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# The Relation Between Mothers' and Fathers' Parenting Styles and Their Division of Labor in the Home: Young Adults' Retrospective Reports

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This article reports on an investigation into the relation between young adults' retrospective reports of their mothers' and fathers' division of household labor (egalitarian or traditional) and parenting styles (authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, or disengaged). Participants' own gender attitudes were also tested in relation to parents' division of labor and parenting. The sample included 294 women and men ( $M = 19$ -years old) who were raised in 2-parent households and came from a range of ethnic backgrounds. When mothers' parenting was evaluated, permissive parenting was more likely among those from egalitarian households whereas authoritarian parenting was more likely among those from traditional households. When fathers' parenting was evaluated, authoritative parenting was more likely among participants from egalitarian households and disengaged parenting was more likely among those from traditional households. The association between fathers' parenting style and division of labor was specific to the division of childcare (rather than housework). Participants' gender attitudes were not related to parents' division of labor or parenting style.

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**KEY WORDS:** division of labor; household management; childrearing practices; adult offspring; fathers; mothers.

With the birth of the first child, the division of labor between couples typically becomes more traditional as women assume the primary responsibility for both household and parenting chores (Crohan, 1996; Crosby, 1991; Deutsch, 1999; Feldman, Biringen, & Nash, 1981; Steil, 1997, 2000). Although most mothers work outside of the home, comparatively few fathers are equally involved in the domestic labor. Women tend to perform the majority of housework and childcare, and are often responsible for supervising tasks and making sure that everything gets done (Buunk, Kluwer, Schuurman, & Siero, 2000; Coltrane, 2000; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Nonetheless, there has been a modest increase in men's participation in domestic labor over the years. Mothers and fathers who equally share child-

care tasks generally perform similar parenting activities (Deutsch, 1999; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992). Also, men who share childcare responsibilities tend to demonstrate better communication and listening skills compared to other men (Coltrane, 1996). Egalitarian arrangements are positively related to the quality of couples' relationships (Risman & Johnson-Sumerford, 1998). Marital communication and satisfaction, in turn, affect the quality of parent-child interactions and are related to positive experiences among children (e.g., Shamir, Schudlich, & Cummings, 2001). Thus, mothers' and fathers' division of housework and childcare has potentially important implications for the quality of parenting that children experience as well as the types of gender roles they observe (Coltrane, 2000; Coltrane & Adams, 1997; Deutsch, Servis, & Payne, 2001; Leaper, 2002; J. E. Stroud, J. C. Stroud, & Summers, 1996).

Researchers studying the division of household labor generally combine childcare and housework

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into one measure (e.g., number of hours that each family member spends doing household labor) or focus on either one or the other (i.e., housework or childcare only). According to Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992), housework and childcare activities should be considered “mutually dependent but conceptually distinct” (p. 644). Household management research shows that fathers are more likely to “help” with childcare than with routine housework activities, such as cleaning and cooking. Research on the division of specific parenting activities, however, shows that mothers remain in charge of the day-to-day childcare tasks, such as feeding and bathing, as well as of children’s emotional and physical comfort. Fathers are more likely to assume responsibilities that are more sporadic, such as playing with the children (Coltrane, 2000), and their parenting participation is often viewed as discretionary (Arendell, 1997). Thus, combining childcare and housework can blur father’s average contribution to total household labor (Coltrane, 1996; Deutsch, 1999; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). It is also important to note that fathers’ contribution to housework and childcare tasks are related in important ways. For example, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) found that men who participated in housework activities were significantly more likely to contribute to childcare activities. This finding was particularly strong for fathers of school age children, in that they were the most likely to perform both caregiving and housework tasks.

### **Relation Between Division of Labor and Parenting Style**

Mothers’ and fathers’ division of labor is likely to be related to their parenting styles. When studying parenting styles, researchers generally distinguish between affiliation and control dimensions (see Baumrind, 1971, 1991). Affiliation is defined by the quality of the parent’s emotional responsiveness to the child (e.g., warmth, sensitivity, acceptance), whereas control refers to the degree to which the parent places demands on the child (e.g., supervision, discipline practices, maturity demands). On the basis of the possible combinations of these two dimensions, Baumrind (1971, 1989, 1991) described the following four parenting styles: *authoritative* (high on both control and affiliation), *authoritarian* (high control with low affiliation), *permissive* (high affiliation with low control), and *disengaged* (low on both control and affiliation). In this study, we explored the possibility that egalitarian fathers and mothers would be more likely than traditional to be associated with the authoritative

parenting style. In addition to combining maturity demands and nurturance, the authoritative style is also characterized by an emphasis on democratic communication (Baumrind, 1991). To the extent that such democratic ideals are reflected in parents’ childrearing styles, we hypothesized that the same individuals would be viewed as having more egalitarian household arrangements.

### **Relations of Parents’ Division of Labor and Parenting to Their Adult Children’s Gender Attitudes**

According to social cognitive theory (Bussey & Bandura, 1999) and gender schema theory (Martin, Ruble, & Szkrybalo, 2002), children develop their views about gender by observing salient role models in their lives. Thus, one consequence of traditional family arrangements is that very young children associate various household tasks with gender (Deutsch et al., 2001). For example, children generally view mothers as the ones responsible for the domestic work and caregiving within the family (Stroud et al., 1996). When parents’ gender roles are more egalitarian—either as a result of mothers’ employment outside the home or fathers’ involvement in housework and childcare—children’s views about gender tend to be less stereotypical (e.g., see Deutsch, 2001; Stroud et al., 1996; Williams, Radin, & Allegro, 1992). Thus, people who grew up in egalitarian households may be more likely to have egalitarian gender attitudes than those who were raised in traditional households. Perhaps to a lesser extent, fathers’ and mothers’ combination of affiliation and control in their parenting may provide a nontraditional model that affects developing gender attitudes. In particular, fathers who are perceived as high in nurturance and other affiliative behaviors reflect a counterstereotypical image of masculinity.

### **Contributions of the Study**

This study adds to the existing literature in three notable ways. First, we examined the relation between young adults’ retrospective evaluations of their parents’ division of family work and their perceptions of their mothers’ and fathers’ parenting. Although many developmental scholars have studied the impact of different parenting styles on children’s development (Russell, Brewer, & Hogben, 1997; Stroud et al., 1996), few researchers have specifically looked at the relationship between mothers’ and fathers’ division of household labor and parenting styles. Second,

we examined childcare and housework tasks both collectively and separately. Most of the previous literature either has combined childcare and housework together or has only examined one of these forms of household labor. Finally, we looked at the perceptions of young adults rather than of children. Past research looking at the relation between parents' division of labor and their children's development has generally focused on very young children. By considering young adults, we could consider possible long-term correlates of egalitarian or traditional household arrangements on young men's and women's gender-related attitudes.

## METHOD

### Participants

Participants were 147 female and 147 male undergraduates ( $M = 19$  years) from a public university located in northern California. They identified their ethnic backgrounds as European American (55%), Latin American (19%), Asian American (13%), and other (13%). All participants grew up in two-parent households with a mother and a father. Most participants came from dual-earner families where both parents had attended at least some college.

### Procedure

This study was part of a larger project on self-concept and friendship in young adulthood. Participants were recruited from introductory psychology classes and asked to bring a friend with them. One partner from each pair was randomly selected for inclusion in the present analyses. After providing their informed consent, the two friends were asked to talk together for 5 min while being videotape-recorded. Next, each participant was placed in separate room and given a battery of questionnaires (described below). Afterward, there was an individual interview, additional videotaped conversations between the friends, and debriefing. Only data from the questionnaire phase were used in this study.

### Measures

#### *Parents' Division of Household Labor*

Participants were asked to estimate their parents' division of labor. The questionnaire stated: "Please estimate the amount that your mother and father

handled the following responsibilities at your house *when you were growing up*" (italics in original). The four areas they rated were cleaning, cooking, basic childcare during childhood, and basic childcare during adolescence. Basic childcare was defined as cleaning, feeding, and supervising. Participants were asked to respond to each question with either "completely mother," "mostly mother," "both mother and father equally," "mostly father," or "completely father." To simplify the analyses, ratings of childcare during childhood and during adolescence were averaged in the present analyses.

The parents' division of household labor was subsequently classified as either egalitarian or traditional. More specifically, separate classifications were made for the division of housework, where measures of cleaning and cooking were combined and averaged, and the division of childcare. In addition, an overall classification was based on the average of their scores in all four areas (cleaning, cooking, childcare during childhood and adolescence). There were no participants who indicated that their father did all of the housework or childcare. We labeled egalitarian those households in which respondents indicated either the father did most of the work or the work was equally divided. Traditional households were those where the mother did all of the work. Respondents who reported that their mothers did most but not all of the work were included in an intermediate group.

For parents' division of childcare, 35.1% of participants (41 women and 54 men) were labeled egalitarian households, 41.5% (54 women and 58 men) intermediate households, and 23.4% (40 women and 23 men) traditional households. For parents' division of housework, there were 24.5% (27 women and 39 men) egalitarian, 45.5% (61 women and 60 men) intermediate, and 30% (47 women and 21 men) traditional households. Finally, for housework and childcare combined, 34.5% (33 women and 49 men) of participants were from egalitarian, 31.5% (38 women and 37 men) from intermediate, and 34% (47 women and 34 men) from traditional households. In view of the homogeneity of our sample and to focus the contrast between egalitarian and traditional households, the intermediate group was dropped in the subsequent analyses.

Given that the foregoing breakdown suggested that men might be more likely than women to report coming from egalitarian households, we carried out chi-square tests crossing participant gender with household division of labor. There was a significant association specifically with regards to the division

of childcare. Men were significantly more likely than were women to report an egalitarian division of childcare by their parents,  $\chi^2(2, N = 153) = 11.82, p < .01, \eta^2 = .28$ .

### Parenting Style

Participants were asked to rate their mothers and fathers separately on various dimensions of parenting style using 10-point scales (extremely low to extremely high). The questionnaire asked the respondents: "Please rate on the following dimensions your impressions of your mother's [father's] overall parenting style while you were growing up." The pertinent dimensions were (1) warmth/affection, (2) sensitivity to your needs/understanding, (3) concerned/worried, (4) strict, and (5) demanding/challenging. We used these scales to create composite measures of affiliation and control. Ratings for warmth/affection, sensitivity to needs/understanding, and concerned/worried were combined to create a measure of parent *affiliation* ( $\alpha = .74$  for mothers,  $\alpha = .84$  for fathers), and ratings for strictness and demandingness were combined to create a measure of parent *control* ( $\alpha = .74$  for mothers,  $\alpha = .78$  for fathers).

Using a median-split technique, the affiliation and the control dimensions were used to classify each parent's style as either authoritative (high affiliation, high control), permissive (high affiliation, low control), authoritarian (low affiliation, high control), or disengaged (low affiliation, low control) following Baumrind's model of parenting (Baumrind, 1971, 1989, 1991).

### Gender Attitudes

The Attitudes Toward Gender Scale (Leaper, 1993; Leaper & Valin, 1996) is an adapted version of the Attitudes Toward Women Scale (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The questionnaire measures participants' beliefs about equal roles and rights for women and men in dating, family, work/school, and public roles. Participants' responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale from *strongly agree* to *strongly disagree*. Examples of statements include "Women should be more responsible than men for giving emotional support in the family" and "Men should express their worries and fears openly to their male friends." The interitem reliability for this scale was  $\alpha = .80$ .

## RESULTS

A series of chi-square tests were performed to examine the association between participants' perceptions of the parents' division of household labor (egalitarian vs. traditional) and their perceptions of their mothers' and fathers' parenting styles (authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, or disengaged). First, findings related to mothers' parenting style are presented, followed by those pertaining to fathers' parenting style. Within each of these sets of results, the division of household labor is examined by considering housework and childcare combined as well as by considering both types of household work separately. Furthermore, we examined the total sample as well as tested women and men separately.

For each result, we include  $\eta^2$  indices of effect size, which indicates the proportion of variance accounted by the effect. Cohen (1988) proposed that  $\eta^2$  values should be interpreted as small at .01, medium at .06, and large at .14.

### Relation Between Parents' Division of Household Labor and Mothers' Parenting Style

A chi-square test indicated significant association between type of household (egalitarian or traditional) and mothers' parenting style (authoritative, permissive, authoritarian, or disengaged),  $\chi^2(3, N = 163) = 8.59, p < .05, \eta^2 = .23$  (see Table I). A series of follow-up  $2 \times 2$  chi-square analyses were conducted to compare each parenting style to the other three combined. The analyses indicated that participants from egalitarian families were more likely to evaluate their mothers as permissive than were participants from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 163) = 4.06, p < .05, \eta^2 = .16$ . Conversely, participants from egalitarian families were less likely to evaluate their mother as authoritarian than were participants from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 163) = 6.3, p < .05, \eta^2 = .20$ .

To clarify whether the association between division of labor and mother's parenting style primarily derived from the sharing of childcare or the sharing of housework (cleaning and cooking), two more sets of chi-square tests were then conducted. No significant associations occurred between mother's parenting style and either parents' sharing of childcare,  $\chi^2(3, N = 152) = 4.58, ns$ , or parents' sharing of housework,  $\chi^2(3, N = 196) = 2.70, ns$ . Hence, the previously noted relation between parents' division of labor and mother's parenting style was not related specifically to any one form of household labor.

**Table I.** Participants' Perceptions of Their Mothers' Parenting Style in Relation to Their Parents' Sharing of Housework and Childcare

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Disengaged
<b>Egalitarian</b>				
Frequencies	27	15	24	16
% within column	56.3%	34.1%	65%	47.1%
% within row	32.9%	18.3%	29.3%	19.5%
<b>Traditional</b>				
Frequencies	21	29	13	18
% within column	43.8%	65.9%	35%	52.9%
% within row	25.9%	35.8%	16%	22.2%

Note.  $\chi^2(3) = 8.59, p < .05$ . Minimum expected frequency = 16.90.  $N = 163$ . Missing observations = 0.

Still another set of chi-square tests were performed to examine participants separately by gender. Among women, no significant association was found between parents' division of labor and mothers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(1, N = 80) = 4.96, ns$ . Among men, a marginally significant association emerged,  $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 7.06, p = .07, \eta^2 = .29$ . Specifically, follow-up tests indicated that men from traditional families were significantly more likely to evaluate their mothers as authoritarian than were men from egalitarian families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 83) = 6.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .29$ .

*Summary*

Participants from egalitarian and traditional households evaluated their mothers' parenting styles differently. Permissive parenting by mothers was more likely in egalitarian households, whereas authoritarian parenting by mothers was more likely in traditional households. Men from traditional households, compared to those from egalitarian families, were particularly likely to evaluate their mothers as employing an authoritarian parenting style.

**Relation Between Parents' Division of Labor and Fathers' Parenting Style**

Several significant findings occurred when we examined participants' perceptions of their fathers' parenting style. First, a significant association was seen between parents' division of labor and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 156) = 16.33, p < .01, \eta^2 = .32$ . However, when the domain of household labor (housework or childcare) was taken into account, we found that the previous result was specific to only one type. There was no association between parents' sharing of housework and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 187) = 4.64, ns$ . Yet, there was a sig-

nificant association between parents' division of childcare and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 144) = 29.09, p < .01, \eta^2 = .45$  (see Table II). Participants from families with egalitarian childcare arrangements were more likely to evaluate their fathers as authoritative than were those from more traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 15.47, p < .01, \eta^2 = .33$ . Also, participants from families with egalitarian childcare were less likely to evaluate their fathers as disengaged than were those from more traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 21.57, p < .01, \eta^2 = .39$ . Finally, there was a marginally significant difference suggesting that participants' from families with a more egalitarian division of childcare were more likely to evaluate their fathers as permissive than were participants from more traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 144) = 3.15, p = .07, \eta^2 = .15$ .

*Women Only*

Among women, there was not a significant relation between parents' division of labor and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 80) = 3.61, ns$ . Also, when the different domains of labor (childcare vs. housework) were considered separately for women, there was no link between parents' division of housework and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 96) = 2.52, ns$ . However, there was a significant correlation for women between parents' sharing of childcare and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 76) = 11.42, p < .01, \eta^2 = .39$ . Women from egalitarian families were more likely to evaluate their fathers as authoritative than were women from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 6.58, p < .01, \eta^2 = .29$ . Also, women from egalitarian families were less likely to evaluate their fathers as disengaged than were participants from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 4.18, p < .05, \eta^2 = .24$ . Finally, there was a marginally significant trend

**Table II.** Participants' Perceptions of Their Fathers' Parenting Style in Relation to Their Parents' Sharing of Childcare Arrangements

	Authoritative	Authoritarian	Permissive	Disengaged
<b>Egalitarian</b>				
Frequencies	31	12	16	7
% within column	70.5%	38.7%	61.5%	16.3%
% within row	47%	18.2%	24.2%	10.6%
<b>Traditional</b>				
Frequencies	13	19	10	36
% within column	29.5%	61.3%	38.5%	83.7%
% within row	16.7%	24.4%	12.8%	46.2%

Note.  $\chi^2(3) = 29.09, p < .01$ . Minimum expected frequency = 11.9.  $N = 144$ . Missing observations = 9.

indicating that women from traditional households were more likely to evaluate their fathers as authoritarian than were women from egalitarian families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 76) = 3.24, p = .07, \eta^2 = .21$ .

#### Men Only

When men were tested separately, there was a significant association between parents' division of labor (childcare and housework combined) and fathers' parenting style,  $\chi^2(3, N = 79) = 20.47, p < .01, \eta^2 = .51$ . Post hoc tests indicated that men from egalitarian families were more likely to evaluate their fathers as authoritative than were men from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 7.19, p < .01, \eta^2 = .30$ . Also, men from egalitarian families were less likely to evaluate their fathers as disengaged than were men from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 79) = 19.12, p < .01, \eta^2 = .50$ .

When the two domains of household labor were examined separately, there was no significant association between division of housework and fathers' parenting style for men,  $\chi^2(3, N = 91) = 4.63, ns$ . But there was an association between division of childcare and fathers' parenting style for men,  $\chi^2(3, N = 68) = 24.13, p < .01, \eta^2 = .60$ . First, men from egalitarian families were more likely to evaluate their fathers as authoritative than were men from traditional families,  $\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 9.23, p < .01, \eta^2 = .37$ . In addition, men from egalitarian families were less likely to evaluate their father as disengaged than were men from families where childcare arrangements were traditional,  $\chi^2(1, N = 68) = 21.81, p < .01, \eta^2 = .57$ .

#### Summary

Compared to participants from traditional households, those from egalitarian households were more likely to view their fathers' parenting style as authoritative and less likely to see their fathers as dis-

engaged. When type of household labor was taken into account, fathers' parenting style was principally associated with the division of childcare (rather than sharing of housework alone).

#### Participants' Gender Attitudes in Relation to Parents' Division of Labor and Parenting Style

Two sets of ANOVAs were performed to examine differences among respondents' gender attitudes depending on their parents' division of household labor and parenting styles. First, we performed a 2 (participant gender)  $\times$  2 (parents' division of labor) ANOVA to test whether participants from egalitarian households expressed different gender attitudes.

The analyses showed no differences between respondents from traditional and egalitarian households in term of their gender attitudes regardless of whether household labor was defined as childcare and housework combined, childcare only, or housework only. However, the analyses indicated differences between women and men participants' overall attitudes toward gender,  $F(1, 162) = 11.31, p < .01, \eta^2 = .06$ . Overall, women ( $M = 4.18, SD = .43$ ) reported more egalitarian attitudes about gender roles than men did ( $M = 3.91, SD = .57$ ).

Next, 2 (participant gender)  $\times$  4 (mothers' or fathers' parenting type) ANOVAs were performed with participants' gender attitudes. Neither the mothers' nor the fathers' parenting style was related to participants' gender attitudes as either a main effect or as part of an interaction. As in the prior analyses, participants' gender was a main effect in the analysis including mothers' parenting type and in the analysis including fathers' parenting type.

#### DISCUSSION

As noted in the Method section, men were significantly more likely than women to report having

come from egalitarian households. We consider this an interesting finding. One possibility is that the men in our sample were more likely than the women to experience egalitarian childcare arrangements. In support of this conjecture is research indicating that fathers are more likely to be involved in the care of sons than daughters (see Leaper, 2002). Alternatively, the men may have been more likely than the women to *perceive* their parents' childcare arrangements as equal. The objective reality may have been that childcare arrangements did not differ on the average for the women and the men in our sample. In an analogous manner, studies suggest that men overestimate their own contributions to labor in the home (e.g., Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, & Robinson, 2002).

Turning to our study's main focus, the findings suggest potentially important links between parenting practices and division of labor within the family. Overall, college students' retrospective evaluations of their mothers' and fathers' parenting styles (authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, or disengaged) were significantly related to how participants viewed their mothers' and fathers' division of family work. Given the correlational nature of our findings, however, we cannot infer any causal relation between the two. We propose, however, that parenting styles and the division of household labor are embedded in a larger system of individual, interpersonal, and social-structural influences (see Leaper, 2000).

Although participants' reports of their parents' division of household labor were related to perceptions of both mothers' and fathers' parenting, the associations were stronger and more robust for fathers than for mothers. Of particular note, fathers in egalitarian households were more likely than traditional fathers to be characterized as having an authoritative parenting style, whereas traditional fathers were more likely than egalitarian fathers to be characterized as having a disengaged style. To the extent that egalitarian parenting often implies more changes in the traditional role of fathers than mothers (Coltrane, 1996, 2000), it is a logical extension that the parents' division of household labor would be more strongly associated with variations in fathers' than mothers' perceived parenting.

When we distinguished between parents' sharing of housework and their sharing of childcare, it was the sharing of childcare—not of housework—that was associated with perceptions of fathers' parenting type. Existing sociological studies already indicate that fathers are more likely to participate in childcare than housework (e.g., Crouter & Manke, 1997;

Gilbert, 1993). Therefore, one might consider fathers' involvement in housework as a more sensitive indicator of an egalitarian household. However, we examined participants' perceptions of their parents' division of labor in relation to their perceptions of parenting. Therefore, from the participants' point of view, their fathers' involvement in childcare may be more salient to their perceptions of his parenting than was their fathers' involvement in housework.

It is worth underscoring that authoritative parenting was associated more with fathers from egalitarian than traditional households. Authoritative parenting is considered a "democratic" style that combines nurturance with maturity demands, and it is usually associated with higher levels of socioemotional competence in children (e.g., Baumrind, 1989, 1991). Given that previous research has suggested possible positive psychological benefits for children raised in egalitarian households (e.g., Deutsch et al., 2001), our findings suggest that the link between these factors may be mediated by the fathers' greater use of authoritative parenting strategies.

The greater likelihood of authoritative parenting among egalitarian than traditional fathers may also be viewed as consistent with research that shows that fathers who are involved in household activities tend to develop more nurturing skills (Coltrane, 1996; Deutsch, 1999; Steil, 1997). Egalitarian arrangements may then also foster authoritative parenting in fathers, in that traditional emphasis on control and power associated with men's socialization (Leaper, 2002) is balanced with the sensitivity and responsiveness associated with caregiving.

Men's familial roles have recently become a topic of increased interest among family researchers (Burton & Snyder, 2000; Coltrane, 1996, 2000; Deutsch, 1999; Deutsch et al., 2001). The present study and the work previously cited suggests that paternal involvement in family work can benefit women, men, and children. Positive outcomes of more egalitarian arrangements between mothers and fathers include better communication within the family (Shamir et al., 2001), higher marital satisfaction (Deutsch, 1999; Steil, 1997, 2000), and less stereotyped views of gender (Deutsch, 1999, 2001; Leaper, 2002).

### Participants' Gender Attitudes

In this study, participants' gender attitudes were not related to their parents' division of labor or



parenting type. On the one hand, the null result is surprising given a recent meta-analysis that indicated a small but significant average correlation between parents' and their children's gender attitudes (Tenenbaum & Leaper, 2002). Accordingly, egalitarian parents might be expected to hold egalitarian attitudes and thereby encourage them in their children. On the other hand, a couple's division of labor in the home is not solely dependent on either partner's gender beliefs, but also on their practical circumstances (e.g., Deutsch, 1999; Hochschild & Machung, 1989). Deutsch (1999), for example, found that families who could not afford to hire outside help would often develop egalitarian arrangements despite the parents reporting traditional gender ideologies. Conversely, many upper- and middle-class couples who reported egalitarian ideologies in actuality maintained traditional arrangements, in that the wife remained responsible for hiring and supervising outside help with housework and childcare.

Given the potential disconnection between parents' gender ideologies and their practices at home, perhaps the impact on their children tends to be domain specific. When parents express certain attitudes, they may influence their children to adopt similar attitudes. And when parents demonstrate particular roles in the home, they may affect the types of behaviors that their children adopt later in life. Indeed, one of the predictors of men's parental involvement as fathers is the degree to which their own fathers were involved during their childhoods (Cowan & Cowan, 1992; Cunningham, 2001).

### Limitations and Conclusion

Two limitations of our study are worth noting. First, we acknowledge that any retrospective accounts are inherently subject to inaccuracies and biases. We do not know how well participants' evaluations described their parents' actual division of labor and parenting styles. A similar limitation is associated with studies of adult attachment styles. However, as adult attachment researchers have argued, retrospective accounts of childrearing are important because they reflect current working models of relationships that guide and often predict contemporaneous behavior (e.g., Main, Kaplan, & Cassidy, 1985; Shaver & Hazan, 1994).

A second and related point is that our method of assessing participants' perceptions of their parents' division of labor was somewhat broad and imprecise. As

Deutsch (2001) commented, "shared care can mean quite different things for different families. In some, an equal division of labor means that mothers and fathers spend an equal amount of time with children, in another that the chores are shared, and in still another that parents equally tend to children's emotional needs" (p. 1017). Thus, the measures utilized in the questionnaire may not have captured fully the most relevant ways that participants' parents actually managed housework and childcare activities.

Nonetheless, our study also points to potentially interesting and important relations between the division of household labor and parenting styles. As other researchers have proposed (Crohan, 1996; Crosby, 1991; Deutsch, 1999; Feldman et al., 1981; Steil, 1997, 2000), parenting may be the key to gender equality within the family. Given the extensive research that links parenting styles to children's competence and adjustment (see Bornstein, 2002), one implication of the present study is that egalitarian parenting can also contribute positively to children's development.

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