Fair Distribution of Domestic Labor

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Abstract

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This thesis aims to identify the reasons underlying unfair division of domestic labor and find a solution to increase equal distribution of housework. What makes women feel more responsible to do more housework than their male partners despite their equal professional status and income? Is it due to gender preferences or gender traits? Is time availability and less income a factor?

In this thesis found that gender norms and expectations continue to put more burden on women's shoulders. Men and women grow differently which makes them develop different identities. Also, some life transitions such as having a new child increases these expectations.

Based on initial research, the research question was defined as how might we design an interaction to balance fair division of domestic labor? Considering gender norms are shaped in childhood and rooted in education, the solution is to focus on behavioral changes, especially in early childhood.

According to the research findings, a couple of solutions were developed, and rough prototypes were made. The final product is an interactive book named Our Beautiful Day; it was designed for toddlers and preschoolers age group to expose them to some simple, including routine and non-routine, housework they all can do, regardless of their gender. Our Beautiful Day is trying to change gender roles as children's early exposure to housework helps them develop their attitude towards ungendered and fair division of housework. In other words, Our Beautiful Day is trying to change the process of internalization and socialization of gender norms in the early stage of life.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Historically and traditionally men are accepted in society as breadwinners and women are accepted as caregivers. Although the gendered division of paid labor has become more equal in recent years, still there is a huge gap in the division of unpaid domestic labor which depends on many factors such as age, race, culture, number of children. According to the findings in both desk research and interviews, countries with progressive gender culture are more successful in reducing traditional gender roles in society. Education, income, and professional occupation play a significant role in reducing gender stereotypes in one's social life but not in individuals' private life. More equal distributions of paid work by gender have not yet led to fair distributions of unpaid domestic labor, even in countries with a progressive national culture.

Research has shown that women mostly are responsible for doing routine or female-typed housework. Routine housework needs to be done daily and includes tasks such as cooking and cleaning. These tasks are urgent, time sensitive, and cannot be postponed. Undoubtedly, men's contribution in doing domestic work has increased in recent years, however, they mostly tend to do non-routine chores such as maintenance, and outdoor tasks. Non-routine housework is not daily, time sensitive, or urgent. Considering time and availability, the tendency to do non-routine housework gives men more choice over the task they want to perform.

Chapter 2: Background

Thébaud et al. (2019) believes that "gender remains a key predictor of housework in modern society." Studies show that gender is an important factor in sharing housework chores. For instance, Civettini (2016) argues that gender attributions and stereotypes influence the amount of housework couples share. According to Civettini, women with higher stereotypically masculine traits tend to do less housework relative to women who express lower levels of masculinity. On the other hand, men with higher stereotypically feminine traits have a tendency to take on a greater share of housework than men with lower levels of stereotypically feminine traits. Housework inequality is rooted either in gender itself or correlated to other factors such as income or paid hours. Whoever has more time availability or makes the least amount of money should do the most housework. According to Thébaud et al. (2019):

> Notably, when a relatively clean room is evaluated, female room occupants are held to higher standards of cleanliness, are believed to suffer more negative social consequences when they do not meet those standards and are generally deemed more responsible for housework across a variety of work–family arrangements than their male counterparts.

Similarly, Fahlén (2016) argues that "the division of housework remains highly gendered with women bearing the lion's share of housework and childcare. Although the gender gap has diminished over time, this downward trend is mainly the result of women decreasing their share of unpaid work, rather than men increasing their share." Also, Fahlen's research indicates women in dual-career families contribute less to housework than dual-earners. This is not because men have more of a tendency to do housework; in

fact, women outsource housework and pay a third person to come and do the chores. Surprisingly, Fahlén (2016) found that "where the woman has the higher income or employment status yet is still performing the majority of the housework." Based on Fahlén's (2016) findings, "men's unpaid work is higher in countries with higher female labor force participation, and fathers do more housework in countries where fathers are entitled to parental leave but do less in countries with long maternity leave," and "Parents tend to share housework less equally in countries with less public institutional support for work–family reconciliation."

Simister (2013) argues that when a woman is the breadwinner and earns more money than her husband, she has more power to bargain her own preferences, and does less housework. Furthermore, Simister's research found different results than his previous hypothesis and that households do not behave as bargaining models predict. Simister (2013) states "a man is likely to do more housework when he and his spouse have equivalent earnings; if he earns more or less than her, he may do less housework."

Simister collected data by using the method of a survey which was done in poor countries and then compared with one developed country. The results show how much different cultures affect people's attitudes towards gender roles. For example, 59% of Kenyans strongly agreed with the statement that 'if women earn more than their husband, it will cause problems'. In table 1, more information can be found regarding gender roles and gender deviance.

Table 1

Fraction of Household in Each Country Displaying 'Gender Deviance'

Country	Fraction of housework performed by husband	Fraction of households where the wife earns more than her husband	Fraction who disagree with the statement *'It is a husband's job to earn money, and a wife's job to look after the 'home and family'*	
			wife	husband
UK	26%	17%	82%	71%
Kenya	18%	16%	50%	48%
Cameroon	13%	9%	46%	44%
Nigeria	13%	15%	19%	18%
Chad	6%	10%	32%	35%
India	4%	2%	11%	11%
Egypt	2%	1%	33%	12%

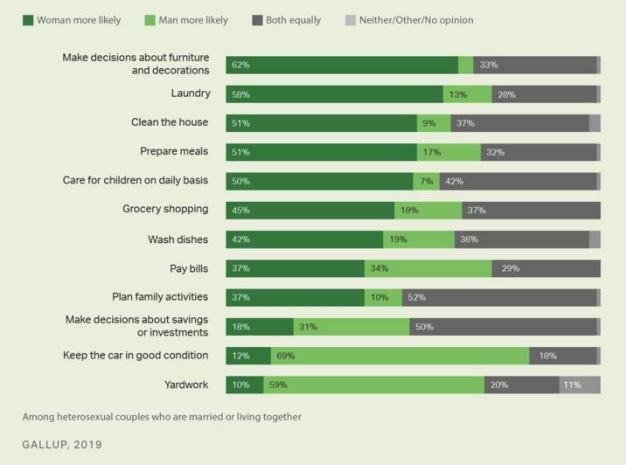
Huws (2019) argues "women's economic disadvantage in the labor market is closely linked with their responsibility for unpaid reproductive work in the home." She continues by arguing that if society creates value for unpaid labor, capitalism will transfer housework into factories. Laundry and child-care facilities are two examples of this argument. However, she further mentions that to make women free from housework, it does not mean to put the burden on poorer women's shoulders as paid labor.

Chapter 3: Reaching Gender Equality

Women play an important role in the job market. Despite their increased labor force participation, women are still responsible almost twice as many chores as their male partners. More equal distribution of paid work has yet to lead to the fair distribution of unpaid domestic labor, even in countries with a progressive national culture. According to Brenan (2020), "married or partnered heterosexual couples in the U.S. continue to divide household chores along largely traditional lines", women in the relationship are responsible to do the laundry (58%), cleaning the house (51%), and preparing meals (51%). In contrast, men in the relationship are responsible for outdoor tasks such as keeping the car in good condition (69%) and doing yard work (59%).

Figure 1

Roles of Men and Women in U.S. Households



The unfair gendered divisions of housework make women face a dual responsibility both in their professional careers and their personal lives which can take up more time and creates additional burdens. Also, it can reduce their participation in public life since women are forced to sacrifice their happiness. As a result, there is an increase in the risk of dissatisfaction and developing low psychological well-being.

There are many reasons related to housework inequality that are rooted either in gender traits or correlated to some other factors such as income or paid hours. Important reasons are as follows:

- Gender attributions and stereotypes influence the amount of housework couples share.
- Time availability is another reason; the partner who spends less time on other activities such as labor force participation will have more time available to take up a larger share of the housework.
- Gendered division of labor is always amplified during critical life course transitions including marriage and birth of a new child. Countries' policies towards family regulations play an important role to balance gendered divisions.

Research findings show that gender norms and expectations are rooted in education and childhood which consequently make women more responsible for doing more housework chores. On the other hand, children's early exposure to housework changes gender biases and helps them understand the fair division of chores. By shifting behavior in childhood, fair division of housework can be increased.

Process

To do this project, systems thinking, design thinking, and human centered design were used. Systems and design thinking help as a tool to find real problems, related stakeholders, and how they affect one another within a system. They help analyze users' behavior, their mental models and their needs to give a deeper insight to understanding the main causes of problems. To collect needed data, primary sources, such as observations and interviews, were used to find empathy with users and make finding solutions easier.

The interviews were conducted with user and expert. Human centered design creates a path to challenge problems and find solutions. After finding possible ideas and solutions, the final prototype was made to test on users.

Chapter 4: Final Product

Our Beautiful Day is an interactive book to help toddlers and preschoolers learn about housework to increase their contribution to house chores at an early age. The storyline is set over the course of a day where a child will be asked to perform light chores suitable for their age such as organizing their bed and clothes, setting the table for lunch, feeding pets, and planting flowers. The objective of this book is to teach small children and their parents' insight into how important it is to have a fair distribution of housework. Also, this book is trying to encourage small girls and boys to perform both routine and non-routine housework regardless of their gender.

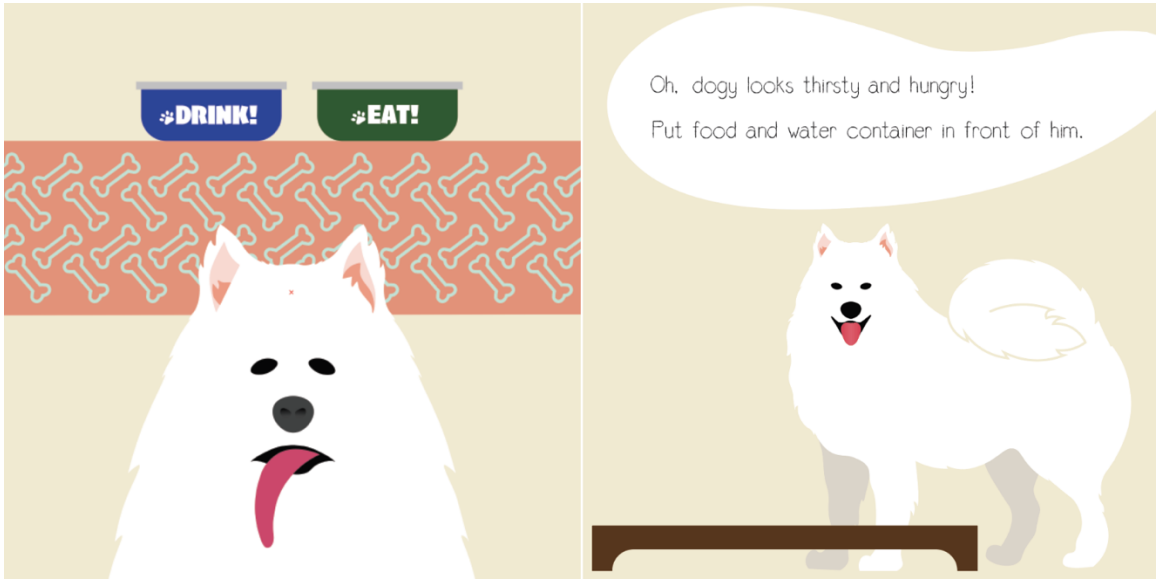
Figure 2

Title Page of Our beautiful Day

This physical book consists of magnetic pieces which can be located by the child based on the expected activity designed in the storyline on each page. For example, in figure 3, we ask the child to feed the hungry dog by relocating food and water container from the left page to the right. On other pages, as mentioned earlier, the child will be asked to contribute to some light housework tasks such as organizing the bed, setting table, and planting flowers. At the end of the book, we ask the child to contribute to the same housework activities in their real life.

Figure 3

Image of Two Inner Pages Showing How Child Interacts with the Book



Chapter 6: Conclusion

This thesis tried to understand the underlying layers of the unfair share of housework among heterosexual couples, and changing behavior is defined as a key factor to increase the contribution of housework. Children, one of the most important stakeholders, were chosen as the target group to increase equal share in doing chores for two reasons:

1- Being exposed to housework at an early age encourages them to contribute more to housework.

2- Remind parents the importance of the equal contribution of housework.

Also, research shows that male partners tend more to do non-routine housework and have less contribution to routine housework; since routine housework is urgent and time sensitive, men's lack of cooperation can put more pressure on women's shoulders. "Our Beautiful Day" ask children, regardless of their gender, to contribute to both routine and non-routine housework tasks to find the balance in contributions to housework.

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