

Expectations and Predictors of the Division of Labour within Marriage¹

Max W. Abbott

Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand, Auckland

Peggy G. Koopman-Boyden

Department of Sociology, University of Canterbury

Anticipated allocation of household activities within marriage was assessed in 95 engaged couples attending pre-marriage courses. As predicted, the young couples expected to participate in more sharing of household tasks than they observed within their parents' marriages. Nevertheless, responsibility for tasks in most instances remained that of one partner and followed traditional lines. Stepwise multiple regression analyses were conducted. Acceptance of feminist ideology was the strongest predictor of non-traditional task expectations for males and although also a significant predictor for women, prior experience of mixed flatting, was the dominant predictor for females. Parental task allocation failed to emerge as a significant predictor, suggesting that familial socialisation into future marital roles is less important in this area than external socialising agencies. Age, education, and religion also failed to emerge as significant predictors, suggesting that change in the area of household task allocation is not occurring at different rates along these dimensions.

In New Zealand, as in other Western societies, traditional sex-role patterns have changed throughout the twentieth century. The most notable change has been the movement of women from all social strata into the world of paid employment. Since the 1950's, married women have comprised an increasing proportion of the paid female labour force (24.4% in 1951, 56.7% in 1976). In spite of these changes, studies show that housework and caring work in the family are still predominantly women's work (Novitz, 1978; Social Development Council, 1977; Szalai, 1975). Although women have entered the wider employment sphere to a considerable degree, movement of men into the domestic sphere has been markedly less. One implication of this differential rate of change is that married women carry dual occupational and domestic responsibilities, increasing con-

siderably the total hours they work relative to their husbands and curtailing their time for leisure (Szalai, 1975).

Data on marital role allocation in New Zealand are limited. Studies by Brown (1970) show a pattern that is in the main consistent with North American and European findings. A more recent study (Fletcher, 1978) suggests that in the last decade, there has been a slight change in families where both husband and wife work in paid employment. In this situation, husbands show increased involvement in tasks traditionally stereotyped "female", although still considerably less than their wives. One objective of the present study is to assess the expectations that engaged men and women hold for the allocation of household activities within their future marriages and to compare these expectations with the patterns the engaged couples describe in their parents' marriages. It was predicted that the expectations of the young couples would be less gender-typed than the task allocations they observe in their families of origin (Young & Willmott, 1973).

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The second major objective of the present study was to identify some of the predictors, both biographical and attitudinal, of "egalitarian" expectations. In other words, what are some of the factors that lead some young people entering marriage to anticipate symmetrical relationships and others to anticipate more traditional patterns? This area has been little researched. As a consequence it is difficult to derive firm hypotheses, particularly with respect to life history indices. More confidence can be attached to hypothesized relationships between attitudinal measures and expectations relating to the household division of labour. This is because previous studies have investigated the influence of attitudinal factors upon other cross-sex-typed behaviours.

Three psychological constructs that seem particularly relevant to the task of predicting nontraditional task allocation have been included in the research undertaken in the present study. The first is "masculinity", "femininity", viewed by recent investigators as independent, orthogonal dimensions (Worrell, 1978). Bem (1975) argues that sex-typed individuals (i.e. individuals who receive high scores on sex-role traits "appropriate" to their gender and low scores on "inappropriate" traits) are more constricted and behaviourally limited in situations where sex-inappropriate behaviour is required. Most of the research corroborating this claim is laboratory-based. Only recently have studies used more "ecologically valid" behaviour samples (Worell, 1978). In the present study, it was hypothesized that among males, high scores of "masculinity" and low scores of "femininity" would be predictive of household task conservatism. Among females, it was hypothesized that high scores of "femininity" and low scores of "masculinity" would be predictive of traditional domestic expectations.

It seems reasonable to propose that unwillingness to anticipate engaging in nontraditional patterns of household task allocation may also reflect a more general attitudinal orientation related to rejection of change. Wilson (1973) argues that individuals vary along a continuum of conservatism, conceptualized as a general

syndrome related to fear in the face of novelty, innovation, or ambiguity. It was hypothesized that conservatism as measured by Wilson's scale would bear a significant predictive relationship with the avoidance of egalitarian task allocation (Wilson, 1973).

One of the most notable social forces in recent years has been the women's movement and related feminist alternatives to traditional ("patriarchal") social institutions. Many feminists point to the inequality of the present division of labour within marriage (Novitz, 1978). Consequently, it was hypothesized that agreement with feminist attitudes more generally, would be predictive of egalitarian expectations for the allocation of domestic tasks.

It was anticipated that a number of the sociodemographic and psychological independent variables incorporated in the present study would themselves be interrelated. In this situation, single tests of significance have limited value. The approach taken was to use stepwise multiple linear regression, which extracts predictors in descending order of their independent variable (expected household task egalitarianism) after previous covariates have been removed (Draper & Smith, 1966).

Method

Sample

The randomly selected sample consisted of 95 men and 95 women who, as engaged couples, attended premarriage courses run by the Christchurch Marriage Guidance Council in 1978 and 1979. The mean age for the males in the sample was 23.5 years (S.D. 3.2) and for females, 21.1 years (S.D. 3.2). The median interval between attending the course and marriage was three months. Respective means for age of marriage from national statistics for 1978 was 24.5 and 21.9. Males had a mean of 3.8 years of secondary education (S.D. 1.1); females had a mean of 3.7 (S.D. 0.9). 37.8 per cent of the sample belonged to the Church of England (compared with 29.2 per cent in the 1976 Census), 21.2 per cent were Presbyterians (18.1 per cent), 16.8 per cent were Roman Catholics (15.3 per cent), 10.7 per cent were of other Christian denominations (18.8 per cent), and 13.6 per cent described

themselves as non-Christian (18.5 per cent), 14.2 per cent of the sample said they attended church weekly, while 28.9 per cent reported that they never attended church.

Instruments

The questionnaire³ used in the study was in five parts.

1. Sociodemographic data

This section of the questionnaire contained questions designed to elicit biographical and demographic information. Items covered the respondent's age, educational attainment, occupation, income, religion, accommodation history and present living arrangement, parent's occupation and marital status, length of relationship with partner, stage of sexual intimacy, and persons in whom the respondent confided.

2. Role Allocation Scale

Twenty household tasks were listed. The tasks were chosen so that comparison with previous New Zealand and overseas research was possible. Respondents were asked if they expected the task to be undertaken "only by the husband", "mainly by the husband", "equally", "mainly by the wife", or "only by the wife". A composite score for 18 of the 20 household tasks was derived by treating the five-fold response classifications or ordinal scales from one to five⁴. Each task was classified *a priori* as to whether it was a "male" or "female" according to traditional stereotypes (see Table 1). The scoring of each item was adjusted to reflect this classification. As a consequence, a high score on each item (and the overall index) reflected the traditional task allocation pattern and a low score the converse. Respondents were also asked to provide the same information

with regard to task allocation within their parents' marriages.

3. Conservatism Scale (Wilson, 1973)

This measure consists of 50 words and catch phrases which are "balanced" so that agreement with half the items and disagreement with the other half contributes to an overall "conservatism" score. Possible scores range from zero ("liberal") to 100 ("conservative"). This scale was developed in New Zealand in the 1960's and has more recently been used in research in a number of other Western societies (Stacey, 1977). In a review of this work, Wilson (1973) considered that these studies "... have clearly demonstrated the overwhelming importance of a general factor that is most appropriately labelled "conservatism" (p. 257). He claimed that the underlying basis of varied conservative attitudes is a generalized susceptibility to experiencing threat or anxiety in the face of uncertainty.

4. Social Order Scale

(Worell & Worell, 1977)

This scale purports to measure support for the women's liberation movement, and is made up of 14 items with six-point Likert-type options ranging from "strongly agree or approve" to "strongly disagree or disapprove". To control for response acquiescence, half of the items are worded in the negative direction and half in the positive direction. Each item is reported as correlating at +.40 or better with the total score and the average item-criterion correlation is cited at +.59. A test-retest reliability (2 weeks) of .86 is reported by the authors. Construct validation is still at an early stage.

5. Bem Sex-Role Inventory (Bem, 1974)

The Bem Inventory (B.S.R.I.), consists of 20 positively evaluated "masculine" personality characteristics (e.g. ambitious, self-reliant, assertive), 20 "feminine" characteristics (e.g. affectionate, gentle, sensitive to the needs of others) and 20 neutral filler items. Respondents rate on a scale from one ("never or almost never true") to seven ("always or almost always true") how well each characteristic describes him or herself. Adequate reliability figures are reported

² The figure from the 1974 census includes the following categories: no religion, object to state, and not specified.

³ A copy of the questionnaire is available from the authors.

⁴ The item "Window-cleaning-outside" was excluded from the analysis (see Table 1) because existing literature did not provide a strong basis for allocating *a priori* as traditionally a male or female task.

and a substantial body of research has extended the construct validity of this measure (Bem, 1975). A variety of scoring systems have been proposed for the B.S.R.I. and there is considerable controversy surrounding the merits and demerits of the different methods (Worell, 1978). In the present study, the raw scores of the masculinity and femininity scales have been used, following the argument for the value of using multiple regression analysis to take into account the full range of scores on both of these scales (Wakefield, Sasek, Friedman & Bowden, 1976). Worell (1978) suggests this procedure could "overcome some of the measurement limitations of current scoring typologies" (p. 789).

Procedure

Questionnaires containing the five sections described above were distributed to the 190 respondents in the first session of their premarriage course. The questionnaires took approximately 45 minutes to complete and were answered confidentially, without the tutor seeing the completed form and without discussion with their partner:

Results

1. Further sample characteristics

Over one half of the sample were living with their parents (52 per cent), almost a quarter were living with their partner (24 per cent), and 13 per cent were living in a mixed flat. A third of the sample had had experience of mixed flatting at some time. A tenth of the pre-marriage sample faced marriage against a background of parental divorce or separation (10.5 per cent), while for a further 5.3 per cent, the parental marriage was broken by death.

There was a range from two months to six-and-a-half years in the time the engaged couple had been going steady (self defined) previous to attendance at the pre-marriage course, with the median time being 18 months. Eighty-six per cent of the sample were having sexual intercourse with their partner. Eighty-eight per cent of respondents said that they confided in their partner most, six per cent in a same sex friend, and five per cent in their mother. No-one confided in their father most. 88.4 per cent said that they intended to have children,

2.1 per cent said no to this question, and 9.5 per cent were uncertain:

2. Task Role Allocation

Expected household task allocations for engaged couples and the perceived task allocations in their parents' marriages are listed in Table 1. The male and female groups held similar expectations for each of the household tasks, although agreement within couples varied from moderate to high. Because significant gender differences failed to emerge, data are pooled across genders in Table 1. Significant gender differences also failed to emerge within the mean composite (overall) scores for anticipated household task allocation ($x = 72.6$, S.D. 17.7 for males; $x = 72.5$, S.D. 18.2 for females). Again, although differences were non-significant, agreement within couples was only moderate on the composite measure ($r = .65$).

From Table 1 it is evident that four tasks (cleaning the outside windows, making beds, setting the table and washing/drying dishes) were seen by most respondents as being equally shared. The majority of other tasks were also expected to be shared to some degree, but with one partner having the major responsibility. Thus the wife is seen as having more responsibility for buying the groceries, cleaning the toilet and bathroom, cooking, doing the flower garden, washing the clothes and cleaning the inside windows, while the husband is seen as having responsibility for cleaning the car, doing the vegetable garden and painting the house. Six tasks were defined by the majority of respondents as being mainly or solely male or female tasks: household cleaning, ironing, sewing/mending as female tasks, and car maintenance, household repairs and mowing lawns as male tasks.

Compared with the actual task allocation within their parents' marriages, there was a higher expectation of more task sharing in the forthcoming marriages of the engaged couples. While only six tasks were seen by the majority to be the main or sole responsibility of the male or female respondents, five tasks had been the main or sole responsibility of their fathers (car cleaning, household repairs, maintain car,

Table 1
Couples' Expected Household Task Allocations and their Descriptions of their Parents' Task Allocations^a

Tasks	Classification Male/Female	Husband Only	Husband Mainly	Allocation (Percentages)			Wife Only	Don't Know Not Applicable
				Both Equally	Wife Mainly	Wife Mainly		
Buy groceries	F	0 (1)	2 (1)	48 (11)	42 (36)	7 (48)	0 (4)	
Car cleaning	M	12 (36)	50 (28)	32 (12)	4 (5)	1 (3)	1 (16)	
Clean toilet and bath	F	0 (0)	2 (1)	38 (8)	42 (33)	19 (53)	0 (5)	
Cook	F	0 (1)	2 (1)	47 (8)	45 (47)	6 (38)	0 (5)	
Dry dishes	F	1 (1)	7 (6)	63 (19)	2 (44)	2 (13)	2 (17)	
Household cleaning	F	1 (1)	1 (1)	36 (4)	54 (49)	8 (40)	0 (6)	
Household repairs	M	42 (48)	51 (36)	5 (3)	0 (2)	0 (1)	2 (10)	
Iron clothes	F	0 (0)	1 (6)	13 (1)	58 (27)	27 (66)	0 (6)	
Look after flower garden	F	3 (7)	8 (14)	47 (23)	34 (26)	6 (20)	3 (10)	
Look after vegetable garden	M	9 (7)	41 (14)	36 (23)	8 (26)	1 (20)	5 (10)	
Maintain car	M	56 (62)	32 (16)	11 (6)	1 (2)	0 (0)	1 (15)	
Make beds	F	0 (0)	1 (2)	58 (12)	34 (38)	6 (42)	1 (6)	
Mow lawns	M	24 (35)	52 (31)	19 (7)	1 (7)	1 (3)	4 (17)	
Paint house	M	17 (42)	34 (23)	45 (15)	0 (3)	0 (1)	4 (16)	
Set and clear table	F	1 (1)	1 (1)	71 (27)	24 (38)	4 (23)	5 (11)	
Sew and mend clothes	F	0 (0)	2 (0)	5 (1)	43 (22)	50 (73)	1 (5)	
Wash and hang out clothes	F	0 (1)	1 (1)	31 (4)	55 (39)	13 (52)	1 (4)	
Wash dishes	F	1 (1)	5 (5)	62 (17)	30 (47)	3 (18)	0 (12)	
Window cleaning—inside	F	1 (2)	2 (3)	38 (8)	48 (47)	10 (32)	1 (8)	
Window cleaning—outside ^b	F	2 (7)	22 (13)	48 (14)	21 (33)	6 (24)	2 (10)	

^a Parents' percentage in parentheses

^b This item was not included in the overall household task allocation total. (See footnote 3)

mow lawns, paint house), and twelve tasks had been the main or sole responsibility of their mothers (buy groceries, clean toilet and bath, cook, drying dishes, household cleaning, iron clothes, make beds, set and clear table, sew/mend clothes, wash/hang out clothes, washing dishes, window cleaning inside). Furthermore, no tasks were given as having been equally shared by both parents, compared with four tasks in the case of respondents.

The data considered in this section indicate that almost all of the routine household tasks have taken on less male-female stereotype, with a greater degree of sharing being anticipated by the pre-marriage respondents. However, most of the tasks still remain the major responsibility of one or other spouse.

3. Step-wise regression analysis

Twelve independent variables were included in stepwise multiple linear regression analyses with the overall household task expectancy score as the dependent variable. The following predictor variables were included: age, years of secondary education, religious attendance (1-6 scale from "never" to "weekly" attendance), previous flatting record (none, single sex, or mixed sex),

time known partner (weeks), time going steady (weeks), living together or not (dichotomous variable), parents' household task allocation total, conservatism, social order, Bem masculinity, and Bem femininity⁵. Separate analyses were conducted for males and females. The summary tables from these two analyses are given in Table 2 (only variables estimated to contribute two per cent or more are shown).

From inspection of Table 2A, it is evident that in the case of the female respondents, three of the independent variables bear a statistically significant relationship to anticipated household task allocation. More specifically, experience of mixed flatting, liberal attitudes, and acceptance of women's liberation ideology predicts less gender-typed expectancies. Less frequent church attendance adds a little to the predictive power of the regression equation with the four variables accounting for 21 per cent of the total variance. The remaining variables included in the analysis have only a trivial relationship to the dependent variable, after the effects due to the first four variables have been extracted. Together, the seven remaining variables account for only a further four per cent of the total variance.

In the case of the males, acceptance of women's liberation ideology was the dominant predictor, explaining nearly 15 per cent of the dependent variable variance. The only other statistically significant predictor was femininity: males who attributed traditionally "feminine" traits to themselves being less gender-typed.

Full interpretation of multiple regression analyses requires consideration of the zero order intercorrelations between variables. In the main, very few highly significant ($p < .01$) intercorrelations were found between the independent variables. Exceptions to this occurred primarily with respect to the psychological measures (see Table 3).

It is evident from inspection of Table 3 that for both males and females, conservatism showed a moderate positive correlation with femininity but relatively

Table 2

Results of Regression Analyses of Household Task Allocation Expectations

A. Females

Variable	Per cent Variance	Partial F (df = 82)
Flatting History	9.4	9.65**
Conservatism	5.3	5.72*
Social Order	4.0	4.51*
Religious Attendance	2.3	2.65
		N = 95

B. Males

Variable	Per cent Variance	Partial F (df = 82)
Social Order	14.8	16.12**
Femininity	3.7	4.41*
Time Known Partner	3.3	3.76
Years Secondary Education	3.0	3.29
Living Together	2.0	2.50
		N = 95

* $p < .05$

** $p < .01$

⁵ Because the variable distribution did not deviate markedly from the assumptions underlying the regression model, the data were not transformed.

trivial relationship with both masculinity and attitudes towards the women's movement (social order). Masculinity and femininity were both positively correlated with acceptance of women's liberation ideology. Although stronger in males, these relationships held for both genders. In contrast to the results of the original validation studies of the B.S.R.I., in the present population, masculinity and femininity were not orthogonal dimensions, particularly among the males.

that are related to marriage expectations. The very fact of their attendance at a human relationship course suggests greater investment in the quality of their relationship. It would seem reasonable to contend that these couples would be more likely to consider a more equitable division of labour than nonattenders.

Other factors will also need to be considered before the relevance of the current findings can be fully appreciated. Research is needed to clarify what difference, if any,

Table 3
*Table of Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations
between the Attitudinal Measures*

	Mean	S.D.	Social Order	Masculinity	Femininity
Conservatism	43.7	9.4	-.14	.22	.33**
Social Order	55.5	10.5		.34**	.40**
Masculinity	84.1	17.2			.43**
Femininity	98.7	14.4			
N = 95					
B. Males					
	Mean	S.D.	Social Order	Masculinity	Femininity
Conservatism	42.1	10.9	-.12	.19	.27*
Social Order	51.7	11.6		.50**	.57**
Masculinity	96.9	19.7			.73**
Femininity	92.4	16.2			
N = 95					

*p < .05

**p < .01

Discussion

As predicted, the young couples expected to engage in more sharing of household tasks than they observed within their parents' marriages. Nevertheless, responsibility for these tasks, with only a few exceptions, remains that of one partner and follows traditional lines. It is not possible to specify how representative the pattern observed in the present sample is of all young couples approaching marriage. Age and education were not significant predictors of egalitarian expectations. It is possible, however, that couples who attend pre-marriage courses differ from the wider population of pre-marrieds on other indices

exists between a task performed "mainly" as opposed to "only" by one partner, when it comes to actual time worked. Careful investigation of the meaning attached to household task allocation could also be relevant to an understanding of sex-role inequality and change. For example, where a task is considered to be mainly the work of one partner, does the overall responsibility for the activity being performed also rest with that individual? If so, does this imply further that the spouse is merely "helping"? This definition of the situation could have important implications for other dynamics within the marriage relationship. The "helper", for example,

might derive or expect reward for spending time on something that is not his or her responsibility? The helped spouse might feel, or be expected to feel, indebted?

Expectations are only one determinant of behaviour. Skill in a particular activity, the reward value of the activity, fear of failure, the desire to please others or self, and relationship factors, for example the expectations and relative power of one's partner, could all be expected to influence actual task performance. Further work is required to determine the extent to which pre-marriage household task expectations translate into behaviour after marriage and to identify the factors that enhance or impede the process.

Among the present sample, regular sexual intercourse was normative, and cross-gender living arrangements were relatively common. Organizers of pre-marriage courses will need to recognize this level of intimacy among their clientele and plan courses accordingly. Although this might indicate a change in sexual mores, this is not so evident with task sharing. There appeared to be less experimentation here, at least as far as expectations for future role tasks are concerned. It could be argued that the traditional stereotype is begun earlier in the living-together relationship.

Hypothesized, acceptance of women's liberation ideology was a statistically significant predictor of less gender-typed expectations. The relationship held for both genders, although it was stronger in the case of males. A behavioural measure, previous history of mixed flatting, was the strongest predictor for women. It is difficult to make causal inferences from correlational analyses, even when they are time-lagged. Longitudinal studies would however help to determine why this relationship occurs. Possibilities include the following: women who go mixed flatting have less traditional values to start with, or they experience traditional task allocations and wish to avoid this in their future marriages, or they have the opportunity to practise more "liberated" role patterns. The question is raised as to why this relationship held for women but not men.

A feature of the regression analyses was the failure of parental task allocation to

predict the degree of egalitarianism anticipated by their children. This suggests that values or expectations in this area are derived from sources other than parents. Furthermore, these expectations tend to be less traditional than those held by their parents, yet more conservative than feminist ideology. With both males and females, acceptance of women's liberation ideology was a significant predictor of less gender-typed expectations but parental task allocation was not. It is suggested that familial socialisation into future marital and familial roles is of less importance than external socialising agencies. Currently, a one-year follow-up of the sample is underway. It will be interesting to see whether the ability to predict from parental behaviour will increase when the dependent variable is post-marriage behaviour rather than pre-marriage expectations.

Education level and religiosity explained a little of the dependent variable variance but, as with the other sociodemographic variables included in the analyses, they failed to reach the .05 level of significance. Because these measures showed low zero-order correlation with predictors extracted earlier in the step-wise analyses, their failure as predictors is not merely a consequence of their inclusion within the matrix of independent variables in this study. This finding is inconsistent with the view that change is occurring appreciably faster in some groups in New Zealand society, such as among the more educated and less religious. Mason, Czajka and Arber (1976), in a United States study of women's sex-role attitudes also failed to find evidence of differential rates of change along education or class lines.

Conservatism, as predicted, emerged as a significant correlate of task expectations, but only for females. Its failure to predict male expectations was not due to its covariance with stronger predictors. Again, the reason for the gender difference is not clear.

It was hypothesized that for males "femininity" would correlate positively, and "masculinity" negatively, with less gender-typed expectations. Among females, a reversal of these relationships was predicted. A significant result in the predicted

direction occurred only with respect to "femininity" in males. In other words, males who perceived themselves as possessing more traditionally "feminine" traits, anticipated to a greater degree, engaging in "cross gender" household tasks. Contrary to prediction, high "masculinity" did not inhibit less gender-typed expectations. In contrast to the original validation studies of the B.S.R.I. (1974) however, in the present population, the masculinity and femininity scales shared an appreciable amount of common variance ($r = .73$). Consequently, males who received high masculinity scores also tended to receive high femininity scores. To use Bem's (1974) terminology, a disproportionate number of the respondents were androgynous, rather than sex-typed. The failure to find full corroboration for the hypothesis related to this measure may in part be a result of this "atypical" pattern of scores on the masculinity and femininity scales. The question of whether the sample really is that atypical in this respect, or whether it reflects a trend towards increased flexibility when it comes to sex-role self-concept is also raised by the conceptual relationship between the two subscales of the BEM questionnaire. If so, the findings of this study could be suggesting that household task expectations are changing more slowly from traditional patterns than are masculine or feminine self-concepts.

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