

Majority of young women and men prefer egalitarian relationships, study shows

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The majority of young women and men today would prefer an egalitarian relationship in which work and family responsibilities are shared equally between partners if that possibility were available to them, according to a new study from the University of Texas at Austin and the University of California-Santa Barbara.

The study, to be published in the February issue of the *American Sociological Review*, was co-authored by David S. Pedulla, an assistant professor of sociology and a faculty research associate in the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin, and Sarah Thébaud, an assistant professor of sociology and a faculty research associate in the Broom Center for Demography at the University of California-Santa Barbara.

In a survey experiment conducted with a nationally representative sample of unmarried, childless men and [women](#) between the ages of 18 and 32 in the United States, the researchers asked respondents how they would ideally like to structure their [relationship](#) with a future spouse or partner in terms of balancing work and family life.

The study finds that when the option is made available to them, the majority of respondents—regardless of gender or education level—opt for a relationship in which they would share earning and household/caregiving responsibilities equally with their partner. Additionally, the study finds that if [workplace policies](#) that support work-family balance, such as subsidized child care, are in place, women are even more likely to prefer an egalitarian relationship and much less likely to want to be the primary homemaker or caregiver.

"This research highlights an important disjuncture between the ideals and preferences of [young men](#) and women and the workplace policies and practices that are currently standard in the United States," Thébaud said.

These findings also shed light on the factors contributing to persistent gender inequality and the ways in which government and organizational policies could be redesigned to improve the lives of young men and women.

"Our study provides compelling evidence that if policies such as flexible scheduling, parental leave, and subsidized child care were universally in place, women would be even more likely to want an egalitarian relationship with their partner and much less likely to want to be primarily responsible for housework and childcare," Pedulla said. "These findings offer new insights that may be useful in guiding policymakers and organizations that are interested in reducing gender inequality and improving the work and family lives of young [men and women](#)."

The findings from this study also contribute new insights in the context of recent public debates about whether women should "lean in" and whether they can "have it all."

"A key implication of this research is that men's and women's current work-family arrangements are often suboptimal and result from a particular set of unsupportive workplace policies and practices," Thébaud said. "What our study helps to show is that if we were to change the workplace policy environment, we would likely see changes in how people express their ideal preferences for balancing work and [family life](#)."

Provided by American Sociological Association

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