

## Chapter 8

### Housework, intergenerational dependency and challenges to traditional gender roles

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This is a peer-reviewed pre-copyedited version of a chapter published as Craig, Lyn, and Powell, Abigail 2017 as 'Housework, intergenerational dependency and challenges to traditional gender roles', in *Multigenerational Family Living: Evidence and Policy Implications from Australia*. Editors: Liu, E., Easthope, H. 1: 93-108. Routledge, UK. Publishers version [doi.org/10.4324/9781315596266](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315596266)

#### Introduction

This chapter investigates predictors of domestic work in two-generation households in which young people aged 15–34 are co-resident with their parents. We know much about the gender division of housework among adult couples (e.g. Bianchi and Milkie 2010), and the literature on the domestic work of children and teenagers is growing (Evertsson 2006; Salman Rizavi and Sofer 2010; Miller 2012). However, the domestic work of co-resident young adults and their parents is largely unexplored (Mitchell 2004). This is a significant knowledge gap given the number of young people who co-reside with their parents (e.g. Mitchell 2004; ABS 2013), and divisions of domestic work are a marker of workload and gender equity (Craig and Baxter 2014). Using 2006 nationally representative time use data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), we address this gap by examining the domestic contribution of young adults, together with their parents' domestic work time.

#### Background

The transition to adulthood is a life stage in which young people are establishing their identity and learning to take control of their life (Erikson 1959). In western societies the transition is a

loosely defined process, consisting of a number of milestones that reflect aspects of independence and together indicate adult autonomy (Furlong 2009). Over the last century, the markers of the transition to adulthood were generally thought to include completing education, securing stable employment, leaving the family home, marrying or cohabiting and having children (Furstenberg et al. 2004; Mahaffy 2004). In recent decades achieving these milestones has become less predictable and the pace at which they are reached slower (Bell et al. 2007; Raley et al. 2007; Mandic 2008;), such that the period during which young people transition to adulthood has lengthened (Swartz et al. 2011; Hendry and Kloep 2012). Whereas during the mid-twentieth century most people transitioned to adulthood by their early to mid-20s, the contemporary transition is considered by many scholars to encompass the age range 18–34 (Furstenberg et al. 2004; Mahaffy 2004; Furlong 2009), and to be an extended period in which individuals may be independent in some contexts but not fully autonomous in others (Tanner and Arnett 2009).

The reasons the transition to adulthood is taking longer include macro-level social and economic changes such as less stable employment, low youth wages, and high housing and education costs (Furstenberg et al. 2004; Bell et al. 2007). School retention and tertiary study rates have gone up, delaying the onset of regular paid work (Flatau et al. 2003). Housing availability and affordability has diminished in many countries. In Australia, for example, national house prices have increased substantially (Richards 2008) and there is a shortage of private rental accommodation (AHURI 2011). The global economic downturn since 2008 has meant young people find it harder to get work (Bell and Blanchflower 2011) and young people's jobs are more likely to be casual, part-time and short-term (Woodman 2012; Foundation for Young Australians 2014). At the same time, state support is being reduced through policies such as limited benefit access for under-25 year olds and rising costs of higher education (Cash 2012). Such measures affect young people's life chances directly, but, importantly, also shift costs of welfare support for young adults from the state to the family (Cobb-Clark 2008; Buckley 2011).

One manifestation of these trends has been a rise in the number of households in which young people co-reside with their parents beyond the teenage years. In Australia, 21 per cent of young people aged 18–34 lived at home in 1976, increasing to 29 per cent in 2011 (ABS 2013). Leaving the parental home is also less likely to be a one-way, one-time event. In Australia more than 40 per cent of young Australians who leave home return at least once for financial, emotional or practical reasons (de Vaus 2004).

Lives of family members are intricately linked, and an obvious corollary of young people taking longer to reach full autonomy is their parents continuing to support them beyond their teenage years (Greenfield and Marks 2006; Fingerman et al. 2009; Swartz et al. 2011). Recent US research estimated that nearly a quarter of the financial cost of raising children is incurred when they are aged between 18 and 34 (Schoeni and Ross 2004). While co-residence is a form of financial subsidy, in that it is likely to save young people living expenses, it does not necessarily involve direct money transfers, and may also bring in-kind support in the form of domestic services. Multigenerational living may be driven by economic or budget considerations, but it is also a form of family solidarity. It may also allow for mutual interdependency with two-way reciprocal exchanges occurring. Thus the exchange of resources between household members and generations can include emotional or other non-financial resources of which domestic labour is only one example, and could be from younger to older as well as vice versa (Vicente and Sousa 2009; Katz and Lowenstein 2010). Family relationships are unlikely to be driven by resource exchange alone, but rather to be impacted by the solidarity of relationships between generations, reflected by behavioural, affectual, cognitive and structural dimensions of family (Katz and Lowenstein 2010).

However, nonfinancial exchange in the form of domestic labour is relatively unstudied. Although scholars increasingly argue that work–family issues should be approached from a household, rather than an individual, perspective (Bianchi and Milkie 2010; Cooke and Baxter 2010), ‘most studies of “household” divisions of labour are actually reporting “conjugal” distribution, since they discuss only the adult partners’ participation’ (Punch 2001: 803). Yet research conceptualising the domestic workload as the combined inputs of couples overlooks that many people live in larger family units. Particularly, patterns of domestic work across co-resident young adult–parent households are largely unknown (Mitchell 2004).

### **Domestic Work in Co-Resident Young Adult–Parent Households**

Contributions to domestic labour likely vary according to the particular circumstances, characteristics and resources of both parents and young people. They also likely vary across different types of domestic work. Domestic work is highly diverse, encompassing activities that need to be done daily, and/or at regular times, and activities that can be done to a more flexible timetable as and when the need arises (Sullivan 1997). Indoor activities including cooking, cleaning and laundry are generally regarded as routine and stereotypically female. Non-routine tasks such as outdoor work, household management and maintenance are more stereotypically

male, and grocery shopping, traditionally a female activity, may now be more gender neutral (Baxter 2002; Bianchi and Milkie 2010).

We expect young people and their parents to participate differently in these forms of domestic work. A qualitative US study found parents regularly prepared meals and did grocery shopping for adult children living at home, but doing their laundry was less frequent (Veevers and Mitchell 1998). This suggests that parents may do more of the regular activities that are essential to the smooth running of the household, and/or which can be done for all household members at once, while young people do domestic activities for their own self-maintenance. Young people may also do more infrequent tasks such as putting out the garbage, sweeping the path, or car maintenance than routine daily activities. Moreover, they may participate in routine activities, but only irregularly, for example cooking or cleaning sometimes but not often. To explore this, it is necessary to examine not only the amount of time spent in various domestic activities, but the frequency with which they are done.

We expect that a central characteristic explaining young people's housework contribution will be gender, because a large body of research documents gender divisions in domestic work among adults. Women do more domestic work overall, and also more of the routine and indoor tasks; men's time spent on domestic work is lower, and includes proportionally more non-routine tasks such as outdoor work and car maintenance (e.g. Bianchi and Milkie 2010). Research also finds that girls do more housework than boys, and that there are gender differences in the type of housework performed by children and teenagers (Dodson and Dickert 2004; Coltrane 2007; Salman Rizavi and Sofer 2010). Teenage daughters face greater expectations than teenage sons to contribute to domestic chores (Manke et al. 1994; Evertsson 2006), and co-resident adult sons are more likely to report receiving domestic services than daughters (Mitchell 2004). This seems particularly so in families with more traditional attitudes, including those from cultural backgrounds with more tightly defined gender roles (Mahaffy 2004; Mitchell 2004). We expect the influence of gender to be pervasive, with differences in associations between gender, domestic work and factors including young people's age, time availability, household demand and resources, described below. For this reason, we stratify our multivariate analyses by gender.

We are particularly interested in whether and what young people contribute in terms of domestic work, how this may be associated with mothers' and fathers' amount and composition of domestic work, and how this may challenge traditional gender divisions, if at all. For example, do the same characteristics that predict young people contribute more to domestic

work also predict that mothers and/or fathers do less? In other words, do mothers' and fathers' contributions to domestic work decrease if young people contribute?

## Method

We analyse data from the ABS 2006 Time Use Survey (TUS), a nationally representative survey of the population of Australian households, which provides the most recent time use data in Australia. To a detail level of five minute intervals, over two consecutive days, all individuals aged 15 years and over in sampled households are required to complete a time-diary. This means we can analyse the time use of both young people and their parents in matched households. We exclude three-generation households and those in which there is more than one family unit. The final analytic sample is 593 households, among which there are diary records for 555 mothers, 462 fathers and 828 young people aged 15–34 years. Most individuals have diary entries for two days, but some complete the diary on only one day, providing a total of 1,624 diaries from young people. A sample description is given in Table 8.1.

### *Dependent Variables*

Our interest is in *domestic work*, which includes *food preparation* (e.g. cooking, clean-up, setting the table); *laundry and cleaning* (e.g. washing, ironing, sorting clothes, wet and dry housework); *outdoor work* (e.g. gardening, animal care, cleaning grounds, pool care); *household maintenance* (e.g. home improvements, making furniture and furnishings, car care); *household management* (e.g. paperwork, bills and budgeting, recycling and disposing of rubbish) and *communication and travel* associated with domestic work as well as the related activity of *purchasing consumer goods* (buying groceries, food etc.). We separately analyse the routine tasks of i) *food preparation*, ii) *laundry and cleaning*, iii) the sum of *non-routine activities* (outdoor work, household maintenance, and household management), and iv) *grocery shopping*.

### *Analysis Plan*

We use multivariate regression (OLS) models to examine associations between each type of domestic work and young people's, parents' and household characteristics. Because gender is central to the performance of housework (Sayer 2005), and implicated in the pace of achieving transition to adulthood (Mahaffy 2004) and the likelihood of being co-resident with parents

(Mitchell 2004), we run our models separately by gender for both generations. Analysis is limited to households where at least one person participated in the domestic work of interest (i.e. household total is greater than zero).

We enter *sex of the young person* (female=1) and *age of the young person* (15–19/20–24/25–34). Young people aged 15–19 years are the base category because it is most age-appropriate for them to be living at home, still be studying and not be self-sufficient (Fingerman et al. 2009). Teenagers are most likely to be recipients of parental domestic services, since co-residence in the teenage years is most usual (Settersten et al. 2005) and older co-residents may be expected to contribute more to the running of the household. The amount of time spent in domestic labour is, in part, dependent on how much time people have available and what other demands they have on their time (Gager et al. 1999). As indicators of time availability, we enter the young person's *current main activity* (studying (omitted)/working/neither working nor studying). We also enter parent's *employment status* (mothers: employed full-time (omitted)/part-time/not employed; fathers: employed (omitted)/not employed or employed part-time), since mothers' employment status is known to be associated with their own time spent of domestic work (Craig and Mullan 2009) and some studies have shown that children and teenagers do more domestic work with stay-at-home, rather than employed, mothers (Salman Rizavi and Sofer 2010). We do not use part-time employment as a separate category for fathers because the overwhelming majority of employed fathers have full-time status. Because family structure may impact on young people's domestic contribution (Gager et al. 1999; Bonke 2010; Miller and Bowd 2010) and indirectly on parents' time availability (Craig 2006; Craig and Mullan 2011) we control for relationship status of parents (couple (omitted)/single).

As indicators of *household resources*, we enter *equivalised household income* (low/middle (omitted)/high). Higher household income may be associated with more material assistance to grown children (Schoeni and Ross 2004) and less domestic work since it can facilitate domestic outsourcing (Craig and Baxter 2014). Equivalised income takes into account the number of people in the household. Household income groups were based on the full ABS samples across the survey years. The bottom three deciles were classified as low income, the top three as high income and the remainder as middle income. We enter mothers and fathers' *education* (no tertiary degree (omitted)/tertiary degree), as it could be related to both household resources and gender attitudes (Baxter 2002; Schoeni and Ross 2004). As indicators of *household demand* we enter the *number of young people aged 15-34* (1(omitted)/ 2 or more) and whether there are *children aged less than 15 years* in the household (yes/no (omitted)). To capture ethnicity we enter whether the household is from a *non-English speaking background* (NESB) (yes/no

(omitted)) because these households may have more traditional gender ideology and household time allocation (Mitchell 2004; Craig 2007). We also control for whether the household is in an urban (omitted) or rural location, because rural households may have greater levels of outdoor work (part of our non-routine activities) in particular.

## **Results**

### *Descriptive findings*

A sample description is presented in Table 8.1. A higher proportion of co-resident young people are male than female, and most who co-reside are teenagers, rather than aged 20–24 or 25–34. Half of the co-resident young people are studying, 38 per cent are working, and 14 per cent are neither working nor in education/training (NEET). The proportion of co-resident young people who are NEET is larger in older age groups, supporting research which suggests it is a factor in co-residence beyond the more normative teenage years (Settersten and Ray 2010).

INSERT TABLE 8.1 HERE

The descriptive findings also show rates of participation in domestic work and the mean number of minutes per day young men and women, and mothers and fathers spend on each domestic activity. Overall, it illustrates that mothers' participation in domestic work is highest; 97.7 per cent of mothers responding to the survey did at least some domestic work on the diary day. This is compared to 85.3 per cent of fathers, 68.9 per cent of young women and 51.9 per cent of young men. Mothers also spent much more time in domestic work on average: 219 minutes per day, compared to 121 minutes per day for fathers, 46 minutes per day for young women, and 52 minutes per day for young men. This indicates strongly that there are both gender and generational differences in domestic labour, such that the older generation (parents) and women are more likely to carry out domestic work and spend longer on it than the younger generation and men. There are similar patterns across the specific domestic activities we examine. However, it is worth noting that fathers and young women have similar rates of participation in laundry and cleaning activities (although amount is greater for fathers). The smallest gender and generation differences are for grocery shopping, with similar rates of participation across the board, and for non-routine domestic activities. Although female participation in non-routine activities is slightly higher than males in both generations, men average longer in these activities than women, with a more substantial gender difference in the older generation. This is

consistent with previous research that suggests outdoor work and maintenance are more likely to be done by men, in part because these tasks are more time-flexible and sporadic than routine domestic activities (Craig and Baxter 2014).

### *Multivariate analysis*

We now turn to our multivariate analysis to examine factors that are associated with the time spent by parents and young people in domestic activities. These results can be found in Tables 8.2 and 8.3.

We found that *young people's gender* only mattered for fathers' time. Fathers were predicted to spend 4.9 minutes per day less in food preparation, 10.8 minutes per day less in laundry and cleaning and 4.3 minutes per day less in grocery shopping, if the young person was female. Young people's gender had no association with mothers' time.

INSERT TABLE 8.2 HERE

Young people's domestic contribution differed slightly by how old they were, but the only differences were between the 15–19 year age group and 25–34 year age group. Young women aged 25–34 did more food preparation and non-routine activities than young women aged 15–19 (15.6 minutes per day and 19.2 minutes per day respectively), and young men aged 25–34 did more food preparation than young men aged 15–19. They were estimated to do 10.7 minutes more per day, additional to the 10.8 minutes estimated for the base category 15-19 year olds. However, young people's age showed little corresponding association with parents' domestic work time, with the exception that fathers of young people aged 25–34 spent 17.4 minutes per day less on laundry and cleaning than fathers of young people aged 15–19.

Young people's time availability was not significantly associated with the time either they or their parents spent in most domestic tasks. The only exception to this was that NEET young men spent longer on food preparation (16.6 minutes per day) and non-routine activities (30.2 minutes per day) than young men who were studying.

Parents' time availability was more related to their own time in domestic work than with their children's, with some exceptions. Fathers who were not employed full-time spent significantly longer than other fathers in food preparation, laundry and cleaning, and non-routine activities (16.5, 36.0, and 34.4 minutes per day respectively). Mothers and young people's time was not associated with fathers' employment status, with the exception of mothers' time grocery



shopping. Mothers spent an average 10.4 minutes per day less on grocery shopping if their spouse did not work full-time compared to if they did. Mothers' time availability and employment status had a greater association with time use than did fathers'. Part-time employed and not-employed mothers spent significantly more time in food preparation, laundry and cleaning, non-routine activities and grocery shopping than employed mothers. Fathers were found to spend less time on laundry and cleaning if their spouse worked part-time compared to full-time (20.3 minutes per day) and less time on food preparation if their spouse was not employed compared to employed full-time (9.2 minutes per day). Interestingly, young women were found to spend less time on laundry and cleaning and non-routine activities if their mother was not employed (7.7 and 14.1 minutes per day respectively), while young men were found to spend significantly more time on non-routine activities if their mother was employed part-time rather than full-time (7.3 minutes per day).

Rather, associations were concentrated in the older generation. Parents' education was associated with fathers doing less laundry and cleaning work (12.8 minutes per day) if they had a degree compared to if they did not and more time in food preparation if their spouse had a degree compared to if they did not (7.4 minutes per day). The latter aligns with a recent study showing that higher male childcare is associated with their wives', rather than their own, higher education (Gauthier and DeGusti 2012). With regard to cross-generation effects, sons were found to spend more time on grocery shopping if their father had a degree (5.9 minutes per day). There was no association with daughters' time.

INSERT TABLE 8.3 HERE

With regard to other household characteristics, these were largely found to have a greater association with parents' domestic work time than young people's. In single- rather than two-parent households, mothers spent less time on laundry and cleaning and grocery shopping (21.3 and 10.3 minutes per day respectively) and fathers spent less time on grocery shopping (9.6 minutes per day). There was no association between having children aged less than 15 years old in the household and parents and young people's domestic work. Having two or more young people (aged 15 or older) in the household, compared to only one, was associated with more laundry and cleaning time for fathers (13.8 minutes per day), but less time in grocery shopping for both mothers and fathers (4.0 and 3.5 minutes per day respectively). Young women also spent less time on non-routine activities if there were two or more young people in the household.

Being in a NESB household, compared to an English speaking household, had a number of associations with time spent on domestic work. Specifically, mothers from NESB households spent more time on food preparation (16.5 minutes per day), but less time on non-routine activities (12.7 minutes per day). Fathers from NESB households were associated with spending less time on laundry and cleaning (21.1 minutes per day). Young women and men from NESB households averaged less time on non-routine activities (10.5 and 13.8 minutes per day respectively), and young men also averaged less time on laundry and cleaning (10.5 minutes per day). Being from a rural rather than urban location was associated with mothers spending more time in food preparation and non-routine activities (18.8 and 26.7 minutes per day respectively). Finally, being in a low income household was associated with fathers spending less time on non-routine activities (20.1 minutes per day), compared to those in middle income households. Interestingly, being in a high income household was associated with young men spending less time on non-routine activities compared to those in middle income households (11.1 minutes per day).

## **Discussion**

Housework and how it is divided within families are important indicators of equity and quality of life. This study showed that parents and young people's time in domestic tasks differed in both frequency and duration. Parents did domestic tasks more often, and for longer, than young people of the same gender. Mothers did most tasks more frequently, and for longer, than either fathers or young people, suggesting that 'routine' tasks in particular are regular daily responsibilities for mothers only, with both fathers and young people of both genders more occasional participants. Notwithstanding, young women did domestic work tasks more frequently than young men. These findings support the extensive literature demonstrating the gendered nature of domestic work.

The main focus in this chapter was identifying the factors that predict more or less domestic work among young people and co-resident parents, with a particular interest in identifying characteristics that affected both generations. Since age norms strongly influence parental expectations of young people (Mahaffy 2004; Settersten et al. 2005), we anticipated those co-resident at older ages would contribute most to the running of the household. For both young men and young women, food preparation was higher among 25–34 year olds than 15–19 year olds; and non-routine activities were higher among older young women. However, we found little evidence that this higher time by older young people relieved their parents of domestic work, with *positive* associations between mothers' food preparation and having a 25–34 year

old co-resident. It could be that such activities become more pleasurable as children grow older, and all members of families with an interest in food preparation do more of it, perhaps cooking together. Alternatively, when young people are older, household members may be increasingly cooking for themselves but not for others in the family, thus doubling up on household effort. In any event, the implication is that older young peoples' domestic work does not save parents' time. The only indication of young people's domestic work off-setting parents' was in relation to laundry and cleaning work, with fathers' predicted to spend significantly less time in this activity if their child was aged 25–34. However, although young women and men were predicted to spend more time on laundry and cleaning if they were older, this was not statistically significant. Similarly, young people's time availability through their employment/student status had more associations with their own domestic time than with their parents'.

On the other hand, there were some *parental* characteristics that were associated with apparent trade-offs between parents and young people. Mothers' time availability was associated with housework variation in the younger generation: sons spent slightly more time on non-routine tasks if their mother was employed part-time rather than full-time. With mothers not in employment, rather than employed full-time, daughters spent less time in non-routine tasks and laundry and cleaning work. Fathers' employment status showed no associations with young peoples' domestic work. Overall, young people's domestic work time was slightly more sensitive to fathers' than to mothers' characteristics. This is perhaps because both fathers and young people's domestic contributions are more contingent than mothers (McMahon 1999; Bianchi et al. 2000; Connell 2006).

Accordingly, previous research has established that adult women's housework is more responsive to family characteristics than men's (e.g. Sayer 2005). We expected the same would apply to co-resident young women, but found little evidence to support this. Most household or parental characteristics that predicted variation did so for young people of both genders. That is, although gender differences in absolute amount of time were wide, factors associated with divergence from average patterns were broadly similar for young men and young women.

Overall, this study suggests that young people contribute only marginally to domestic labour in co-resident households. This may be due to taken-for-granted assumptions about housework, such that it is thought appropriate that domestic services flow down the generations. It may be difficult for parents, particularly mothers, who are predominantly the primary carers, to adjust from doing everything for children to expecting them to take over some net responsibility for domestic tasks (Kloep and Hendry 2010). Similarly it may be difficult to increase adult

children's contribution to the household chores, if this has not been the norm when they were younger. If an indicator of adulthood is taking care of oneself and others in the household, this study suggests that it is not attained by co-resident young people in two-generation households. Rather it suggests that there is continued domestic dependency, even among older co-resident young people. The findings also show that gender continues to be central to the division of domestic labour beyond couple relationships. We conclude that gender and generation are both important and outweigh the power of other explanations of differences in domestic contribution such as time availability and relative resources.

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**Title:**

Housework, intergenerational dependency and challenges to traditional gender roles

**Date:**

2017-03-03

**Citation:**

Craig, L. & Powell, A. (2017). Housework, intergenerational dependency and challenges to traditional gender roles. Liu, E (Ed.). Easthope, H (Ed.). Multigenerational Family Living: Evidence and Policy Implications from Australia, (1), pp.93-108. Routledge.

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