

Battle of the Sexes: Study Reveals Married Men Lag Behind in Household Chores

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A woman shouldn't be surprised if the man she's lived with suddenly stops taking out the trash or putting away the dirty dishes after they get married. The results of a recent international study conducted by researchers at North Carolina State University and George Mason University give credence to wives' complaints that their husbands don't do their fair share of work around the house.

Based on data from more than 17,000 respondents in 28 countries, researchers found that live-in boyfriends perform more housework than married men because cohabiting couples tend to split housework more evenly than married couples. After marriage, however, women take on a larger portion of household chores. Most studies of housework suggest that on average married women do about twice as much housework as their husbands even after controlling for employment status and other factors.

The results of the study are published in the September edition of the *Journal of Family Issues*, and are based on research by Dr. Theodore Greenstein, professor of sociology at NC State, Jennifer Marks, a graduate research assistant in sociology at NC State, and Dr. Shannon Davis, assistant professor of sociology at George Mason University.

In marriage, there are a lot of expectations about what husbands and wives are supposed to do," Greenstein says. "Cohabiting couples seem to be a little more free to divide housework the way they want to divide it, rather than the way society expects them to divide it. I think that's one of

the reasons why the traditional gender allocations of housework aren't nearly as strong in cohabiting couples as they are in married couples."

The findings suggest that marriage alters the division of labor in a household, even when men and women share egalitarian views on gender roles. In analyzing the effect of gender ideology on housework among couples, researchers found that perspectives on gender more greatly impact cohabiting couples than married couples. Egalitarian views on gender, which see men and women as equal, generally result in a more equal distribution of housework, a common characteristic found among cohabiting partners. In marriages, however, husbands report doing less housework than their wives even if the couple has egalitarian views on gender.

Researchers say the differing dynamics of cohabitation and marriage may result in how egalitarian or traditional beliefs are expressed among men and women at different stages of the relationship. For example, traditional norms and societal expectations regarding marriage may lead to a behavioral shift regarding housework once a couple gets married. Although the study did not examine couples who made the transition from cohabitation to marriage, the findings raise important questions regarding the relationship between cohabitation and marriage.

It's important to understand what effects cohabitation has on couples if we are going to understand how marriage works in the 21st century," Greenstein says. "Because greater percentages of people who get married have cohabited before they get married, we want to find out how cohabitation affects the way a marriage is structured later on."

Source: NC State

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