

Thanksgiving gender roles aren't as stuffy as stereotypes suggest, survey finds

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Penn State Abington students found that preparing for and serving Thanksgiving dinner can be a source of tension within families. Credit: cottonbro studio/Pexels.com

A survey of almost 600 people by three Penn State Abington students found that there was little difference between reported levels of involvement of women or men in tasks associated with preparing for and hosting Thanksgiving. But both men and women responded that planning for the holiday was a source of family tension.

Students Kyleigh Byers, a senior majoring in psychological and social sciences, Emma Jamison, a junior majoring in criminal justices, and Sophia Montany, a junior majoring in psychology, said they were surprised by the results of their study, titled "Cooking, Cleaning and Contributions: Exploring Gendered Division of Labor in Thanksgiving Family Celebrations." Beth Montemurro, distinguished professor of sociology and their faculty adviser, agreed. One possible explanation may be the nature of surveys—participants tend to be self-selecting.

"We think that individuals may have taken the survey if they were involved in planning or hosting Thanksgiving and those who were not involved, did not take it," Montemurro said. "This could explain why we did not see anticipated gender differences. We also noted that individuals may have answered based on what they did in their household, rather than what they did as individuals."

The survey focused on age and [gender differences](#) during Thanksgiving in terms of labor such as planning, preparing, cooking, cleaning and communication with friends and [family](#), as well as feelings associated with the tasks.

Despite reporting a nearly equal division of labor, many participants said the holiday is a source of tension in their families. For those over age 40, 32% of men and 28% of [women](#) agree that Thanksgiving caused family stress, and 53% of men and 38% of women under 40 reported cited the holiday as a source of strain.

Among the findings:

- Women over the age of 40 felt that they could plan Thanksgiving better than their partner, but women under age of 40 said that their work is more appreciated by their partner.
- Of the people who took the survey, 96% were involved in planning, and 61% of men and 65% of women said they enjoy making the arrangements for Thanksgiving.
- 59% of men and 47% of women said they spent more than 10 hours preparing for Thanksgiving.
- There was no gender difference for enjoyment of cooking for Thanksgiving more than daily meal preparation.

The students collected the information online from individuals ages 25 through 75 who were in a [committed relationship](#) of at least three years and celebrate Thanksgiving in the United States. Of the respondents, most were between the ages of 30 and 39 years old, with nearly 90% self-identified as white/Caucasian.

Montemurro said previous literature regarding women and kinkeeping—the emotional and physical labor of familial maintenance beyond physical necessities—inspired the research questions.

"The idea of women's responsibility for maintaining social networks and recognizing milestones in family members' lives stayed with me, and I always thought it would be great to do an updated study," she said.

"Kyleigh, Emma and Sophia all took my honors Sociology of Gender course, and I recruited them for the Abington undergraduate research program. We talked through topics related to gendered networks and division of labor, which eventually led to the development of this study."

She said she plans to work with the students to gather more information and possibly publish it after completing additional data analyses while

controlling for additional factors like income compared to partner's income and work hours.

The students presented their [survey](#) results at the Eastern Sociological Society Annual Meeting in Baltimore earlier this year.

Provided by Pennsylvania State University

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