inequality, University of Konstanz, Universitätsstrasse 10, Konstanz 78464, Germany

³Department of Sociology, Washington University in St. Louis, MSC 1112-228-04, One Brookings Drive, St. Louis, MO, 63130-4899, USA

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the gendered distribution of mental work—i.e., the invisible planning and organizing of household and childcare tasks—among coupled individuals in Germany. Analyzing survey data from a large-scale national probability sample ($N = 2675$), we find that women disproportionately shoulder the mental work, particularly when it comes to managing daily household and family responsibilities. Men report responsibility for a limited set of nonroutine tasks. Perceptions of task division also diverge significantly by gender: While women believe that they are primarily or entirely responsible for planning and organizing most family and household tasks, men tend to believe that mental work is shared equally between partners. Additionally, women’s mental work is higher when they have children and lower when they pursue more hours in paid employment—patterns not mirrored among men. However, across both genders, more egalitarian attitudes are associated with perceptions of a more equal distribution. By providing quantitative evidence on a domain often addressed qualitatively, this study highlights the persistent gender inequalities embedded in the invisible management of household and childcare work.

Who manages the family calendar? Who buys birthday presents, draws up shopping lists, and plans who has to go where and when? A growing body of sociological research and everyday experience points to a clear answer: It is predominantly women who are responsible for the mental work associated with organizing housework and childcare (Reich-Stiebert, Froehlich, and Voltmer 2023). This invisible planning, organizing, and monitoring of household tasks is boundaryless and emotionally taxing (Daminger 2019; Dean, Churchill, and Ruppner 2022; Haupt and Gelbgiser 2024; Offer 2014; Offer and Schneider 2011; Weeks and Ruppner 2025).

* Corresponding author: WZB Berlin Social Science Center, Berlin, 10785, Germany, and University of Potsdam, Potsdam, 14469, Germany. Email: hipp2@uni-potsdam.de

The authors thank Jutta Allmendinger, the initiative Chef:innen:sache, Die Zeit, and infas for supporting the data collection for this project.

Key words: mental work; cognitive labor; gender inequalities; childcare; domestic work.

Received 29 December 2024; revised 2 August 2025; accepted 14 August 2025

© The Author(s) 2026. Published by Oxford University Press on behalf of the Society for the Study of Social Problems.

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted reuse, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

To date, most of the existing research on mental work—sometimes also referred to as cognitive labor or mental load—has been based on qualitative, in-depth interviews (Daminger 2019; Delaney, Bobek, and Clavero 2023; Moore 2017; Robertson et al. 2019). The few existing quantitative studies have used convenience or quota samples (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Offer 2014; Weeks and Ruppner 2025) or approximated the distribution of mental work within couples by investigating the division of labor by “cognitive-heavy tasks” (Haupt and Gelbgiser 2024).

Because previous work has faced these limitations, we also know little about the factors that may be linked to a more equitable sharing of daily task planning and organization. Is mental work more equally distributed when couples hold gender egalitarian beliefs? Is a more equal distribution of paid work, particularly when both male and female partners do full-time jobs, associated with a more equal distribution of mental work? How is having children in the household, and the increased need for planning and organizing that goes along with it, linked to the distribution of planning and organizing tasks across different life domains?

We answer these questions by deriving generalizable survey-based estimates on the distribution of mental work among couples in Germany from a unique, large-scale probability sample ($N = 2675$). Although traditional gender role attitudes have become less prevalent in Germany following the expansion of publicly provided childcare and the introduction of a Swedish-style parental leave scheme (Barth and Trübner 2018; Schober and Büchau 2022; Zoch and Schober 2018), the country is still characterized by considerable gender inequalities in the division of paid and unpaid work (England 2010; Hipp, Bernhardt, and Allmendinger 2015; Kühhirt 2012; Minkus and Busch-Heizmann 2020) and therefore comparable to many other rich democracies. Our data enable us to examine variations in the distribution of mental work based on women’s and men’s involvement in paid work, the presence of children in the household, and their gender role attitudes. By exploring the relationships between these factors and the division of mental work among couples, we test predictions derived from the three theoretical frameworks commonly applied to the division of housework and childcare: relative resources (Becker 1991), time availability (Brines 1993), and doing gender (West and Zimmerman 1987).

Our analyses show that couples’ division of *invisible* mental work in Germany is as unequal as their division of *visible* unpaid household and childcare work. Men only exclusively or predominantly perform three out of 21 organizational tasks—the mental work associated with repairs, tradespersons, and bills, none of which arise on a daily basis. In contrast, women are primarily or solely responsible for the remaining ones. Furthermore, while both men and women are aware of the inequalities in the distribution of mental work, they nonetheless disagree on the extent of these inequalities: Men are much more likely to believe that mental work is distributed equally between partners than women, while women are more likely to see themselves as predominantly or solely responsible. Third, women who work fewer hours than their partners do more mental work than women who work the same or more hours than their partners. However, the proportion of the mental work done by men is neither related to their own nor their partner’s working hours. Likewise, mothers do more mental work than childless women, but fathers do not do more mental work than childless men. Broadly interpreted, this finding means that time-related burdens are relevant only for women. Lastly, we find that egalitarian gender role attitudes are positively associated with perceptions of a more gender-equal distribution of mental work.

Our study thus contributes to the growing literature on mental work by developing a survey instrument that tests the claims repeatedly made in qualitative and conceptual work (Dean et al. 2022; Delaney et al. 2023; Robertson et al. 2019). It advances recent efforts to capture the invisible work necessary to manage families and households (e.g., Weeks and Ruppner 2025 who also developed a mental work instrument that they tested with parents in the United States). We provide reliable and generalizable estimates of the extent of gender inequalities in the distribution of mental work across different life domains in Germany and identify factors that can potentially contribute to a more equitable distribution of invisible management tasks within families. Much of the existing empirical research on mental work has been conducted in the United States (e.g., Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019; Delaney et al. 2023; Weeks and Ruppner 2025)—and hence in a country with limited policy support for families. By introducing generalizable evidence from Germany, our study

provides a valuable additional perspective and helps to generalize knowledge about mental work across diverse institutional contexts.

THE CONCEPT OF MENTAL WORK

The concept of mental work—often also referred to as cognitive labor and mental labor or mental load—has emerged from research on unpaid housework (see e.g., Bianchi et al. 2012; Fuwa 2004; Sayer 2005) and refers to the cognitive and nonphysical work aspects of accomplishing family goals (Daminger 2019; Dean et al. 2022; Weeks and Ruppner 2025). It hence includes various facets of the invisible work necessary to ensure that individuals' and families' daily lives function smoothly. In addition to managerial aspects, such as the planning and organizing of daily tasks and activities, mental work also encompasses a cognitive component—i.e., the thinking, anticipating, and decision-making associated with organizing family life (Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023; Wayne et al. 2023).

In practice, mental work does not just include everyday tasks such as planning meals, anticipating childcare needs, and monitoring schedules; it also includes less regular, nonphysical tasks, such as remembering birthdays, managing finances, planning activities or trips, and meeting children's other needs, including buying clothing or enabling them to meet friends (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019; Thorne 2010; Weeks and Ruppner 2025). Although managing, planning, and simply thinking about household and childcare tasks may be closely related to actually performing them, the tasks themselves nonetheless differ in their visibility, the effort they require, and how much appreciation they attract (see, for example, Coltrane 2000; Hochschild and Machung 1989; Lee and Waite 2005; Offer and Schneider 2011; Robertson et al. 2019). Indeed, while daily tasks may be more burdensome than nondaily ones, the opposite could also be true: Recurring daily planning and organizational tasks are never-ending, but a certain routine can also set in, with the same shopping list from week to week. Conversely, irregularly occurring planning and organizational tasks related to purchases or repairs may impose a higher mental burden when they do arise.

Studying Mental Work

Most of the existing research on mental work is qualitative (e.g., Daminger 2019; Delaney et al. 2023; Luthra and Haux 2022). A recent literature review indicated that only eight of the 31 studies on mental work published between 1989 and 2022 used standardized questionnaires (Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023). Only two were conducted on large-scale probability samples—one used international ISSP data and focused on three household responsibilities (Treas and Tai 2012), while the other used the American Time Use Survey (ATUS) and measured the absolute time people spend on planning, monitoring, and coordinating different types of tasks (Winkler and Ireland 2009). Other survey studies, all of which have been conducted in the United States, have used convenience samples and therefore do not necessarily lend themselves to generalizable conclusions. For instance, Ciciolla and Luthar (2019), used snowball sampling to find respondents to ask about their distribution of childcare and housework tasks. Weeks and Ruppner (2025) tested their 21-item battery of task-based questions on a quota sample and explored whether the distribution of mental work followed established gender patterns. Offer (2014) contacted volunteer study respondents at random times during the day to ask about their activities.

Gender Differences in Mental Work

The existing studies on the distribution of mental work have found that women in different-sex couples do most of the invisible family-related planning and managing tasks (see Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023) and that mental work is more unequally distributed than visible household and childcare work (Aviv et al. 2025). Studies from the early 2000s estimated that individuals do approximately two to three hours of mental work daily (Lee and Waite 2005; Offer 2014), and more recent work has shown that gender inequalities in the distribution of mental work even persist in separated families (Luthra and Haux 2022; Weeks and Ruppner 2025).

Scholarly work on the distribution of mental work tends to confirm anecdotal evidence that mental tasks are unevenly divided within couples and that women and men have different perceptions of *how* unequal this distribution actually is. Studies on coupled men and women from convenience samples in the United States have found that male participants were more likely to believe that they shared mental

tasks equally with their partners, whereas women were more likely to report being solely responsible for planning and organizing household and childcare-related tasks (Harrington and Reese-Melancon 2022; Meier, McNaughton-Cassill, and Lynch 2006). Just as there is gender specialization in visible household and childcare tasks, there is an evident pattern of gender specialization in mental tasks (Coltrane 2000; Craig and Powell 2018; Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011; Weeks and Ruppner 2025). Women are more responsible for mental work regarding cleaning, groceries, and social life—and hence the daily organization and planning of household and family life—while men think more about car maintenance—and hence the tasks that can best be described as episodic (Klasnić 2023; Weeks and Ruppner 2025).

This unequal division of mental work may have negative implications for well-being, particularly for women (Aviv et al. 2025). There is some evidence that women experience more stress from mental work than men (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019; Offer 2014). Higher involvement in mental work increases family-to-work conflict for women but not men (Haupt and Gelbgiser 2024)—because women perform the tasks that are more frequent and complex (i.e., organizing joint activities vs. doing small repairs). Moreover, stress may come from the mismatch between the expected and actual mental work distribution: As Naujoks and Hamjediers (2022) showed in a study based on a vignette survey, women believe that mental work should be shared equally but ultimately perform more mental work than men. Mental work can therefore be a significant source of conflict and relationship dissatisfaction for couples (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019).

Empirical Expectations about the Heterogeneous Distribution of Mental Work

To explain the gendered division of paid and unpaid work within couples, prior research has typically drawn on three theoretical perspectives: time availability approaches (e.g., Barnett 1994; Brines 1993; Presser 1994), relative resource theories (Becker 1991; Blood and Wolfe 1978; Brines 1993), and the doing-gender perspective (e.g., Acker 1992; Blair and Johnson 1992; Greenstein 1996; West and Zimmerman 1987). In what follows, we apply the insights from these three perspectives to derive our hypotheses about the distribution of couples' mental work.

Time availability approaches focus on the limited time that individuals can spend on either paid or unpaid work (e.g., Barnett 1994; Brines 1993; Presser 1994). If one partner works longer hours or has a more demanding job, the other partner might take on more household chores or childcare responsibilities. Relative resource theory suggests that unequal earnings potential between partners determines who spends more time on paid work and who spends more time on unpaid work (Becker 1991; Blood and Wolfe 1978; Brines 1993). Based on the insights of time availability approaches and relative resource theory, we expect that women and men with more equal distributions of paid work will report a more equal distribution of mental work (Hypothesis 1).

Moreover, both time availability and relative resources shift when couples become parents. Women typically take some time off and reduce their working hours when they become mothers, while fathers' working hours remain unaffected (Kühhirt 2012; Schober 2013). Studies on the division of visible domestic work show that, when men become parents, the time they invest in housework and childcare remains relatively stable, while women perform more domestic work (Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes 2008)—regardless of their financial resources (Kühhirt 2012). We therefore expect that women and men without children will report a more equal distribution of mental work than women and men with children (Hypothesis 2).

However, empirical work that has applied time availability approaches and relative resource theory to the division of visible household and childcare work in couples has yielded mixed results (Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010). Some studies looking at relative resources and the division of visible household work have reported that women continue to do more housework than men despite earning equal or even higher wages (Kan and Kolpashnikova 2021; Syrda 2023), while others have found no relationship between relative resources and the gendered division of unpaid work (Nitsche and Grunow 2016). Cross-national research on mental work related to raising children and weekend activities has shown that women are more responsible for household management, even if they earn more than their husbands (Treas and Tai 2012). Yet, results from the American time-use survey found that women in dual-earner couples spend less time on mental work (Winkler and Ireland 2009).

Given this lack of agreement, we will consider a third perspective to explain couples' division of mental work: the doing-gender approach, which posits that the division of paid and unpaid work follows prescribed gender norms and practices (e.g., [Acker 1992](#); [Blair and Johnson 1992](#); [Greenstein 1996](#); [West and Zimmerman 1987](#)). According to this view, women may not only perform more visible household and childcare work than men but also more of the invisible mental work, because gender is deeply engrained in women's and men's behaviors. It is not just that women are socialized into the role of the female caretaker and men into the role of the male breadwinner ([Cunningham 2001](#)); it is also that women and men actively perform these roles through routine practices to construct both their own and their partners' gender identities ([Hollander 2013](#); [Thébaud, Kornrich, and Ruppner 2021](#); [West and Zimmerman 1987](#)). Hence, according to the doing-gender perspective, women will always do more mental work than men and be the invisible managers—particularly when it comes to female-typed tasks—independent of the actual time and relative resources available. For women, planning and organizing a family's daily life is one way for them to maintain their status as women; for men, not engaging in such tasks is a way for them to protect their masculine identity ([Arrighi and Maume 2000](#); [Davis and Greenstein 2004](#)).

Internalized gender role attitudes may therefore be another predictor of couples' division of mental work. Research on the division of visible housework and childcare shows that gender role attitudes are related to actual behavior. Men with more egalitarian gender role attitudes perform more housework ([Grunow and Baur 2014](#)), as do women with more conservative gender role attitudes ([Nitsche and Grunow 2018](#); [Schober 2013](#)). In addition, women with more egalitarian upbringings report doing less mental work ([Klasnić 2023](#)). Recent evidence also indicates an increase in the number of individuals who believe in the equal sharing of household work ([Scarborough, Sin, and Risman 2019](#)). We therefore expect women and men with more egalitarian gender role attitudes to report a more equal distribution of mental work than women and men with more traditional gender role attitudes (Hypothesis 3).

In summary, just as the distribution of paid and unpaid work is gendered and unequal, we expect a similarly gendered and unequal distribution of mental work based on the theoretical considerations of the time availability, relative resources, and doing gender perspectives. We therefore expect a more equal distribution of mental work among couples when paid work is more equally distributed (Hypothesis 1), among couples without children (Hypothesis 2), and among couples with more gender egalitarian views (Hypothesis 3).

DATA AND METHODS

To test these hypotheses, we collected data on the distribution of mental work among different-sex couples by implementing a 21-item module into a national probability survey on work values and attitudes in Germany in early 2023. Potential respondents were incentivized with a €10 post hoc payment for study participation, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.

The German Context

Germany is particularly well-suited to studying the distribution of mental work among couples, as it exhibits a blend of policy, cultural, and economic characteristics that resemble those of many other countries. First, despite major political advances to promote gender equality, such as the introduction of a Swedish-style parental leave scheme in the early 2000s and the liberalization of public opinion regarding mothers' employment ([Blome 2017](#)), Germany is still characterized by a traditional gender division of paid and unpaid work ([Hipp et al. 2015](#); [Kühhirt 2012](#)); this is also the case in other Western democracies, such as Belgium and France (see [Campaña, Gimenez-Nadal, and Velilla 2023](#)). Second, Germany is also comparable to other rich democracies in terms of its key structural and economic features. While women's labor force participation has consistently risen in recent decades, it still lags more than eight percentage points behind men's ([Hipp and Kelley 2025](#)). Income inequality between men and women, moreover, is still above 15 percent on average ([Statistisches Bundesamt 2023](#)). Although there is quite some variation in women's labor force participation, working hours, and earnings across countries, gender gaps of comparable size can be found in most other OECD countries ([OECD 2023a, 2023b, 2023c](#)). All of these features make the findings derived from this

study potentially applicable to other countries—particularly those more similar to Germany than the United States, where most existing studies on mental work have been conducted and which differs substantially in terms of women’s labor force involvement and the social policy context.

Measures

In the survey, we asked respondents about who typically performs 21 tasks related to planning and organizing housework and family life—both regular and irregular activities—such as planning meals, remembering birthdays, and organizing repairs (for the full list of tasks, see [Appendix Table A1](#)). This operationalization of mental work reflects the definition by [Reich-Stiebert et al. \(2023\)](#) in their systematic review. These authors describe mental work as cognitive household and childcare tasks that involve managerial activities “aimed at achieving communal goals (e.g., goals related not only to the individual, but also to the family, partner, children), which are directed toward a future outcome” (p. 485). In the instrument we developed, we hence focused on the cognitive planning and organizing component of mental work (following the examples of [Allen, Klein, and Hill 2008](#); [Daminger 2019](#); [Hochschild and Machung 1989](#); [Moore 2017](#) who explicitly distinguish between emotional and cognitive labor). We did not include questions on the emotional component, which some scholars consider to be an integral part of mental work (e.g., [Bass 2015](#); [Bianchi et al. 2012](#); [Dean et al. 2022](#); [Offer 2014](#)).

The specific questions we included in our instrument were selected to capture a broad range of tasks commonly associated with household and family management and derived theoretically from qualitative studies and conceptual accounts of mental work (e.g., [Daminger 2019](#); [Dean et al. 2022](#); [Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023](#); [Robertson et al. 2019](#)). To reduce the cognitive load for respondents in our study, we clustered the different types of mental activities into four broad categories—daily tasks, leisure tasks, irregular tasks, and children-related tasks. The order in which the specific tasks were presented to respondents within each category was randomized to avoid potential order effects. Prior to fielding our study, we engaged in extensive cognitive pretesting with parents and childless women and men and modified our items based on their verbal responses and written feedback to the various programmed versions of the instrument.

Rather than asking respondents how much time they spent on the different types of mental work tasks—which are often performed in parallel with other activities or on an intermittent basis and hence prone to over- and underreporting—we followed the example of previous work and asked respondents about the relative distribution of the different aspects of mental work (e.g., [Ciciolla and Luthar 2019](#); [Haupt and Gelbgiser 2024](#)). That is, after the question “When it comes to planning and organizing, who handles the following in your partnership?” we provided respondents with five different answer categories (entirely/predominantly me, entirely/predominantly my partner, and equal sharing). In addition, respondents also had the option to reply with “don’t know” and “does not apply” as well as to refuse to answer a particular question, which led to item nonresponse in certain types of mental work. We indicate the variation in the respective sample sizes in the figures below.

The main explanatory variables in our analyses are couples’ average working hour differences, whether they have children, and whether they hold gender-egalitarian views. We capture average working hour differences with five categories (female/male partner working 20 or more hours less, 1–19 hours less than the male/female partner, partners work the same number of hours, male/female partner working 1–19 hours more, 20 or more hours more than the female/male partner). Parental status is represented by a dichotomous variable contrasting couples who have children between the ages of 0 and 17 and those who do not. Lastly, gender-egalitarian views are represented by a summative index using six items on gender norms (alpha 0.72) that have commonly been used to measure gender role attitudes in Germany ([GESIS 2022](#)) and are shown in [Appendix Table A2](#). The index is coded so that 1 represented more conservative gender attitudes, 2 represented neutral attitudes, and 3 represented more egalitarian gender attitudes.

In addition, we include the following covariates in our multivariable analyses: age in years, university education (dummy variable), and whether the respondent grew up in East Germany, West Germany, or outside of Germany, as even more than 30 years after reunification, there are still considerable cultural, institutional, and economic differences between East and West Germany ([Deuflhard 2023](#); [Lietzmann and Frodermann 2023](#); [Minkus and Busch-Heizmann 2020](#)). Individuals socialized in East Germany

Table 1. Overview of sample characteristics (weighted and unweighted distributions).

	N	Women		Men	
		unweighted	weighted	unweighted	weighted
Age	2675	51 (10.4)	46 (11.56)	54 (9.58)	48 (11.04)
% University degree	2675	42%	29%	55%	33%
% Employed full-time	2675	39%	37%	76%	79%
% Employed part-time	2675	39%	37%	11%	8%
% Unemployed	2675	18%	21%	12%	11%
% Other (e.g., parental leave)	2675	3%	5%	1%	1%
# of children	817	1.7 (.74)	1.73 (.79)	1.64 (.75)	1.54 (.66)
Age of youngest child	817	9 (5.24)	8 (5.38)	9 (5.08)	8 (5.26)
% East German	2675	29%	31%	24%	25%
Cons. gender attitudes (1–7)	2675	3.1 (1.13)	3.25 (1.15)	3.28 (1.13)	3.5 (1.12)

Mean with SD in parentheses for continuous variables.

have generally been more exposed to state-supported gender equality policies and prevailing norms that emphasize women's full-time employment—all of which may influence behaviors and practices related to the division of couples' mental work.

Sample

A total of 4211 respondents aged 23–65 participated in our study. After excluding nonbinary and unpartnered individuals, our analytic sample included 2675 observations of 1312 heterosexual, cis-gender men and 1363 women who lived in a different-sex relationship. We focus on these different-sex cisgender couples because the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work in such couplings is an important dimension of the uneven and stalled gender revolution (Bianchi et al. 2012; Daminger 2020; England 2010; Lamont 2020). Table 1 provides an overview of the weighted and unweighted sample characteristics.

Table 1 shows that 817 out of the 2675 respondents had at least one child in the household. Most respondents were employed, with men working full-time more frequently (76 percent) than women (39 percent). Unemployment rates were 18 percent for women and 12 percent for men. The average age was 51 for women, 42 percent of whom held a university degree, and 54 for men, with 55 percent holding a university degree. Older and more educated individuals were more likely to participate, which is common in survey research (Revilla and Höhne 2020; Reyes 2020). To address these biases, we applied poststratification weights in all analyses.

Analytic Strategy

In the following, we first provide a descriptive overview of the extent to which women and men in different-sex relationships in Germany engaged in the different aspects of mental work. In addition to providing evidence on the distribution of the 21 single items of our instrument, we also assess the overall distribution of mental work. To do so, we create a summary using the average proportion of tasks that were either entirely/predominantly performed by oneself, equally performed by both partners, or entirely/predominantly performed by the other partner. Moreover, we descriptively relate the distribution of mental work to the actual execution of visible unpaid work.

In the second step, we estimate linear probability models to assess the association between couples' sharing of mental work and an equal/unequal division of paid work, the presence of children in the household (yes/no), and individuals' gender role attitudes. In these analyses, we use three dependent variables—whether the tasks were entirely or predominantly performed by the female partner, by both partners equally, and (entirely or predominantly) performed by the male partner. All analyses are stratified by gender to account for the fact that a) men and women may have different perceptions of how they and their partners share the planning, organizing, and monitoring of unpaid work, and b) we surveyed individuals and not couples. To ease the interpretability of our results, we present coefficient plots in the main body of the text; full regression tables can be found in the appendix (see Appendix Table A3).

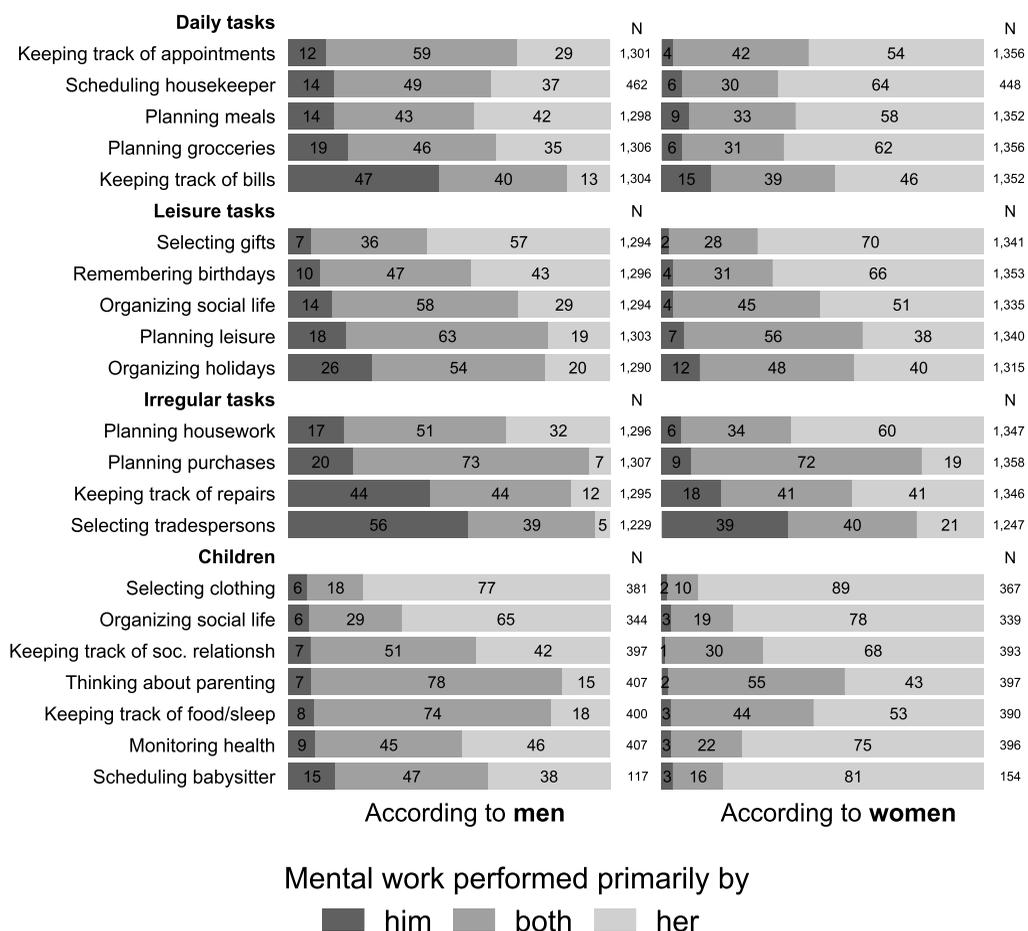


Figure 1. Distribution of mental work between women and men in different-sex relationships in Germany (weighted proportions of single tasks). *Note:* Weighted percentages of answers by different-sex couples to the question “When it comes to planning and organizing everyday matters, who takes on the following tasks in your partnership?”; the question regarding childcare was answered only by parents.

FINDINGS

Figure 1 shows the weighted proportions of the distribution of mental work across the four different family domains—childcare, leisure-time related tasks, and irregular tasks—as viewed by men (left-hand side) and women (right-hand side). Both men and women perceive men as less likely to primarily perform mental work in any of the four domains, with the notable exception of tradesperson/repair-related tasks. Interestingly, however, women and men do *not* agree on whether mental work is distributed equally between the two partners—a view held by men for 17 out of the 21 tasks under consideration—or whether mental work is primarily performed by the female partner—as reported by women for 17 out of 21 tasks.

Men predominantly think that their female partners are entirely or primarily responsible only for the mental tasks related to gift purchase and those related to childcare (clothing, playdates, and health) and perceive all other mental tasks as being distributed equally between partners. Women, by contrast, overwhelmingly perceive equal sharing in the mental work associated with leisure-time activities and holidays, larger household purchases, and parenting-related tasks, and they see themselves primarily responsible for the planning and organization of the remaining tasks (with the exception of repairs, which they attribute primarily to their male partners).

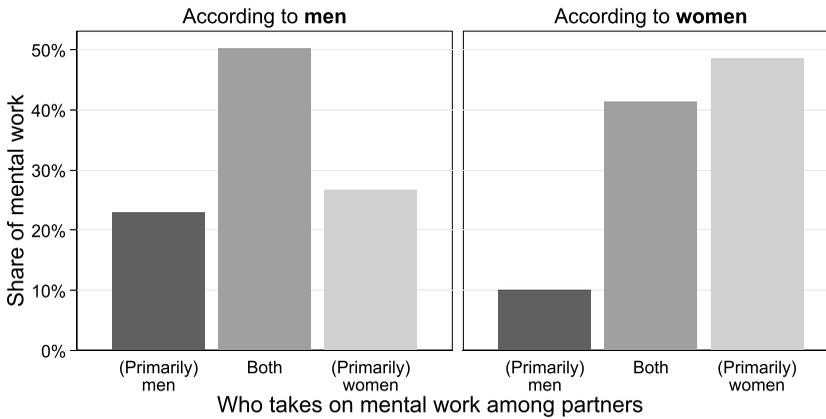


Figure 2. Distribution of mental work averaged across 21 tasks in different-sex relationships. *Note:* Weighted percentages of women and men in different-sex relationships who stated that the female partner entirely/predominantly performs the mental work, that both partners perform the mental work in about equal proportions, and that the male partner entirely/predominantly performs the mental work in their relationship; the figure above does not include childcare-related tasks. $N = 1312$ men, 1363 women.

Gender discrepancies in perceptions of who is doing more planning and organizing are particularly evident for three tasks: keeping track of bills, managing repairs, and planning purchases. Interestingly, both women and men believe they take on these responsibilities more than their partners do. One possible explanation is that these types of mental work are especially invisible—even to an individual’s partner—because they occur irregularly and may involve more cognitive effort than other types of planning and organizing—or simply because women and men may engage with different types of bills, purchases, and repairs. Moreover, these tasks may often produce less tangible outcomes and offer fewer opportunities for discussion, making it harder for each partner to see what the other one is doing.

We now turn to the overall distribution of the tasks. [Figure 2](#) synthesizes our findings from the detailed description of the distribution of different mental work domains by showing the average share of mental work across all individual tasks according to men (left) and according to women (right). The bars represent whether respondents think that men primarily performed the mental work, whether they think that both partners played an equal role in performing these tasks, or whether they think that women primarily performed the mental work.

The results shown in [Fig. 2](#) confirm what we have seen previously on a more disaggregated level: While most men believe that mental work is distributed equally between them and their female partners, most women believe that they primarily perform the mental work associated with the organization of couples’ daily lives. There are also stark differences in the extent to which women and men believe that their partners primarily perform the everyday mental work: Only around ten percent of women regard their male partners as primarily performing the mental work necessary in daily life while almost 25 percent of men think that this is the case. Likewise, while nearly one-quarter of men see their female partners as the primary invisible managers of their joint daily lives, around 50 percent of women perceive themselves as such. Among those who believe that both partners share tasks equally, we see considerably smaller discrepancies in perceptions between the sexes; around 50 percent of men believe that the mental work is shared equally, while only around 40 percent of women think so.

We also asked respondents about the distribution of *visible unpaid* work to understand how the planning and organizing of tasks are related to their actual execution. The resulting distributions, as shown in [Fig. 3](#), largely mirror those for mental work, with women stating that they (predominantly) perform five of seven tasks, whereas men perceive the task-sharing as more equal. There is notable disagreement about who manages the couple’s finances, as 39 percent of women see themselves as responsible, whereas only 16 percent see men as responsible. In stark contrast, men believe that finances are their domain (47 percent), whereas only 11 percent perceive their female partner as

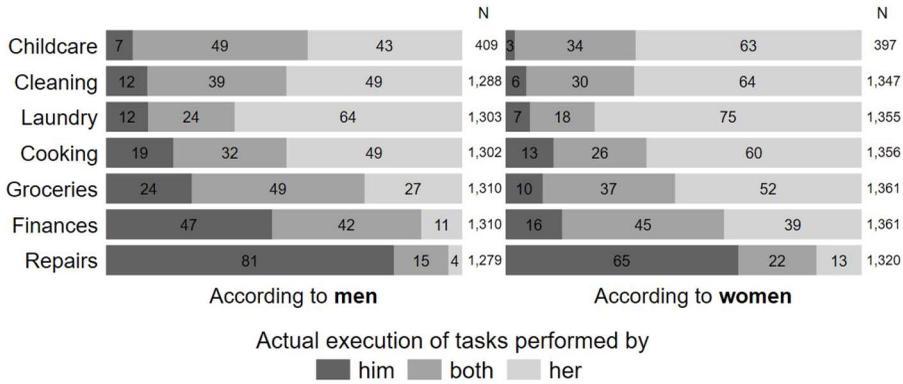


Figure 3. Distribution of visible unpaid work between men and women in different-sex relationships. *Note:* Weighted percentages of answers by different-sex couples to the question of “Who takes on the following tasks in your partnership?”; the question regarding childcare was answered only by parents.

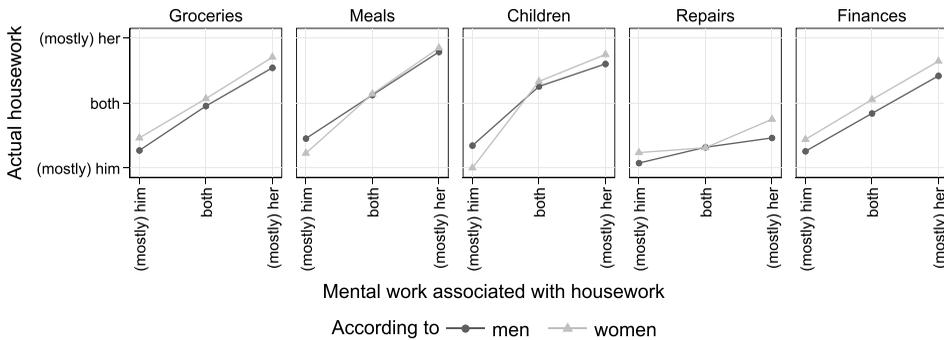


Figure 4. Comparison of mental work and visible unpaid work. *Note:* The corresponding tasks for the groceries category are “planning groceries” and “groceries.” For meals, they are “planning meals” and “cooking.” For children, they are all mental tasks related to children and “childcare.” For repairs, they are “keeping track of repairs” and “repairs.” For finances, they are “keeping track of bills” and “finances” (see Figs. 1 and 3 for the number of observations).

responsible. Repairs are the only tasks where men and women agree that they are primarily performed by men—although again to differing degrees.

Figure 4 shows the bivariate relationship between the planning and organizing of tasks and their actual execution. It shows that the two concepts are highly related, as the partner who plans and organizes the specific tasks essentially also performs them. The only notable exception is household repairs: Even though respondents perceive either both partners or primarily women as responsible for planning repairs, they report that men predominantly carry them out.

Next, we turn to the results of our multivariable analyses. To test Hypothesis 1, which posits that women and men with more equal distributions of paid work would also report a more equal distribution of mental work, we examine the predicted values for the distribution of mental work by differences in average working hours between male and female partners (Fig. 5). Differences in work hours between partners range from one partner working at least 20 hours less than their partner to at least 20 hours more than their partner. Note that there are gender differences in the overall number of respondents within each category: While more women work fewer hours than their partners (535 women vs. 154 men), more men work longer hours than their partners (610 men vs. 241 women). The number of women and men reporting similar working hours is about even (527 men vs. 558 women).

Figure 5 depicts the association between the difference in working hours between partners and the share of mental work for men and women. In general, there is a slight variation in men’s perception of the distribution of mental work by working time differences within couples. Men who work more

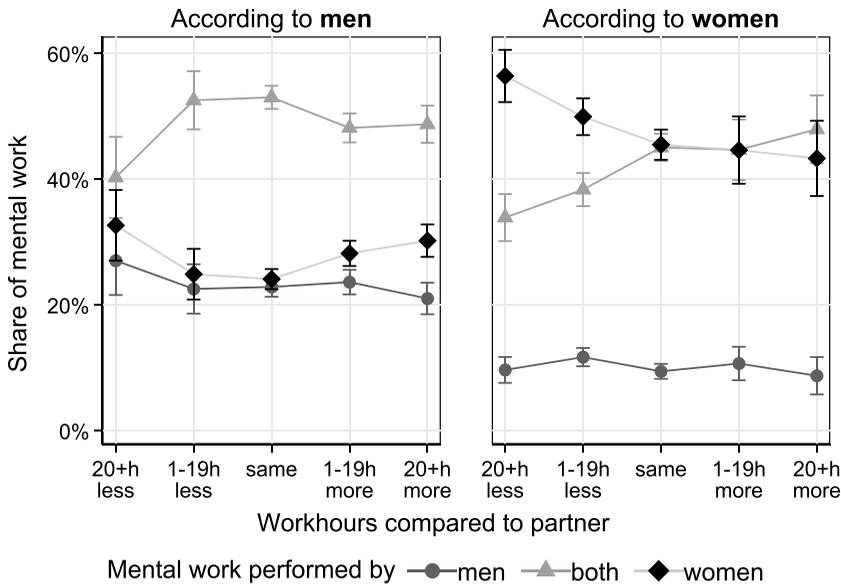


Figure 5. Distribution of mental work among men and women in different-sex relationships by (in)equality in working hours. *Note:* Results from linear regression models predicting the share of mental work based on relative work hours compared to the partner, controlling for total work hours, age, education level, east German socialization, presence of children, and gender role attitudes; separate models by gender. N = 1291 men, 1334 women.

than their partners are about 4 percentage points less likely to say that mental work is shared equally in their partnership than men who work about the same as their partners. Counterintuitively, men who work far less than their partners are more than 12 percentage points less likely to report that they equally share the mental work. Men's perceptions of the share of mental work that is (predominantly) performed by women follow a U-shaped pattern: When men work far fewer hours than women, they report that women perform more mental work, but the same applies when they work more hours than women. The share of work that men report performing does not vary significantly depending on the difference in work hours between them and their partners. Moving to women's perceptions, we see that they view their share of mental work as decreasing (from 56 percent to 45 percent) when their work hours are more similar to their partners. However, women who work more hours than their male partners do view their partners as taking on a larger share of mental work.

These findings support both the time availability and relative resource approaches, as more couples share mental work equally when they work similar paid work hours. Additionally, as men's work hours increase relative to women's, women's share of mental work also rises. However, support for the invisible manager hypothesis emerges as well: Women tend to take on more mental work when their partner works less but do not reduce their share of mental work when working more than their male partner.

To test Hypothesis 2, which suggests that parents would report a less equal distribution of mental work than childless women and men, we next examine the distribution of mental work between women and men with children under 18 in their household and those without them. Figure 6 shows that men with children report a lower likelihood of equal sharing of mental work than childless men (48 percent vs. 52 percent). Men with children perceive their partners as taking on more of the mental work than men without children (29 percent vs. 25 percent). There is no statistical difference in the share of fathers and childless men stating that they perform most of the mental work (both ~ 23 percent).

An essentially similar picture emerges for female respondents regarding the differences between parents and nonparents. The share of mothers reporting equal sharing of mental work is much lower than that of childless women (37 percent vs 44 percent). This decrease is nearly fully accounted for

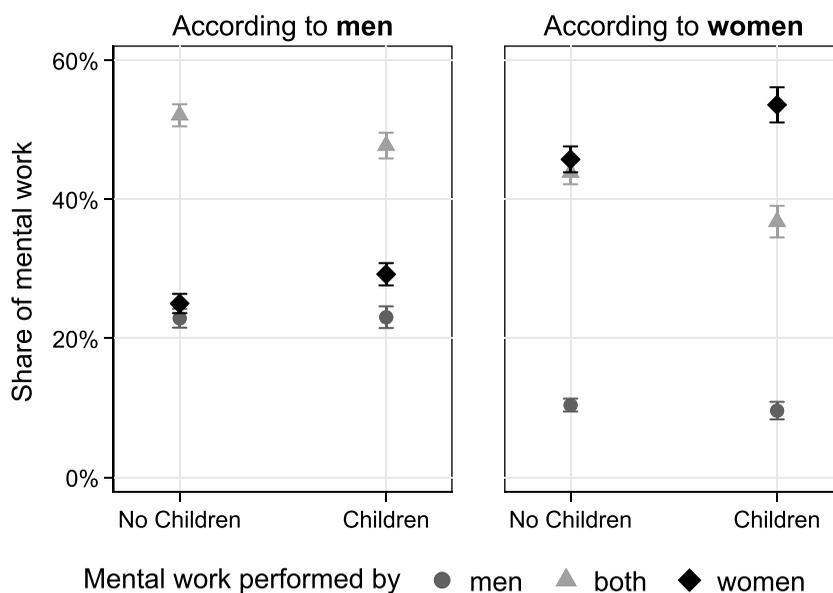


Figure 6. Distribution of mental work among men and women in different-sex relationships by parental status. *Note:* Results from linear regression models predicting the share of mental work based on the presence of children, controlling for relative work hours compared to the partner, total work hours, age, education level, east German socialization, and gender role attitudes; separate models by gender. N = 1291 men, 1334 women.

by the corresponding increase in the proportion of mothers who report doing mental work mostly alone (54 percent vs 46 percent for childless women). Notably, men and women tend to agree that parenthood does not seem to impact the share of mental work performed (predominantly) by men. Although parents and childless individuals may differ on characteristics relevant to engagement in unobserved mental tasks, this finding nonetheless provides support for Hypothesis 2, as the distribution of mental work is less equal for people with children than for those without.

Lastly, we examine the relationship between gender role attitudes and the distribution of mental work among couples (Fig. 7). Hypothesis 3 predicts that individuals with traditional gender role attitudes would report a less equal distribution of mental work than those with more egalitarian views. Consistent with this, we find a significantly lower proportion of conservative men and women stating that mental work is equally shared by both partners compared to both egalitarian men and women and neutral men and women (43 percent conservative, 52 percent neutral, 51 percent egalitarian, according to men; 36 percent, 41 percent, 43 percent respectively according to woman). A higher share of conservative men and women state that mental work is (predominantly) performed by women (29 percent conservative, 26 percent neutral, 27 percent egalitarian according to men; 53 percent conservative, 48 percent neutral, 48 percent egalitarian according to women). Conflicting with the hypothesis, the proportion of conservative men who view mental work as (predominantly) performed by men is higher than that of nonconservative men (27 percent vs. 22 percent). Women's gender attitudes are not statistically related to their estimation of the share of mental work performed by men.

However, our analytic strategy does not allow us to infer any causal relationship: Couples with egalitarian gender role attitudes might plausibly perceive (and actually have) a more equal distribution of mental work, as couples with a (perceived) equal sharing of mental work subsequently develop more egalitarian gender role attitudes.

DISCUSSION

In this study, we examined the managerial side of mental work and how couples divide the planning and the organization of household activities, including those around children, daily tasks, leisure tasks, and irregular tasks (such as repairs). By analyzing representative survey data on different-sex couples'

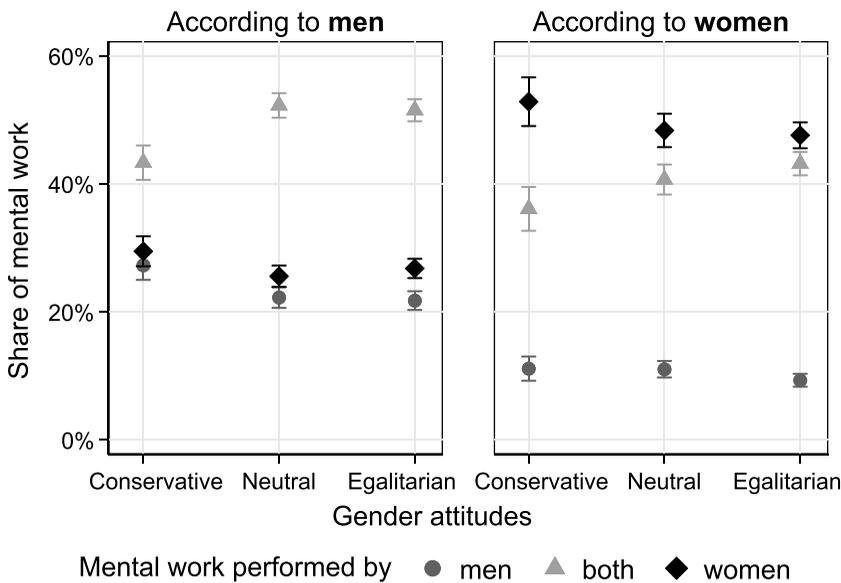


Figure 7. Distribution of mental work among men and women in different-sex relationships by gender role attitudes. *Note:* Results from linear regression models predicting the share of mental work based on gender attitudes (conservative, neutral, egalitarian), controlling for relative work hours compared to the partner, total work hours, age, education level, east German socialization, and presence of children; separate models by gender. $N = 1291$ men, 1334 women.

distribution of mental work in Germany, our study contributes to the growing body of literature on the gendered nature of planning and organizing household activities—which is a major but insufficiently understood dimension of gender inequalities.

Our analyses showed that—despite the decline of the male-earner, female-caregiver model (Deufhard 2023)—women in Germany today still bear the burden of planning and organizing the daily lives of household members. This includes tasks such as cleaning, cooking, childcare, and coordinating joint leisure activities. In contrast, men see themselves as primarily responsible for only three out of 21 organizational tasks: managing repairs, contacting tradespeople, and handling bills—none of which arise on a daily basis. In addition to highlighting great inequalities between genders, this finding also underscores the strong gendering of specific tasks, which previous research has found for couples’ division of visible household work (Craig and Powell 2018; Kan et al. 2011). These findings align with recent evidence from the United States, where similar gendered patterns of mental work were observed using a different measurement instrument in a quota sample (Weeks and Ruppner 2025). The high degree of similarity in gender inequalities in the distribution of mental work between Germany and the United States—two countries similar in terms of economic development but different in policy support for working parents and women’s labor force involvement (Hipp and Kelley 2025)—suggest that gender inequality in the distribution of mental work may reflect a universal pattern that is hard to overcome and deeply rooted in gender stereotypes and expectations.

Moreover, our results also showed a considerable imbalance in the perceived extent of inequalities in the distribution of mental work. Specifically, we found that women perceive themselves as performing most mental work (primarily) alone, while men overwhelmingly believe that both partners distribute mental tasks equally, which is in line with the results from previous studies (Harrington and Reese-Melancon 2022; Meier et al. 2006; Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023; Weeks and Ruppner 2025). This raises the question of where these differences in perceptions come from. People may believe they do more mental work than they actually do because they are naturally more aware of their efforts and contributions and do not see—due to the invisible nature of mental work—the time and effort that their partner spends planning and organizing childcare and household tasks (see Kamo 2000 for evidence on such self-perception and confirmation biases). In addition, there may be a lack

of communication about this work. The two latter points may also explain why we even see more imbalances in the distribution of mental unpaid work than in visible unpaid work in our study (see [Aviv et al. 2025](#) for similar findings).

Regarding the heterogeneities in the distribution of mental work, we tested three hypotheses, derived from the time availability ([Presser 1994](#)), relative resources ([Brines 1993](#)), and doing gender theories ([West and Zimmerman 1987](#)). These three theoretical frameworks are commonly used to analyze gender inequalities in both paid and unpaid work ([Geist and Ruppner 2018](#)). Consistent with the predictions of the time availability and relative resource theories, we find that women are more likely to see themselves as primarily responsible for mental work when they work fewer hours than their partner and that they are more likely to report equal sharing of mental work when they work more hours than their partner. However, contrary to previous research ([Winkler and Ireland 2009](#)), we find that this relationship is not linear. Even if women work more hours than men, a substantial proportion of women see themselves as mainly responsible for the daily planning of household and childcare activities (see [Treas and Tai 2012](#) and [Weeks and Ruppner 2025](#) for similar patterns for the United States). Time availability approaches and relative resource theory, however, do not predict men's perceived involvement in mental tasks. In fact, there is no or only slight variation in men's perceptions that mental work is shared equally across couples' employment arrangements (only men who work considerably less than their partners are more likely to also state that mental work is not shared equally between partners).

Likewise, and running contrary to the predictions of the time availability and relative resource perspectives, our analyses showed that when couples have children, women are even more—and not less—likely to perceive themselves as performing mental work (primarily) alone. Although this finding contradicts the predictions of rational-choice approaches to couples' division of mental work, it is consistent with a recent finding from Croatia that parenthood is associated with more mental work for women but not men ([Klasnić 2023](#)). Our study thus contributes further evidence on the traditionalizing effect of parenthood on couples' division of household work ([Baxter et al. 2008](#)).

Our findings on the distribution of mental work by individuals' gender role attitudes support the predictions derived from the doing-gender approach. When individuals hold egalitarian gender role attitudes, both women and men are more likely to report equal sharing of mental work (and are less likely to see women as primarily responsible for mental work). This suggests that doing-gender explanations outweigh rational explanations for inequality in mental work. While the doing-gender perspective ([West and Zimmerman 1987](#)) assumes that women and men constantly enact gender and are held accountable for behaving in such gender-appropriate ways, recent empirical evidence has highlighted contextual and individual-level variation ([Geist and Ruppner 2018](#); [Scarborough et al. 2019](#)) and has shown that the division of visible domestic work varies by individuals' gender role attitudes (e.g., [Grunow and Baur 2014](#); [Nitsche and Grunow 2018](#); [Schober 2013](#)). Our study extends this literature to the domain of mental work, showing that individuals with egalitarian or neutral attitudes engage in more equal sharing. Yet, a considerable proportion of women with neutral and egalitarian attitudes still perceive themselves as solely responsible for mental work. This mismatch between men's and women's perceptions, alongside the persistence of gendered responsibility among egalitarian women, marks a distinctive pattern in the division of mental work (see [Weeks and Ruppner 2025](#) for similar findings).

Before concluding this study, we want to mention a few limitations and avenues for future research. Although we selected the most essential aspects of people's daily lives to develop a standardized instrument to cover couples' division of mental work, people need to consider many more tasks than the 21 items that we identified to be the most relevant and time-consuming based on the existing literature and therefore included in our survey (see [Reich-Stiebert et al. 2023](#) for an overview). Moreover, to assess variation in the overall distribution of mental work between coupled women and men in Germany, we combined these items into one single measure without differentiating how much time, effort, and emotional energy is associated with the different planning and organizing tasks. Future research should therefore generate weighting procedures that capture this variation and extend and modify the list of items we used in our study.

Another avenue for future research involves the measurement of the absolute time individuals spend on mental and cognitive tasks related to care and household labor. In our study, we focused on the distribution of mental work within couples, as estimating the actual duration of such tasks in surveys is cognitively challenging due to the intermittent nature of mental work and the fact that it tends to be performed alongside other activities. Knowing about the absolute time individuals devote to different types of mental work, however, would shed light on the overall burden and complexity of such tasks. Future research could employ time-use methods, which are particularly suitable for capturing the fragmented and overlapping nature of mental labor, to generate these highly valuable data.

Moreover, researchers who have the opportunity to collect original data should also consider collecting more detailed socio-demographic information from respondents. Specifically, our data captured only whether respondents are currently responsible for a child under the age of 18 living in the household; we were therefore unable to distinguish between respondents who never had children and those whose children no longer live at home. The question of whether having had children at any point continues to shape the division of cognitive labor later in life may be another interesting and relevant one to answer.

Lastly, while Germany is comparable to many other rich Western democracies, our study's findings may generalize to some but not all other contexts, as Germany is characterized by high part-time rates among women, for instance (Hipp and Kelley 2025). By studying the distribution of mental work across different countries and settings that differ in labor market and policy conditions and potentially also with a refined survey instrument, researchers and policymakers can assess the conditions under which mental work is more evenly distributed among couples. Identifying—and creating—these conditions is necessary to increase equity among genders.

CONCLUSION

This study is among the first to provide generalizable findings about couples' distribution of mental work by drawing on original survey data from a national probability sample in Germany ($N = 2675$). Our analyses reveal that women in Germany overwhelmingly bear the burden of mental work and that there are significant gender discrepancies in perceptions of who does what. Men are far more likely than women to believe that both partners share mental work equally. In contrast, women tend to view themselves as primarily or entirely responsible for the planning and organization of daily family life. Additionally, women's mental work decreases when their work hours more closely match those of their partners and increases when they have children—patterns that are not observed among men. However, for both women and men, holding more egalitarian gender role attitudes is linked to perceptions of a more equal distribution of mental work.

Having generalizable information about the distribution of mental work is of great importance for researchers and practitioners interested in gender inequalities and well-being. The managerial aspects of unpaid household and childcare work are usually done “on the side,” e.g., while taking care of kids, commuting, or doing work. Multitasking, however, is associated with strain, anxieties, and reduced capacities to exercise willpower and make long-term decisions (e.g., Daminger 2019; Vohs et al. 2008; Wang et al. 2010; Wetherell and Carter 2014). Studies on the consequences of an unequal distribution of mental work within couples have, moreover, identified increased work–family conflict (Haupt and Gelbgiser 2024) and relationship dissatisfaction as further negative consequences (Ciciolla and Luthar 2019; Daminger 2019). This means that the burden and negative health- and well-being-related consequences of the already unequal distribution of mental work falls on women. Given that the physical and cognitive dimensions of unpaid work are closely related (e.g., Hjalmsdóttir and Bjarnadóttir 2021), couples may decrease gender inequalities in the distribution of mental work by changing how they divide visible household and childcare work.

SUPPLEMENTARY MATERIAL

Supplementary materials are available online at *Social Problems* (<https://academic.oup.com/socpro>) and at <https://osf.io/rg4cw>.

CREDIT STATEMENT

Conceptualization: Lena Hipp and Armin Sauermann; Methodology: Lena Hipp and Armin Sauermann; Resources: Lena Hipp; Data Curation: Armin Sauermann and Lena Hipp; Writing—original draft: Lena Hipp; Writing—review and editing: Lena Hipp, Olga Leshchenko, Armin Sauermann; Visualization: Armin Sauermann; Project administration: Lena Hipp.

Conflicts of interest: None declared.

FUNDING

The project received financial support from the German Federal Ministry of Education and Research (Grant #01UG1806 Who Cares?) and the Cluster of Excellence “The Politics of Inequality” funded by the German Research Foundation under Germany’s Excellence Strategy (EXC-2035/ 1 – 390681379).

REFERENCES

- Acker, Joan. 1992. “From Sex Roles to Gendered Institutions.” *Contemporary Sociology* 21(5):565–9. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2075528>.
- Allen, Sarah, Shirley R. Klein, and E. Jeffrey Hill. 2008. “Framing Carework Context, Processes, and Outcomes.” *Journal of the Association for Research on Mothering* 10(1):20–32.
- Arrighi, Barbara A., and David J. Maume. 2000. “Workplace Subordination and Men’s Avoidance of Housework.” *Journal of Family Issues* 21(4):464–87. <https://doi.org/10.1177/019251300021004003>.
- Aviv, Elizabeth, Yael Waizman, Elizabeth Kim, Jasmine Liu, Eve Rodsky, and Darby Saxbe. 2025. “Cognitive Household Labor: Gender Disparities and Consequences for Maternal Mental Health and Wellbeing.” *Archives of Women’s Mental Health* 28(1):5–14. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00737-024-01490-w>.
- Barnett, Rosalind C. 1994. “Home-to-Work Spillover Revisited: A Study of Full-Time Employed Women in Dual-Earner Couples.” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 56(3):647–56. <https://doi.org/10.2307/352875>.
- Barth, Alice, and Miriam Trübner. 2018. “Structural Stability, Quantitative Change: A Latent Class Analysis Approach towards Gender Role Attitudes in Germany.” *Social Science Research* 72:183–93. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2018.02.008>.
- Bass, Brooke Conroy. 2015. “Preparing for Parenthood?: Gender, Aspirations, and the Reproduction of Labor Market Inequality.” *Gender & Society* 29(3):362–85. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243214546936>.
- Baxter, Janeen, Belinda Hewitt, and Michele Haynes. 2008. “Life Course Transitions and Housework: Marriage, Parenthood, and Time on Housework.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 70(2):259–72. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2008.00479.x>.
- Becker, Gary S. 1991. *A Treatise on the Family*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Bianchi, S.M., L.C. Sayer, M.A. Millie, and J.P. Robinson. 2012. “Housework: Who Did, Does or Will Do it, and how Much Does it Matter?” *Social Forces* 91(1):55–63. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sf/sos120>.
- Blair, Sampson Lee, and Michael P. Johnson. 1992. “Wives’ Perceptions of the Fairness of the Division of Household Labor: The Intersection of Housework and Ideology.” *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 54(3):570–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353243>.
- Blome, Agnes 2017. *The Politics of Work-Family Policy Reforms in Germany and Italy*. London & New York: Routledge.
- Blood, Robert Oscar, and Donald MacCreery Wolfe 1978. *Husbands and Wives: The Dynamics of Married Living*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.
- Brines, Julie. 1993. “The Exchange Value of Housework.” *Rationality and Society* 5(3):302–40. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1043463193005003003>.
- Campaña, Juan Carlos, Jose Ignacio Gimenez-Nadal, and Jorge Velilla. 2023. “Measuring Gender Gaps in Time Allocation in Europe.” *Social Indicators Research* 165(2):519–53. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-022-03026-0>.
- Ciciolla, Lucia, and Suniya S. Luthar. 2019. “Invisible Household Labor and Ramifications for Adjustment: Mothers as Captains of Households.” *Sex Roles* 81(7–8):467–86. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-1001-x>.
- Coltrane, Scott. 2000. “Research on Household Labor: Modeling and Measuring the Social Embeddedness of Routine Family Work.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 62(4):1208–33. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x>.
- Craig, Lyn, and Abigail Powell. 2018. “Shares of Housework between Mothers, Fathers and Young People: Routine and Non-Routine Housework, Doing Housework for Oneself and Others.” *Social Indicators Research* 136(1): 269–81. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-016-1539-3>.
- Cunningham, Mick. 2001. “The Influence of Parental Attitudes and Behaviors on Children’s Attitudes toward Gender and Household Labor in Early Adulthood.” *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(1):111–22. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2001.00111.x>.

- Daminger, Allison. 2019. "The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor." *American Sociological Review* 84(4): 609–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007>.
- Daminger, Allison. 2020. "De-Gendered Processes, Gendered Outcomes: How Egalitarian Couples Make Sense of Non-Egalitarian Household Practices." *American Sociological Review* 85(5):806–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122420950208>.
- Davis, Shannon N., and Theodore N. Greenstein. 2004. "Cross-National Variations in the Division of Household Labor." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 66(5):1260–71. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2004.00091.x>.
- Dean, Liz, Brendan Churchill, and Leah Ruppanner. 2022. "The Mental Load: Building a deeper Theoretical Understanding of how Cognitive and Emotional Labor over Load Women and Mothers." *Community, Work & Family* 25(1):13–29. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2021.2002813>.
- Delaney, Caitriona, Alicja Bobek, and Sara Clavero. 2023. "It Was Too Much for me': Mental Load, Mothers, and Working from Home during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Frontiers in Psychology* 14:1–12. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2023.1208099>.
- Deuflhard, Carolin. 2023. "Who Benefits from an Adult Worker Model? Gender Inequality in Couples' Daily Time Use in Germany across Time and Social Classes." *Socio-Economic Review* 21(3):1391–419. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwac065>.
- England, Paula. 2010. "The Gender Revolution: Uneven and Stalled." *Gender & Society* 24(2):149–66. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243210361475>.
- Fuwa, Makiko. 2004. "Macro-Level Gender Inequality and the Division of Household Labor in 22 Countries." *American Sociological Review* 69(6):751–67. <https://doi.org/10.1177/000312240406900601>.
- Geist, Claudia, and Leah Ruppanner. 2018. "Mission Impossible? New Housework Theories for Changing Families." *Journal of Family Theory & Review* 10(1):242–62. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12245>.
- GESIS 2022. *GESIS Panel - Extended Edition\; Version 42.0.0 [Data set]*. GESIS, Cologne. <https://doi.org/10.4232/1.13797>.
- Greenstein, Theodore N. 1996. "Husbands' Participation in Domestic Labor: Interactive Effects of Wives' and Husbands' Gender Ideologies." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 58(3):585–95. <https://doi.org/10.2307/353719>.
- Grunow, Daniela, and Nina Baur. 2014. "The Association between Norms and Actions: The Case of Men's Participation in Housework." *Comparative Population Studies* 39(3):521–58. <https://doi.org/10.12765/CPoS-2014-10>.
- Harrington, Erin E., and Celinda Reese-Melancon. 2022. "Who Is Responsible for Remembering? Everyday Prospective Memory Demands in Parenthood." *Sex Roles* 86(3–4):189–207. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-021-01264-z>.
- Haupt, Andreas, and Dafna Gelbgiser. 2024. "The Gendered Division of Cognitive Household Labor, Mental Load, and Family–Work Conflict in European Countries." *European Societies* 26(3):828–54. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2023.2271963>.
- Hipp, Lena, Janine Bernhardt, and Jutta Allmendinger. 2015. "Institutions and the Prevalence of Nonstandard Employment." *Socio-Economic Review* 13(2):351–77. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwv002>.
- Hipp, Lena, and Kristin Kelley. 2025. "Gender Differences in Paid Work over Time: Developments and Challenges in Comparative Research." *PLoS One* 20(5):1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0322871>.
- Hjálmsdóttir, Andrea, and Valgerður S. Bjarnadóttir. 2021. "I Have Turned into a Foreman Here at Home': Families and Work–Life Balance in Times of COVID-19 in a Gender Equality Paradise." *Gender, Work and Organization* 28(1):268–83. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12552>.
- Hochschild, Arlie Russell, and Anne Machung 1989. *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.
- Hollander, Jocelyn A. 2013. "I Demand More of People': Accountability, Interaction, and Gender Change." *Gender & Society* 27(1):5–29. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243212464301>.
- Kamo, Yoshinori. 2000. "He Said, she Said': Assessing Discrepancies in Husbands' and Wives' Reports on the Division of Household Labor." *Social Science Research* 29(4):459–76. <https://doi.org/10.1006/ssre.2000.0674>.
- Kan, Man-Yee, and Kamila Kolpashnikova. 2021. "Three-Stage Transitional Theory: Egalitarian Gender Attitudes and Housework Share in 24 Countries." *Frontiers in Sociology* 6:1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fso.2021.700301>.
- Kan, Man-Yee, Oriël Sullivan, and Jonathan Gershuny. 2011. "Gender Convergence in Domestic Work: Discerning the Effects of Interactional and Institutional Barriers from Large-Scale Data." *Sociology* 45(2):234–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038038510394014>.
- Klasnić, Ksenija. 2023. "Exploring Gender Inequalities in Mental Load: A Croatian Household Study on Mental Tasks with the Largest Gender Gap." *Journal of Research Administration* 5(2):13008–25.
- Kühhirt, Michael. 2012. "Childbirth and the Long-Term Division of Labour within Couples: How Do Substitution, Bargaining Power, and Norms Affect Parents' Time Allocation in West Germany?" *European Sociological Review* 28(5):565–82. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcr026>.
- Lachance-Grzela, Mylène, and Geneviève Bouchard. 2010. "Why Do Women Do the Lion's Share of Housework? A Decade of Research." *Sex Roles* 63(11–12):767–80. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9797-z>.

- Lamont, Ellen 2020. *The Mating Game: How Gender Still Shapes How We Date*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.
- Lee, Yun-Suk, and Linda J. Waite. 2005. "Husbands? And Wives? Time Spent on Housework: A Comparison of Measures." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67(2):328–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-2445.2005.00119.x>.
- Lietzmann, Torsten, and Corinna Frodermann. 2023. "Gender Role Attitudes and Labour Market Behaviours: Do Attitudes Contribute to Gender Differences in Employment in Germany?" *Work, Employment and Society* 37(2): 373–93. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211011318>.
- Luthra, Renee, and Tina Haux. 2022. "The Mental Load in Separated Families." *Journal of Family Research* 34(2): 669–96. <https://doi.org/10.20377/jfr-743>.
- Meier, Jo A., Mary McNaughton-Cassill, and Molly Lynch. 2006. "The Management of Household and Child-care Tasks and Relationship Satisfaction in Dual-Earner Families." *Marriage & Family Review* 40(2–3):61–88. https://doi.org/10.1300/J002v40n02_04.
- Minkus, Lara, and Anne Busch-Heizmann. 2020. "Gender Wage Inequalities between Historical Heritage and Structural Adjustments: A German–German Comparison over Time." *Social Politics: International Studies in Gender, State & Society* 27(1):156–86. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sp/jxy032>.
- Moore, Lauren Renée. 2017. "Food Intolerant Family: Gender and the Maintenance of Children's Gluten-Free Diets." *Food, Culture & Society* 20(3):463–83. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15528014.2017.1288792>.
- Naujoks, Tabea, and Maik Hamjediers 2022. *Do You Think That I Should Care? Measuring Social Expectations About Cognitive Labor in Household Contexts*. OSF Preprints. <https://doi.org/10.31235/osf.io/awyr7>.
- Nitsche, Natalie, and Daniela Grunow. 2016. "Housework over the Course of Relationships: Gender Ideology, Resources, and the Division of Housework from a Growth Curve Perspective." *Advances in Life Course Research* 29:80–94. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.alcr.2016.02.001>.
- Nitsche, Natalie, and Daniela Grunow. 2018. "Do Economic Resources Play a Role in Bargaining Child Care in Couples? Parental Investment in Cases of Matching and Mismatching Gender Ideologies in Germany." *European Societies* 20(5):785–815. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616696.2018.1473626>.
- OECD 2023a. *Average Usual Weekly Hours Worked on the Main Job*. [Data set] OECD Data Explorer, Paris. https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DatasetCode=AVE_HRS.
- OECD 2023b. *Employment: Labour Force Participation Rate, by Sex and Age Group*. [Data set] OECD Data Explorer, Paris. <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=54749>.
- OECD 2023c. *Gender Wage Gap*. [Data set] OECD Data Explorer, Paris. <https://data-explorer.oecd.org/share/?token=eyJ0eXAiOiJKV1QiLCJhbGciOiJIUzI1NiJ9.eyJzdWIiOiJkMmU0NmU1OC0wNmJjLTRlRlYUWUfYUyNi1kYWFiZDEwZmM2EiLCJlbWVpbCI6Im9sZ2EubGVzaGNoZW5rb0B1bmkta29uc3RhbnouZGUiLCJqdGkiOiI1ZjliYmM1My01MzE4LTQwMWQwOTNiMjBiZGE2OWiLlCJpYXQjOjE3MjQ2NjU2NzMsImV4cCI6MmTcyNDY2NjY3M30.HUwxs-0KdsprOnUiuOuGTf5FB7004rxP-1ZaKdIGLvo&email=olga.leshchenko@uni-konstanz.de&id=d2e46e58-06bc-4eae-a526-daabd10c0f3a>.
- Offer, Shira. 2014. "The Costs of Thinking about Work and Family: Mental Labor, Work-Family Spillover, and Gender Inequality among Parents in Dual-Earner Families." *Sociological Forum* 29(4):916–36. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sof.12126>.
- Offer, Shira, and Barbara Schneider. 2011. "Revisiting the Gender Gap in Time-Use Patterns: Multitasking and Well-Being among Mothers and Fathers in Dual-Earner Families." *American Sociological Review* 76(6):809–33. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411425170>.
- Presser, Harriet B. 1994. "Employment Schedules among Dual-Earner Spouses and the Division of Household Labor by Gender." *American Sociological Review* 59(3):348–64. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2095938>.
- Reich-Stiebert, Natalia, Laura Froehlich, and Jan-Bennet Voltmer. 2023. "Gendered Mental Labor: A Systematic Literature Review on the Cognitive Dimension of Unpaid Work within the Household and Childcare." *Sex Roles* 88(11–12):475–94. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-023-01362-0>.
- Revilla, Melanie, and Jan Höhne. 2020. "Comparing the Participation of Millennials and Older Age Cohorts in the CROSS-National Online Survey Panel and the German Internet Panel." *Survey Research Methods* 14(5):499–513. <https://doi.org/10.18148/SRM/2020.V14I5.7619>.
- Reyes, Germán. 2020. "Understanding Nonresponse Rates: Insights from 600,000 Opinion Surveys." *The World Bank Economic Review* 34(Supplement 1):S98–102. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wber/lhz040>.
- Robertson, Lindsey G., L. Tamara, M. Elizabeth Anderson, Lewis Hall, and Christina Lee Kim. 2019. "Mothers and Mental Labor: A Phenomenological Focus Group Study of Family-Related Thinking Work." *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 43(2):184–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684319825581>.
- Sayer, Liana C. 2005. "Gender, Time and Inequality: Trends in Women's and Men's Paid Work, Unpaid Work and Free Time." *Social Forces* 84(1):285–303. <https://doi.org/10.1353/sof.2005.0126>.
- Scarborough, William J., Ray Sin, and Barbara Risman. 2019. "Attitudes and the Stalled Gender Revolution: Egalitarianism, Traditionalism, and Ambivalence from 1977 through 2016." *Gender & Society* 33(2):173–200. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243218809604>.
- Schober, Pia S. 2013. "The Parenthood Effect on Gender Inequality: Explaining the Change in Paid and Domestic Work when British Couples Become Parents." *European Sociological Review* 29(1):74–85. <https://doi.org/10.1093/esr/jcr041>.

- Schober, Pia S., and Silke Büchau 2022. "How Parenting Leaves Impact Parental Employment, Family Work, and Gender Norms: A Literature Review". In *Research Handbook on Leave Policy*, edited by I. Dobrotić, S. Blum, A. Koslowski, pp. 141–54. Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar Publishing.
- Statistisches Bundesamt 2023. *Gender Pay Gap*. Statistisches Bundesamt, Wiesbaden. https://www.destatis.de/EN/Themes/Labour/Earnings/GenderPayGap/_node.html.
- Syrda, Joanna. 2023. "Gendered Housework: Spousal Relative Income, Parenthood and Traditional Gender Identity Norms." *Work, Employment and Society* 37(3):794–813. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09500170211069780>.
- Thébaud, Sarah, Sabino Kornrich, and Leah Ruppanner. 2021. "Good Housekeeping, Great Expectations: Gender and Housework Norms." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50(3):1186–214. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0049124119852395>.
- Thorne, Deborah. 2010. "Extreme Financial Strain: Emergent Chores, Gender Inequality and Emotional Distress." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 31(2):185–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-010-9189-0>.
- Treas, Judith, and Tsui-o Tai. 2012. "How Couples Manage the Household: Work and Power in Cross-National Perspective." *Journal of Family Issues* 33(8):1088–116. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X11426700>.
- Vohs, Kathleen D., Roy F. Baumeister, Brandon J. Schmeichel, Jean M. Twenge, Noelle M. Nelson, and Dianne M. Tice. 2008. "Making Choices Impairs Subsequent Self-Control: A Limited-Resource Account of Decision Making, Self-Regulation, and Active Initiative." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 94(5):883–98. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.94.5.883>.
- Wang, Jing, Nathan Novemsky, Ravi Dhar, and Roy F. Baumeister. 2010. "Trade-Offs and Depletion in Choice." *Journal of Marketing Research* 47(5):910–9. <https://doi.org/10.1509/jmkr.47.5.910>.
- Wayne, Julie Holliday, Maura J. Mills, Yi-Ren Wang, Russell A. Matthews, and Marilyn V. Whitman. 2023. "Who's Remembering to Buy the Eggs? The Meaning, Measurement, and Implications of Invisible Family Load." *Journal of Business and Psychology* 38(6):1159–84. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10869-023-09887-7>.
- Weeks, Ana Catalano, and Leah Ruppanner. 2025. "A Typology of US Parents' Mental Loads: Core and Episodic Cognitive Labor." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 87(3):966–89. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.13057>.
- West, Candace, and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1(2):125–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0891243287001002002>.
- Wetherell, Mark A., and Kirsty Carter. 2014. "The Multitasking Framework: The Effects of Increasing Workload on Acute Psychobiological Stress Reactivity." *Stress and Health* 30(2):103–9. <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2496>.
- Winkler, Anne E., and Thomas R. Ireland. 2009. "Time Spent in Household Management: Evidence and Implications." *Journal of Family and Economic Issues* 30(3):293–304. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10834-009-9160-0>.
- Zoch, Gundula, and Pia S. Schober. 2018. "Public Child-Care Expansion and Changing Gender Ideologies of Parents in Germany." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 80(4):1020–39. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12486>.