Doing marriage and parenthood: The division of household labour across two life course events.

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The current study is a longitudinal investigation into changes in the division of household labour across transitions to marriage and parenthood in the UK. Previous research has noted a more traditional division of household labour, with women performing the majority of housework, amongst spouses and couples with children. However, the bulk of this work has been cross-sectional in nature. The few longitudinal studies that have been carried out have been rather ambiguous about the effect of marriage and parenthood on the division of housework. Theoretically, this study draws on gender construction theory. The key premise of this theory is that gender is something that is performed and created in interaction, and, as a result, something fluid and flexible rather than fixed and stable. The idea that couples ‘do gender’ through housework has been a major theoretical breakthrough. Gender-neutral explanations of the division of household labour, positing rational acting individuals, have failed to explicate why women continue to perform an unequal share of housework, regardless of socio-economic status. Contrastingly, gender construction theory situates gender as the key process in dividing household labour. By performing and avoiding certain housework chores, couples fulfill social norms of what it means to be a man and a woman although, given the emphasis on human agency in producing and contesting gender, couples are able to negotiate alternative gender roles which, in turn, feed back into the structure of social norms in an ever-changing societal landscape. This study adds extra depth to the doing gender approach by testing whether or not couples negotiate specific conjugal and parent roles in terms of the division of household labour. Both transitions hypothesise a more traditional division of household labour. Data comes from the British Household Panel Survey, a large, nationally representative quantitative survey that has been carried out annually since 1991. Here, data tracks the same 776 couples at two separate time points – 1996 and 2005. OLS regression is used to test whether or not transitions to marriage and parenthood have a significant impact on the division of household labour whilst controlling for host of relevant socio-economic factors. Results indicate that marriage has no significant effect on how couples partition housework. Those couples making the transition from cohabitation to marriage do not show significant changes in housework arrangements from those couples who remain cohabiting in both waves. On the other hand, becoming parents does lead to a more traditional division of household labour whilst controlling for socio-economic factors which accompany the move to parenthood. There is then some evidence that couples use the site of household labour to ‘do parenthood’ and generate identities which both use and inform socially prescribed notions of what it means to be a mother and a father. Support for socio-economic explanations of the division of household labour was mixed although it remains clear that they, alone, cannot explain how households divide housework.

**Tiivistelmä – Referat – Abstract**

The current study is a longitudinal investigation into changes in the division of household labour across transitions to marriage and parenthood in the UK. Previous research has noted a more traditional division of household labour, with women performing the majority of housework, amongst spouses and couples with children. However, the bulk of this work has been cross-sectional in nature. The few longitudinal studies that have been carried out have been rather ambiguous about the effect of marriage and parenthood on the division of housework. Theoretically, this study draws on gender construction theory. The key premise of this theory is that gender is something that is performed and created in interaction, and, as a result, something fluid and flexible rather than fixed and stable. The idea that couples ‘do gender’ through housework has been a major theoretical breakthrough. Gender-neutral explanations of the division of household labour, positing rational acting individuals, have failed to explicate why women continue to perform an unequal share of housework, regardless of socio-economic status. Contrastingly, gender construction theory situates gender as the key process in dividing household labour. By performing and avoiding certain housework chores, couples fulfill social norms of what it means to be a man and a woman although, given the emphasis on human agency in producing and contesting gender, couples are able to negotiate alternative gender roles which, in turn, feed back into the structure of social norms in an ever-changing societal landscape. This study adds extra depth to the doing gender approach by testing whether or not couples negotiate specific conjugal and parent roles in terms of the division of household labour. Both transitions hypothesise a more traditional division of household labour. Data comes from the British Household Panel Survey, a large, nationally representative quantitative survey that has been carried out annually since 1991. Here, data tracks the same 776 couples at two separate time points – 1996 and 2005. OLS regression is used to test whether or not transitions to marriage and parenthood have a significant impact on the division of household labour whilst controlling for host of relevant socio-economic factors. Results indicate that marriage has no significant effect on how couples partition housework. Those couples making the transition from cohabitation to marriage do not show significant changes in housework arrangements from those couples who remain cohabiting in both waves. On the other hand, becoming parents does lead to a more traditional division of household labour whilst controlling for socio-economic factors which accompany the move to parenthood. There is then some evidence that couples use the site of household labour to ‘do parenthood’ and generate identities which both use and inform socially prescribed notions of what it means to be a mother and a father. Support for socio-economic explanations of the division of household labour was mixed although it remains clear that they, alone, cannot explain how households divide housework.
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"To get the whole world out of bed,
And washed, and dressed, and warmed, and fed,
To work, and back to bed again,
Believe me, Saul, costs worlds of pain”
- (Masefield, 1946; 61)

1. Introduction

Household labour is a crucial component of life from childhood to retirement (South & Spitze, 1994: 330). It has been estimated that the total time spent on housework is equal to the amount of time spent in formal employment (Coltrane, 2000: 1209). All households need to eat, wash clothes, and perform and perform a number of cleaning duties (Bianchi et al, 2000: 191). Thus in multi-member households, household labour becomes a site of conflict, contestation, negotiation and cooperation in which members need to debate, divide, and allocate several domestic chores (Ibid: 192). How these battles and encounters play out has been the job of social scientists who have hitherto presented two broad competing theories. The first draws on classical economic theory and depicts household labour as a neutral arena in which household members come together, lay down their claims as to why they should or should not engage in housework, and decide upon the most rational course of action – typically with regards to time and money. The second theory, gender construction, sees household labour as a site where gender is contested, created, and enacted. In this scenario, gender itself is deemed to play the key role as participants work with and reshape notions of gender over the division of housework. These competing explanations interact with a variety of life course factors which are also seen to influence the division of household labour (Coltrane, 2000: 1215). These include age, living arrangements, family structure, union type, and transition to parenthood (Ibid). Transitions into marriage and parenthood will be the foci of this study.

Numerous findings have presented evidence that in households with young children the division of labour becomes more ‘traditional’ whereby women take on a
greater share of the work (Thomas & Hildginsson, 2009: 141)). However, these have typically been cross-sectional studies which fail to capture the partition both before and after the transition to parenthood. The few longitudinal works which have been carried out have been rather inconclusive in the association between childbearing and the division of household labour (Baxter et al, 2008: 260). A similar story emerges between union type and household labour. By far and away the hitherto central household type for reporting the division of labour has been the heterosexual married couple (Baxter, 2005: 205). However, several social and economic changes from the 1970s has seen the emergence of diverse union types (Batalova & Cohen, 2002: 743) to which division of household labour studies have responded. Couples living together outside of marriage have been one of the key changes in family formations, and some general trends of household labour amongst this group have emerged. However, findings tend to offer static interpretations of the division of household labour within each union type and fail to capture the effect of moving between household types (Gupta, 1999: 700).

This study will then have two core aims. Firstly, to add the growing body of longitudinal works by using the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) to uncover changes in household labour both before and after the presence of young children and in the transition from cohabitation to marriage. Secondly, to add an extra dimension to the gender construction theory approach by investigating whether couples are not only ‘doing gender’ but, more specifically, if they are ‘doing parenthood’ and/or ‘doing marriage’ in relation to household labour.

1.1. The division of household labour

Household labour became a popular research topic during the 1990s which saw a large rise in the number of articles and books dedicated to the subject (Coltrane, 2000: 1208). Although a limited number of studies have analysed the division of household labour across different countries (see Fuwa, 2004; Crompton et al, 2005; Greenstein, 2009; Thebaud, 2007), the majority treat the division as a phenomenon that holds true across the western world. Given the paucity of household labour studies concentrating
on the UK and the absence of comparative research on the topic, this study will make use of theoretical frameworks informed by research from multiple western countries. Since most research has been conducted on married couples, it is on this group that most information is available although the attention has begun to be turned to the allocation of household labour in cohabiting households (Batalova & Cohen, 2002; Gupta, 1999; Scott & Spitze, 1994), remarried and stepparent households (Masako & Coltrane, 1992), adoptive households (Hamilton, 2004), and gay and lesbian households (Lawrence, 2007; Sutphin, 2006). At the broadest level, married women perform considerably more housework than married men. Coltrane (2000) estimates that women carry out up to 2-3 times as much household labour as men. A second generalized finding is that this gender discrepancy is narrowing (Baxter 2005: 301). According to Sullivan (2000), in the UK in 1975 wives undertook 77% of domestic labour whilst husbands completed 23%. By 1987 this had changed into 67% for wives and 33% for husbands. For 1997, the respective figures were 63% and 37%. When both spouses were in full time formal employment the percentages were lower for married women and higher for married men but followed the same pattern over time (Sullivan, 2000: 443). In fact, the growth in female employment has prompted researchers to look at developments in the domestic sphere (Bianchi et al, 2000: 192). At the same time, women’s rising participation in the labour market has undermined the male breadwinner and encouraged researchers to look at men’s changing behaviour in the home (Gupta, 1999: 700). Whilst these transitions are taking place, Kan (2008: 46) claims that women have increased their hours in paid employment faster than they have reduced their time spent on household labour meaning total hours of work, both inside and outside the home, have actually risen for married women. Hochschild has labeled this phenomenon as women’s ‘second shift’ (Hochschild, 1989). This study will abstain from making any normative prescriptions about the division of household labour. Instead the key concern here is to merely report and explain the division.

In explaining the division of household labour, three main theories, from two competing schools, have been utilized; the time availability theory and economic theories fall under the rational banner of understanding the division of household labour, and the gender construction theory which draws inspiration from a number of sources. The time availability theory posits that household labour is rationally divided amongst household members according to who has the most time to undertake the tasks
The economic theories represent a collection of three related but separate theories which are held together by a central concern for the influence of relative earnings on the division of household labour. The first, Becker’s (1981) theory of human capital investment, states that the division is based rationally upon the suitability of each partner to either the economic or domestic sphere (Bianchi et al, 2000: 194). The second, the relative resources theory suggests that household labour is a burdensome chore and so partners use the resources as their disposal in order to negotiate out of performing housework (Davis et al, 2007: 1248). Finally, the economic dependency model hypothesizes that women will perform a disproportionate share of housework in return for economic security from men (Coltrane, 2000: 1213).

Both the time availability theory and the economic theories are gender-neutral in that they both describe household labour as neutral ground over which rational actors battle. However, household labour is loaded with meaning, especially in relation to gender (Pinto, 2006: 4). Therefore, gender itself has been conceived as a principle around which households divide labour (Coltrane, 2000: 1209). Gender construction theory, which came to the fore during the 1990s, views household labour not only as a site in which services and goods are produced but also as a location where gender is continually produced and reproduced (Berk, 1985). By performing and not performing certain household duties, individuals symbolically create and confirm their gender identities (Coltrane, 2000: 1213). Individuals are considered as active agents acting within a space conditioned by social structural constraints and power imbalances (Ibid). This study will add an additional dimension to the gender construction theory by documenting how couples manage gender through the division of household labour in transitions to marriage and parenthood.

1.2. The division of household labour in cohabiting and married households

Compared to married couples, previous research on the division of household labour has proven to be more equal amongst cohabiting couples though women continue to perform an unequal share (see Gupta, 1999; Shelton & John, 1993; South &
Spitze, 1994). Both married couples and cohabiting couples share a physical living space, a certain level of commitment, and sexual and emotional relationships (Davis et al, 2007: 1246). However, cohabiters lack both social and legal endorsements (Ibid).

Cohabitation is then a condition of incomplete institutionalization (Cherlin, 1978), freer from the written and unwritten rules associated with marriage and leaving open more space to negotiate and contest the division of labour (Baxter, 2005: 304). All western countries, including the UK, have witnessed large increases in the number of people who have cohabited yet the actual percentage cohabiting at a given time has witnessed only small increases (Baxter, 2005: 301). For many couples then, cohabiting is a stage prior to marriage. Subsequently, it becomes crucial not only to measure the division of household labour amongst cohabiting and married couples, but to trace what happens to the division of labour when cohabiting couples make the transition to husband and wife. The different methodologies perhaps explain the contrasting evidence. Whilst snap shot cross-sectional results repeatedly confirm that cohabiters have a more egalitarian division of household labour, in one of the few longitudinal studies Gupta (1999) found no difference in the division when cohabiting couples move into marriage. According to Gupta (1999) it is the condition of a man and woman living together which allows for ‘doing gender’ – the type of union is less important.

1.3. The division of household labour and the presence of children

The addition of a child to a household is felt in almost every area of parents’ lives (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005: 104). Parenthood places new demands on new parents’ physical and mental health, social roles, work responsibilities (Ibid), and tends to be associated with a reduction in leisure time, joint activities, and sexual satisfaction (Kluwer et al, 2002:: 930). There is also some evidence that the birth of a child leads to an overall drop in marital satisfaction (Ibid). Changes in the division of household labour are also part of the transition to parenthood. Overwhelmingly, research indicates that the division becomes more traditional, in which women assume a greater share (Koivunen et al, 2009: 324) regardless of the starting point before the birth of the child (Thomas & Hildgingsson, 2009: 141). To give some idea of the total work time in early
childbearing years, Kahn (1991) found that women work 84 hours per week, 69% of which is on household labour, whilst men work for 71 hours per week, 37% of it spent on household labour. However, the majority of these findings, like those which examine different union types, are drawn from cross-sectional studies and may be attributable to unmeasured differences between couples who choose to become parents and those who do not (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997: 749-750). The few panel studies are less congruent in their results. Sanchez & Thomson (1997) found a clear rise in mothers’ share of housework, attributable to their increase in housework hours whilst for fathers time spent on household labour varied little pre- and post-partum. On the other hand, whilst Gjerdingen & Center (2005) also witnessed a growth in mothers’ share of housework, the increase was substantially smaller than in other studies.

As with the transition to marriage, the move to parenthood can be seen as an added dimension to the gender construction theory. Rather than just ‘doing gender’, the transition to becoming parents will unlock whether or not couples are rather ‘doing motherhood and fatherhood’. In order to answer these questions, prospective panel data from the BHPS will be used. One of the longest running panel surveys still running, the BHPS is a nationally representative household panel survey which tracks the same households, and any individual aged over sixteen in the household, each year. The survey began in 1991 with a sample of around 5,000 households which has now doubled to 10,000 households. Information concerning the BHPS and the complete questionnaire content is available online at: www.iser.essex.ac.uk

1.4. Structure of the study

Section 2 will clarify the concepts being employed throughout the study and discuss the fundamental questions concerning the division of household labour. I will debate household labour itself, for it remains unclear what exactly constitutes housework. Also, the different actors involved in household labour, frequently neglected, will be discussed. Finally in this section, the importance of studying household labour is touched upon. Very often the implications of finding, in most cases, an unequal division of labour are left unstated. Furthermore, many studies in this area
appear to have an unwritten goal of overturning uneven divisions which are viewed as unjust.

The major theoretical frameworks used to explain the division of household labour will be the theme for section 3. The main premises, empirical evidence, and shortcomings of the time availability theory, the economic theories, and the gender construction theory will be presented. Emphasis will be placed on the latter, since it is the idea of gender as something created, debated, and maintained in everyday interaction which drives this entire study. Gender construction theory proposes a dynamic, ever changing relationship between structure and agency. Agency in this study focuses on couples generating specific gender roles around marriage and parenthood. Structures or, perhaps more appropriately, loose structures come from societal norms concerning gender, marriage, and parenthood. This will be the subject of section 4 which will conclude by setting out the two principal hypotheses of the study.

Section 5 is the data and method section. Some words will be said about the data source, the BHPS, before discussing the main tool of analysis – OLS regression. Also in this section, the complete list of dependent and independent variables and how they have been constructed will be discussed. The groundwork laid in section 5 will be put into practice in section 6. The results of both cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses, including the regression model, will be reported in this section. The final section, section 7, will summarise the main findings as well as evaluate the principal hypotheses. Some of my own propositions, based on the empirical evidence, will be put forward. The final part of section 7 will address future research. The possible directions for later researchers are based on both the findings in this study, which can be extended and tested, and its limitations which can be remedied.
2. Understanding household labour

The vast majority of studies on the division of household labour emphasise and theorize the division but neglect the other half of the equation – household labour itself. By confronting such questions as ‘who is involved in household labour?’, ‘what does it entail?’, and ‘where does it take place?’ this study, while not providing a solution to the problem, will at least be conscious of its limitations. Since household labour is rarely dealt with explicitly it can be presumed that many scholars believe they are describing and explaining all types of domestic labour across the entire household. By drawing on the work of Eichler and Albanese (2007) I will document two main weaknesses in current household labour studies. Firstly, a false assumption is typically inferred that only couples within a household undertake household labour. Secondly, household labour itself is often defined in a very narrow sense and fails to take heed of other, less visible forms of labour. The final part in this section will deal with the implications of household labour, something which is often left implicit in studies of household labour.

2.1. Who is doing household labour?

Division of household labour studies have begun to report housework allocation in other household types besides heterosexual married unions (Baxter, 2001: 16). However, one problem yet to be overcome is the reduction of household labour to members of that household (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 229). In fact, when the focus is on couples, household labour is further reduced to being accomplished by only those adult partners and, only occasionally, by children within the household (Ibid). There has been a welcome shift in family sociology away from the rigid analysis which clings to the household level and concentrates on institutional dyads – relations with some official status such as between a child and parent or married couples (Widmer et al, 2008: 2). In their configuration approach to studying the family, Widmer et al (2008) advocate a move beyond the household, and beyond only legally recognized formations in order to uncover the true patterns of family life. Hopefully, division of household labour studies will also react to real changes in family types and look past individual
households and formal relationships to grasp the real extent of who is contributing to housework. This simplification of the division of household labour neglects a host of other agents who play a role in the division. For example, a number of households make use of both paid and unpaid help (Coltrane, 2000: 1210). In the Netherlands, Lippe et al (2004: 226) estimate that 12% of households buy domestic help, and as many as 25% of higher class households. Paid help and the division of household labour amongst full household members should be treated as two sides of the same coin. The tasks carried out by bought services impact on the resulting division between household members and vice versa. Unfortunately, in most cases the division of household labour and bought household labour are treated as separate spheres (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 230). Furthermore, when paid help is incorporated it brings with it its own set of difficulties. Firstly, much paid domestic work is untaxed work, meaning that it does not always reveal itself in official statistics (Ibid). Secondly, a lot of paid work remains illegal and thus remains concealed, again adding doubt as to the true nature of who is doing household labour.

A second source of underreported household labour comes from children (especially daughters), kin, and other unpaid help (Coltrane, 2000: 1210). Interestingly, some scholars have noted that the crucial division in a household is not between the male and female partners, but between different women, including daughters, grandmothers, and other kin (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 230). This pattern of family and/or kin help leads naturally to another important point and a reversal of the original problem. It becomes clear that not only do people benefit from outside help with regards to domestic labour, but that people perform household labour for others, in addition to the work put into their own household. Household labour of this type unquestionably goes unreported. Therefore, this should provide a stimulus for researchers to look beyond the household as an exclusive and well bounded unit which acts independently and self-sufficiently in its completion of household labour.

The heart of this argument is that household labour comes from a variety of sources and is not restricted to members of the household let alone only adult members. Regrettably, the BHPS data set does not ask questions related to outside domestic help, nor does it report the contributions of people under sixteen years of age, and so I am guilty of restricting household labour to adult members of that household. However,
there are two positives to emerge. Firstly, I will deal only with households consisting of one male and one female in cohabiting and married unions either with or without dependent children or non-dependent children. Whilst this still overlooks a host of possible paid and outside help, as well as contributions of dependent and, especially, non-dependent children, more complex household configurations are avoided. Secondly, by extending the actors and agents involved in household labour I recognize the limitations of this study. No claims will be made that the division of household labour between couples represents entire household labour. Instead, I can only report the division of a partial amount of household labour whose portion of the entire household labour it represents is unknown.

2.2. What is household labour?

In failing to tackle household labour directly most studies make one of two errors. The first mistake involves omitting different forms of household labour and working with too simple a definition. The second mistake is to include more forms of household labour but not to specify in detail what those forms are. This leads to a situation whereby studies are reporting on household labour but in fact are talking about two very different things. The first error will be classified as a problem of depth and the second error a problem of consistency. These will be discussed in turn.

Household labour is defined in a variety of ways (Shelton & John, 1996: 300). However, what is eye-opening is that studies on the division of household labour so often gloss over what they mean by household labour. Typically, a study will mention in passing how the variable ‘household labour’ is operationalised, often with reference to whether or not it includes child care (Coltrane, 2000: 1210). At its most basic, household labour is partitioned into tasks that require frequent attention and that are almost compulsory for a household to perform such as cooking, cleaning, and laundry, and more occasional tasks such as household repairs, gardening, driving people, and paying bills (Ibid). Several terms have been afforded to each. The former tasks have been labeled ‘mundane’, ‘repetitive’, ‘onerous’, and ‘unrelenting’ (Ibid). The latter have been termed ‘residual’, ‘occasional’, and ‘other’ (Ibid). Others have used gender to
differentiate the tasks, calling the former ‘feminine’ or ‘female-dominated’ and the latter ‘masculine’ or ‘male-dominated’ (Blair & Lichter, 1991). Whilst separating household labour is an important step in furthering our understanding, there is a potential hazard by differentiating tasks by gender. By grouping certain duties as belonging to the domain of men or women, researchers risk acting as a cause in the very phenomena they are studying (Coltrane, 2000: 1211). Breaking up household labour along other lines besides gender is something which some researchers have already achieved.

Baxter (1997) refers to tasks accomplished indoors and outdoors, Starrels (1994) uses the frequency of tasks as the crucial divider whilst Barnett and Shen (1997) separate tasks into those with high-schedule-control and those with low-schedule-control. Given the kind of data available in the BHPS, this study will focus only on the core household chores which need to be performed frequently. These tasks will be labeled ‘routine household labour’. In fact, the BHPS does not collect information on more sporadic tasks. Coltrane (2000: 1210) suggests that, in American households, for every 1 hour spent on other domestic labour 2-3 hours are spent on routine household labour. Twiggs et al (1999: 713) declare that 70-90% of all household labour goes towards routine household labour. This may provide some justification for focusing on everyday tasks which is also standard practice in the field (Kan, 2008: 52).

However, concentrating on the time spent on household labour does not necessarily tell the whole story. For instance, it has been reported that women are more adept at multitasking – accomplishing more, with the added stress, than men over the same time frame (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005: 114). A minority of household labour studies focus not on the time spent on labour but instead on the type of work it entails. In this area, qualitative research has been more successful in mining the meanings given to certain tasks and, subsequently, why some chores become labeled as ‘masculine’ or ‘feminine’ tasks (Twiggs et al, 1999: 713). Drawing on occupational sex segregation, Twiggs et al (1999) argue that more rigorous attention should be paid toward whom is performing particular jobs and, if men are increasing their housework time, is that extra effort being spread evenly. Twiggs et al (1999) found that a hierarchy of household chores exists, whereby men and women proceed through an ordered list of household tasks, gradually crossing gender boundaries as opposed to jumping from strictly
masculine tasks to highly feminized ones. This finding adds weight to the claim that dividing household labour by type can be measured rather than arbitrarily categorized by researchers. Too often household labour has been conceived in terms of time as opposed to task. To give a more accurate sketch of the division of household labour, it is important that household labour, like studies of the labour market, are sensitive to both the type of work and the length of working of time (Ibid, 713).

Child care is a form of household labour which is sometimes included under household labour and sometimes not. Some scholars treat it as an entirely distinct area with its own nature and explanations (Bianchi & Raley, 2005). For example, whilst men continually show up as performing less routine housework than their female partners, some studies suggest men take on a more pronounced role when it comes to child care (Ibid). In fact, Cowan (1988) has suggested that men simultaneously increase their child care and reduce their time spent on household labour when they become fathers. I agree with Thomas & Hildingsson (2009; 149) who insist that child care and household labour should be measured and analysed separately. Treating them independently will help to collect more accurate data on the trends and patterns in overall domestic labour.

Perhaps the more salient point is that whilst child care remains on the periphery of household labour studies, care of adults is almost completely invisible (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 231). Adults can require help for a number of reasons, including health problems and disabilities. There appears no logical reason why child care should be included and adult care overlooked. In addition, to complicate the issue, Eichler and Albanese (Ibid) propose that self-care also be incorporated under the ‘care’ banner. Closely related to care work is emotion work, another form of household labour which is excluded from household labour studies (Erickson, 1993: 898). Emotion work can include such things as comforting, support, advice, resolving conflicts, and managing crises (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 238). Eichler and Albanese (2007) concluded from their research that women more than men provide emotional support and carry the emotional burden of the family.

Another form of household labour passed over in studies is household management or planning. No household labour can proceed without some prior thought being put towards it (Eichler & Albanese, 2007: 250). By recording only the physical
part of the labour, household labour studies would note the time taken to do the shopping but ignore the time and thought given to making the shopping list, or document the cooking time without reference to the time and effort taken to search for a recipe. A few studies have underscored responsibility for household labour as the key rather than the physical labour itself (Shelton & John, 1996: 302). Closely related but distinct is the differentiation between undertaking the task and feeling responsible for it (Perkins & DeMeis, 1996: 79). Responsibility is recognized in the labour market as deserving of higher pay and prestige, so it should follow that it deserves acknowledgement with respect to household labour. One further consideration, particularly relevant to longitudinal studies, will be made about the depth of household labour studies. Eichler and Albanese (2007: 232) note that household labour is often represented as a static phenomenon which is relatively stable over time. Whilst routine household labour does need frequent attention, how this is performed can vary. For instance, a household may purchase a dishwasher which saves significant time on washing dishes, or the disappearance of a local grocery store can increase the time needed for a shopping trip. What is more, for a number of reasons people may choose or be forced to alter their housework habits (Ibid: 245).

This study will not operate at the level of detail needed to keep track of such subtle changes and their influence over the amount of household labour and its subsequent division. Figure 1 provides an oversimplified picture of the various forms domestic labour can take. In reality, the separate boxes are not at all distinct but exhibit much cross-over and overlapping. For instance, household management can be present in each box, whilst feelings of responsibility can also permeate each category. At the same time, the diagram highlights the limited scope of this study, focusing as it does on only routine household labour. From here on in, household labour and housework will be used interchangeably to denote routine household labour.
Problems of depth are inherently intermingled with problems of consistency. Since studies operate at different levels of depth, comparisons between findings run the risk of incommensurability. Explanations of the division of household labour, when defined as routine household labour, may be refuted when emotion work is affixed to the definition. I agree with Eichler and Albanese (2007) who argue for a broader characterization of household labour, including care work, emotion work, and household management as opposed to the different forms existing in isolation. Whilst working with the wider definition is preferable, it is not always practical. In such cases, researchers ought to be clear about their meaning of household labour and be aware of the forms of household labour they are detailing and all of the actors involved.

Just as the previous part of this section exposed the limitations with regards to who is performing household labour, this part has illustrated a number of shortcomings in relation to household labour itself. This study does not offer any solution to the problem of depth in household labour studies. What it can offer is an honest account of its focus, applicability, and limits. On the negative side I will investigate only routine household labour and how it is divided only between two partners in a household. On the positive side I am conscious of the fact that this represents just a small slice of the overall division of household labour. In terms of consistency, this study can make a positive contribution by being explicit about its definition of household labour.
2.3. Why household labour?

Few studies that investigate the division of household labour situate it in its larger milieu. Implicit in many studies that investigate the division of labour is a sense that uncovering an unequal division is highlighting some social evil in need of a remedy. This is problematic on two counts. Firstly, household labour is bound up in a complex web with other social, economic, and political events, and so dealing with household labour in isolation provides only a shortsighted view. Any tonic based on household labour alone is likely to have consequences in other spheres. Secondly, some researchers concentrate on perceptions of fairness in the division of household labour rather than exploring actual conditions (see Kluwer et al, 2002; Bartley et al, 2005). Whether the emphasis should be on subjective experience or objective conditions is a philosophical debate, yet one that needs to be framed and articulated and then considered prior to making any normative judgments on the division of household labour. An important work on subjective experience is Major’s (1987) influential framework of distributive justice which proposes why women may perceive the division as fair even if evidence points to the contrary. For example, societal gender norms, which assign women to the home, may impact on women’s own thoughts of what is an appropriate domestic workload (Bartley et al, 2005: 75). Furthermore, social comparison theory, as employed by Himsel and Goldberg (2003) posits that couples compare their division of household labour with others, for instance friends and family, in determining the (un)fairness of their own partition (Bartley et al, 2005: 75). Closely related to perceptions of fairness is a focus on the outcomes of the division of household labour as opposed to the causes. The bulk of household labour studies concentrate on the latter with little work dedicated to the former (Kluwer et al, 2002: 940). However, unfair perceptions have been known to cause more psychological distress and conflict and less marital satisfaction (Ibid). The upshot of this debate is that the meaning of household labour and its division has been woefully under-represented in academia. Discovering an unequal division is not reason enough to declare the division as unjust and in need of change. Therefore, it becomes necessary to understand the ties and connections between household labour and other domains, as well as to grasp the meanings which household labour and its division have on people’s subjectives.
Whilst these are worthwhile goals, they are beyond the scope of this study. Instead, I will seek to use the division of household labour as a means of furthering the understanding of gender construction in the social sciences. In fact, the area of household labour has already been used as a fruitful laboratory. Power and resource bargaining theories have traditionally been used as the foremost explanations for the division of household labour. More recently, gender construction has stepped in to fill spaces left unexplained with economic and rational theories for example through the discovery of gender deviant behaviour (outlined in more detail in section 3.3.). My aims are then theoretical rather than practical whilst conscious of the fact that real practical changes require more theoretical precision.
3. Theoretical frameworks for the division of household labour

Explanations of the division of household labour are more neatly established than definitions of household labour. The bulk of studies in this area draw on one or more of three theories; the time availability theory, economic theories, and the gender construction theory. The first two theories emerge from classical economic theory with more specific formulations given by Becker’s (1981) human capital theory and Blood and Wolfe’s (1960) resource-bargaining theory. Gender construction theory traces back through eclectic roots, drawing on symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and feminism (Coltrane, 2000: 1213). Up until the 1990s the time availability and economic theories dominated research in the field of the division of household labour. However, the gender construction theory has shone a different shade of light on the subject and, what is more, it has offered solutions to some of the unanswerable problems thrown up by the other theories. My study will take its starting point from gender construction theory but attach extra layers by arguing that not only gender but conjugal and parental identities are produced through the division of household labour.

It is important to note that a focus on gender construction is not to refute alternative explanations. It is best to conceive household labour as being conditioned by several forces, such as biology, culture, interaction, institutions, and their interconnections (Singley & Hynes, 2005: 380). As a grossly simplified example; women give birth, a biological factor, which, given that child birth will result in at least short term exit from the labour market, can cause employers to overlook women when deciding on promotions. This in turn makes men more successful in the workplace which can be used as a bargaining resource in deciding how to allocate housework and employment. As a result, women tend to be the ones spending more time on housework and other domestic chores, which is also their socially prescribed position. This plural image of the division of household labour is also noted by Thomas and Hildingsson (2009: 142) who speculate that these various forces typically work together to maintain a traditional gendered division, although at times they can also be in conflict with one another (Singley & Hynes, 2005: 381). Therefore, gender construction explanations of the division of household labour should be seen as complementary, rather than opposed,
to economic and rational theories. The remainder of this section will scan these three predominant theories, addressing their central ideas, findings, and shortcomings.

### 3.1. Time availability theory

Couples in a household can devote time either to the formal labour market or to household labour (Mikucka, 2009: 77). The time availability theory finds its place within these interrelations between the market and the home. At its core, the time availability theory posits that couples divide household labour by the relative time they have free to perform it (Davis et al, 2007: 1248). According to Shelton and John (1996: 307), household labour is performed after all other commitments are out of the way. It is something that is carried out when needed and if there is sufficient time (Ibid). South and Spitze (1994: 329) suggest that paid work is likely to be prioritized over household labour, leaving the latter to be divided only after work commitments are finalized. In this sense, the time availability theory is a rational one in that household labour is weighed against available time in order to determine its distribution (Bianchi et al, 2000: 193).

The explanatory power of the time available theory has proved to be mixed at best. The most unambiguous finding is that women’s work hours are positively associated with her time spent on household labour (see Bergen, 1991; Brines, 1993) which means the more time women spend in paid employment the less time they dedicate to household labour. However, this reveals nothing about the allocation within male-female partnerships. Some studies find a positive relationship between a woman’s working hours and her partner’s time in household labour (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Brines, 1993) whilst others find the same relationship between a woman’s working hours and her partner’s share of household labour (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992; Kamo, 1988). Others find weak or no relationship between a woman’s working hours and her husband’s time spent on household labour (see Kamo, 1991; Shelton, 1990). With regards to men, research continually unearths a negative association between the number of hours they spend at work and the amount of time given to household labour (Shelton & John, 1996: 308). However, very little research has been directed at
answering how a man’s employment hours are connected with his partner’s household labour or the relative proportion of household labour undertaken by couples (Ibid).

These findings leave open certain aspects of household labour that remain unresolved. Whilst paid work reduces the time a woman spends on housework, it is less clear whether increasing work hours have a significant effect on the time her partner spends on household labour (Shelton & John, 1996: 308). Assuming that time spent on routine household labour remains relatively stable, for routine chores require frequent attention, the time availability theory would propose that if a couple were working the same number of hours then routine household labour should be shared evenly between the couple. Some research hints that this is taking place slowly, whilst others flatly refute it. For example, Brines (1993) finds that even when women are employed full-time, working similar or even more hours, they continue to do more household labour. This indicates that decisions over household labour involve more than simply calculating free time and distributing them accordingly.

An additional problem lies in the causal processes behind the time availability theory. Whilst the theory hypothesizes that decisions about employment are prioritized with the remaining time rationally allocated to housework, it remains possible that families make decisions about employment with household labour in mind (Nermo & Evertsson, 2004; 1274). In such cases it becomes problematic to untangle whether or not women undertake more household labour because they do less paid work, or whether they spend less time in paid employment because they do more housework (Ibid). In essence, the theory pays scant attention to factors which determine allocation of time. For instance, time in the work place is strongly determined by gender since career and work are important identifiers of masculinity, and housework of femininity (Dribe & Stanfors, 2009: 35).

3.2. Economic theories

Economic understandings of the division of household labour can be grouped into three main categories; the economic dependency model explains the division of
household labour through a kind of contract whereby women agree to undertake the bulk of household labour in exchange for economic security; Becker’s (1981) theory of human capital investment rationalizes the division of household labour as something couples negotiate and agree upon to maximize household welfare; finally, the relative resources approach stems from the classic sociological study of Blood and Wolfe (1960) with its central theme of power relations within marriage and claims that the division of household labour rests on each partner’s relative bargaining power with regard to the resources each holds.

The first theory falling under the economic theories banner is the economic dependency model pioneered by the likes of Delphy (1984) and Walby (1986). This approach, which describes heterosexual partnerships as contracts which women enter into for economic security and men in order for domestic support (Coltrane, 2000: 1213), has received little scholarly attention. Its premise is rather outdated in that it assumes women will seek refuge under their partner rather than pursue their own career. The remaining two theories are entirely rational and gender-neutral in that they allow either partner to occupy either position within the household. The first, Becker’s (1981) theory of human capital investment asserts that, in paid employment, individuals act according to self-interest but, in the home, households act as single unit of analysis working towards its own ends (Thebaud, 2007: 7). In essence, households need the welfare offered by household labour as well as a number of goods and services which need to be purchased through income earned via paid employment (Mikucka, 2009: 77). In trying to maximize productivity in both spheres, households will rationally apportion its members in the most efficient manner (Kan, 2008: 46). Since men typically earn higher wages, they are more suited to the labour market whilst women, for a number of reasons including biology, socialization, and discrimination (Mikucka, 2009: 77), are more efficient in the domestic sphere (Bianchi et al, 2000: 194). Once allocated, members become more efficient by specializing in their chosen sphere (Mikucka, 2009: 78). Empirical support for this theory has been mixed (Bianchi et al, 2000: 194) and it has been criticized from other angles. Firstly, whilst economists state that decisions about paid work and household labour are made simultaneously and prior to their allocation, sociologists tend to give primacy to paid work with decisions about the division of household labour coming second (South & Spitze, 1994: 329). Similarly, this contractual view of relationships overlooks the historical context by beginning with
household labour and its rational partition but fails to consider why, in the first place, it is rational for men to be higher paid in the labour market. Lastly, analyzing the household as a consensual unit aimed at maximizing its welfare ignores the conflicts and clashes between household members (Thebaud, 2007: 7).

The idea that individuals within households hold conflicting views on household labour runs neatly into the relative resources theory. Rather than starting with households, the relative resources theory projects individuals as the key agents acting in ways to ensure their own self-interests are met. In this framework, self-interest involves avoiding household labour which is seen as something negative (Davis et al, 2007: 1248). Since both partners are predisposed to evade housework, they must use their relative resources, vis-à-vis their partner’s, in order to bargain from a stronger position and gain a favourable outcome (Ibid). When operationalised, the resources most thought to help shift the balance of power include relative income, relative education attainment, and relative employment prestige (Shelton & John, 1996: 304-305). To illustrate this point, high ranking occupations come with the assumption that some extra work, outside of office hours, is required (Evertsson & Nermo, 2007: 458). If just one partner in a household is employed in a high status job, then he or she can use this as a way to avoid housework. However, as Kan (2008: 48) importantly points out, it is crucial to use not only current resources but also potential resources which can be put to use in the bargaining process. In fact, education is best viewed as a potential resource as opposed to a direct resource (Evertsson & Nermo, 2007: 458). There is some support for this theory (see Blair & Lichter, 1991; Presser, 1994) who find that as earnings converge so the division of household labour becomes more even. In fact, associations between the division of household labour and relative resources have proved more robust with income as opposed to education and employment prestige (Shelton & John, 1996: 306). Yet the most important findings posit a curvilinear relationship between relative earnings and the division of household labour (see Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). Both Brines (1994) and Greenstein (2000) conclude that as relative earnings come together the division of household labour becomes more even. This pattern remains only until a certain point where after, as men become more dependent on their partners, their household labour decreases and the division of labour again becomes more traditional (Thebaud, 2007: 8).
In summary, criticisms of economic theories tread one of two paths. Firstly, as Brines (1994: 654) acknowledges, rational decision making over household labour may be gender-neutral, but the conditions in which decisions are made, as well as the outcomes of decisions, are heavily gender-influenced. In other words, men may bargain out of performing housework because they have higher earnings, but this fails to grasp why they earn more income in the first place. By starting from a shallow level of analysis, economic explanations miss out on deeper dynamics. The second criticism targets the actual empirical findings of economic theories, even if one accepts the shallow starting point. This has directed scholars towards searching for a further dynamic at work; something besides the availability of time and the strength of relative resources is playing a pivotal role in dividing household labour between partners. In spite of their differences, all three of the economic theories stress the influence of income and earning power in the division of household labour (Coltrane, 2000: 1214) and are operationalised in similar ways. As it stands, more of the variation in the division of household labour is explained by gender itself than by reference to free time, income, education, or occupation prestige (South & Spitze, 1994: 329)

3.3. Gender construction theory

It is somewhat unflattering to the previous theories that, if one is looking for the best predictor of who performs household labour, the best and most commonsensical answer is ‘women’ (Erickson, 2005: 339). Put simply, women undertake more household labour than men regardless of income or the availability of free time (Ibid: 340). In response to this phenomenon, the gender construction or ‘doing gender’ approach gained prominence during the 1990s as a rival explanation of housework allocation (Coltrane, 2000: 1213). Gender construction traces its roots through a number of mainstream sociological approaches, including symbolic interaction, ethnomethodology, phenomenology, and feminism (Ibid). Its starting point is a view of people as active agents, acting within but bound by a number of social structural constraints (Ibid). One of these structural constraints is gendered identity which simultaneously prescribes an accepted set of behaviours together with the possibility of negotiating and altering these norms. However, gender construction is distinct from
notions of gender socialization or gender ideology. These frameworks imply that individuals carry around a fixed set of ideas about gender and apply them to everyday situations. This is too restraining an outlook and denies individuals the chance to modify and construct alternative gender identities in different times and spaces. Instead, gender construction posits that there are prescribed ideas of gender which people draw on, consciously and unconsciously, in particular circumstances. In fact, although one may reject a particular gender ideology he or she may find themselves constructing that kind of identity in a given interaction (Thebaud, 2007: 9). In this sense, gender construction strikes a more harmonious balance between structure and agency by allowing for both structural constraints, in terms of gender norms, and human agency whereby actors can negotiate different gender identities in varying contexts. Household labour fits into the equation as both a site in which couples can affirm, reject, or modify these gendered identities and as a location in which they are reflected (Erickson, 2005: 340).

The inspiration for this approach to the division of household labour is rooted in the collective works of Sarah Fenstemaker Berk, Candace West, and Don Zimmerman. Judith Butler has also been influential in spreading the notion that gender is something performed, especially in *Gender Trouble* (Butler, 1990). Instead of seeing gender as a fixed category, West and Zimmerman (1987: 126) conceptualize gender as being a routine, ongoing accomplishment in micro, everyday interactions. Gender is acting with the knowledge of how one should act given social norms about one’s sex category (Ibid: 127). Heterosexual unions fit the bill as a location prime for small, interaction situations through which gender can be constructed and reconstructed (Gupta, 1999: 701). This framework has been applied to division of household labour studies most famously by Berk (1985) who argued that household labour not only produces goods and services but that is also produces gender. Household labour in this instance is a location where gender is made and remade – it is a ‘gender factory’ (Berk, 1985). Gender becomes the key product, as opposed to ironed clothes or mopped floors. In this perspective, household labour is a place where boundaries are drawn between appropriate behaviours for men and women in order to assert traditional masculine and feminine identities (Twiggs et al, 1999: 713).
Isolating the effects of gender construction from rational factors is a complex task. Most households in which one would expect to find a busy gender factory are also the site of several social and economic changes which lend support to a rational division of household labour. For instance, when a new child enters a household both rational and gender approaches would predict the same changes in the division of household labour but using separate explanations. When a couple have a child it is the woman who more often reduces her time in the labour market and so has less economic resources vis-à-vis her partner and thus, from a rational perspective, would increase her amount of housework (Baxter, 2008; 261). From a gender standpoint, a new child in the household also predicts a greater share of housework for women but the crucial factor is becoming a mother, of which doing housework is an important component (Ibid; 262). However, research has been able to sequester the two competing theories by looking at gender deviant households. The findings of Brines (1994) and Greenstein (2000) that men reduce their housework and women increase theirs in households where a woman’s income substantially outweighs that of the man are interpreted through ‘doing gender’ lenses (Shelton & John, 1996: 312). It is claimed that, given the atypical gender positions in paid work, men and women use housework to reclaim their respective gender identities and ensure a traditional gender hierarchy in the home. There is then a curvilinear relationship between a woman’s share of household labour and her proportion of the household income (Grunow et al, 2007: 3). As well as detecting the construction of gender within heterosexual marriages, in the same study Berk (1985) notes the absence of ‘doing gender’ in the division of household labour between same sex friends. In fact, gender construction is only visible if, as applied by Berk, male-female households are compared with other household types where the opportunities to act out traditional gender are limited (South & Spitze, 1994: 329). Given this, one would expect gender construction to be more prevalent in households where male and female partners are present in which each has a competing gender identity to defend, renegotiate, and amend (Ibid: 330). To further emphasise this point, Perkins and DeMeis (1996) found no difference in the time single men and women spend on housework.

Empirically unraveling the doing gender approach from rational factors is one problem. Another is that doing gender is typically inferred without any direct measurement. In short, where economic and time availability variables fail to account
for the division of household labour, it is assumed the rest is explained by gender – its production, negotiation, reproduction, or modification - without actually measuring these gender processes. Proceeding in such a manner can overestimate the effect of gender and, simultaneously, neglect a range of other possible explanations. At the extreme, one could argue that gender construction is being employed as an explanation of the division of household labour with little evidence of its existence and only until the time when some other explanatory tool later usurps it. Like many large quantitative surveys, the BHPS does not include such complex variables as negotiation, conflict, and performing gender – if it is even capable of quantifying such phenomena. However, some qualitative studies have found direct processes of doing gender (see Walzer 1997; Garey 1999). Such findings provide a degree of confidence that gender construction is at work, even when not measured directly. In the absence of more developed explanatory variables, the best this study can offer is to confirm that rational factors fall short in fully explaining the division of household labour whilst assuming that, at least a part of, the remaining division is bound up with culturally based loose structures of gender and how they are both constraining and enabling in interactions between couples. Furthermore, this study can shed light on how the division of labour varies by union status and the presence of children, although it can only insinuate as to why and how much these variables interact with gender construction in deciding on who performs routine housework tasks.

One further qualification should be made before proceeding to the next stage. The doing gender approach has been applied as a ‘doing traditional gender’ approach (Grunow et al, 2007: 3). Gender construction’s key premise is that, despite being constrained by external norms surrounding gender, gender is produced in interaction and, typically, the two are in agreement which serves to reinforce traditional gender differences (Pitt & Borland, 2008: 142). However, the key role given to agency and people’s active roles in constructing their own gender identities complicate the process of capturing and measuring couples doing gender. These complications work in two ways. Firstly, there is available space for couples to actively negotiate untraditional gender roles which challenge the existing gender norms. Without directly measuring negotiation processes, any display of traditional gender roles in terms of housework is viewed as couples doing traditional gender when, in fact, they may have constructed alternative gender roles; displaying traditional gender roles in the division of household
labour may be the result of some other explanation. Secondly, the new and competing ideas of gender which people create feed back into the system of gender norms, meaning that the structural landscape in which couples later construct gender is altered (Pitt & Borland, 2008: 142). If structural gender norms, which help to shape gender construction in interaction, are changed then couples can do gender without doing traditional gender. In other words, if gender norms no longer offer clear outlines for men and women, in housework and beyond, then any set of patterns of household labour can be interpreted as doing gender. Gender construction theory has not yet fully explained how fluctuations in gender norms affect day-to-day interactions, or how everyday actions transform gender norms (Grunow et al, 2007: 5). It is these structural constraints – the ideas and norms accompanying prescribed gender behaviour – in the UK to which attention is turned in the following section. Some scholars have scrutinized the relationship between a country’s gender ideology and the division of household labour (see Fuwa, 2004). This will not be pursued within this study. Nonetheless, with some academics having proclaimed sweeping transformations in the gender ideology climate in the UK and the entire western world, it is important to understand, without directly measuring couples negotiating gender roles, if there remain strong enough guidelines of traditional gender to justify that changes to a more traditional division of housework may in part be caused by loose structures of gender being applied in specific situations.

In summary, in addition to producing gender I argue that household labour is a site where specific marriage and parenthood roles are generated. Therefore, this study probes deeper within gender construction theory and looks at how gender is produced over two life course events. Firstly, I will test the effect on the division of routine household labour of moving from cohabitation to marriage. According to the gender construction theory, both arrangements facilitate the production of gender but I hope to investigate whether or not the division of labour within marriage is a distinct location in which not only gender but conjugal identities are made. By analyzing the division of household labour between cohabiting couples and following their transition to marriage, controlling for other variables, I will be able to detect whether couples are ‘doing marriage’ through the division of labour. Secondly, I will test whether or not specific mother and father identities are made evident in household labour via the transition to parenthood. Gender production should already be underway in couples, whether married
or cohabiting, and tracking households both pre-and post-parenthood should provide insight into whether a further layer of gender is built on top.
4. Gender in the UK

At the ideological level the breadwinner family was, from the mid-nineteenth century, the principal family organization in Britain (Creighton, 1999: 519). In unpacking the different dimensions of the breadwinner model, Creighton (1999) sees the model as a series of compacts or agreements between several actors such as between couples, workers, employers, and the state. For the purposes of this study, the compact between couples across the gender dimension are of importance. The model established men as the financial providers and full-time workers of whom little was expected in terms of housework or child care (Ibid: 523). For women, the breadwinner model gave responsibility for the management of the home, the family budget, and the physical and emotional needs of husbands and children (Ibid). In practice, the breadwinner model, in its pure form, was rarely achieved as many poorer families needed two wage earners to get by (Branen & Nilsen, 2006: 336). However, no matter how close families came to experiencing the true breadwinner model, its position as the ideal-type family structure, and the complementary gender roles, has come under increasing pressure over the past few decades (Ibid). The causal factors are too numerous and complex to describe here; typical trends thought to have played an important role include a rise in female employment, including more women in high status jobs, an increase in female education, the growth of feminism (Berridge et al, 2009: 346), expanding divorce rates, and a multiplication of different family forms, including single parent families and other reconstituted forms (Gregory & Milner, 2008: 61). Amongst the consequences of such waves of social change is an uncertainty and, at times, conflicting of gender norms. Men and women are provided with a swelling variety of appropriate codes of gender conduct. According to social theorists such as Anthony Giddens and Ulrich Beck, the breakdown of the breadwinner model is part of a much broader set of changes related to processes of modernity (Callinicos, 1999: 300). Principles of equality, rights, and, importantly, individualization, where lives are bound less by tradition and more through individual choice (Lewis, 2007: 274-275), flourish in modernity and are expressed not only in large-scale processes and movements but also reach down into intimate relations, such as between partners (Ibid: 300-301). The following sections will discuss the balance between traditional and more egalitarian gender norms in the UK.
4.1. New gender roles in the UK

At their foundations, the new ways of conceiving gender stem from a social constructionist perspective, whereby gender roles are seen as socially produced and malleable, as opposed to gender essentialism which ascribes differences between men and women as innate and natural (Crompton & Lyonette, 2005: 601-602). Seen from this viewpoint, gender roles are more open and flexible and can change across time and space. However, gender roles are influenced by existing notions of gender, although they are not entirely structured by them. The guiding ideas about appropriate gender behaviour impress upon the kinds of gender identities produced in interaction, but these ideas are liable to be both affirmed and altered. These ideas or loose structures of gender, which, logically, can be modified over time, are the focus of this section. Scott (2008) has examined changes in gender attitudes in Britain from 1980 to 2002. Although shifts in attitudes have been rather slow, there has been a clear trend of increasing egalitarian feelings away from the breadwinner model and towards a feminist stance in support of women’s economic independence (Scott, 2008: 6). Support for dual-earner families and agreement with the statement that working women can form equally strong ties with children as non-working mothers are just two of the indicators which imply a change in attitudes (Ibid: 7). Nevertheless, the direction and degrees of change are strongly contested. The prevailing discourses and instructions for men and women will be debated in turn.

4.2. Masculinities

A host of social changes have paved the way for what academics have termed the ‘crisis of masculinity’ (McDowell, 2001: 456). Firstly, since the 1960s, women in Britain have been moving in greater numbers into the formal labour market, often in part time employment, at such a rate that means dual-earner households are becoming the norm (Crompton et al, 2005: 214). As a result, men are feeling threatened and superfluous, unsure of their role in society – a role so unequivocal under the male breadwinner system (McDowell, 2001: 456). In addition, girls are outperforming boys
in schools, record numbers of women are initiating divorce, and the number of men committing suicide is growing whilst for women, the rate is declining (Ibid). Even if previous versions of what it meant to be a man were simplified stereotypes, the current uncertainty around men has coincided with evolution from discussions about masculinity to speaking about masculinities. Connell (1995) has pioneered the concept of multiple masculinities, arguing that masculinity, and femininity, can be dissected and differentiated by a number of other variables, such as race, ethnicity, and class. In addition to the number of masculinities, Connell has also added the dimension of ranking different types of masculinities. Despite locating new and potentially new alternative masculinities, Connell continues to place the more traditional masculinity at the top of the gender tree, occupying the position of hegemonic masculinity in that it is given a culturally higher status than other forms (Connell, 1995: 77). According to Kinsman (1993), the contemporary hegemonic male is white, middle-class, and heterosexual. Furthermore, hegemonic men should be physically powerful, emotionally distant from surroundings and relations, sexually rampant, and with a rational, cool-headed thinking style (Neville, 2009: 234). Whilst few men actually meet these criteria, a large number work to advance this image in their own self-interest. On the other hand, hegemonic masculinity does not reign unopposed and can be challenged by a number of competing ideals of masculinity.

One such competitor would be the ‘New Man’. Married and heavily involved in child care, the new man offers a more delicate version than the aggressive hegemonic male (Neville, 2009: 235). Qualities associated with this version of masculinity include being artistic, intimate, emotive, domesticated, affectionate, and considerate (Chapman, 1988: 226-227). In their study of fathering in four generation families, Brannen and Nilsen (2006: 347) witness a move to a more hands-on, child-centred father in the latest generation, although they note that transferring cultural ideas is a delicate process. Support groups for battered husbands and campaigns by men’s groups such as Fathers4Justice, a movement which seeks more equality in child custody cases, further illustrate the number of competing images of masculinity (Neville, 2009: 235). By and large, this softer version of masculinity has been more successful in theory than in practice (Halford, 2006: 387). For example, Halford (Ibid) suggests that, even when the image is endorsed, it tends to be added around working hours and work commitments rather than replacing them. Furthermore, as contrasting pictures emerge, hegemonic
masculinity is able to reassert itself once again, often in slightly modified forms. The ‘New Lad’ culture which penetrated 1990s Britain was a coarser and wilder version of masculinity (Ibid: 236). Drinking, fun, sex, football, and unselfconsciousness typified this type of man (Benyon, 2004: 211-212). Neville (2009: 236) concedes that these competing images of masculinity take hegemonic masculinity as the reference point from which they radiate outwards, simultaneously, yet unintentionally, assuring hegemonic masculinity as the dominant image of manliness.

4.3. Femininities

Just as there are multiple masculinities, it follows that femininity comes in many shapes and sizes. Likewise, in Connell’s (1995) influential model, there is also a hegemonic form of femininity which is the benchmark for women. Those meeting the standards of hegemonic femininity should be beautiful, weak, submissive (O’Connor & Kelly, 2006: 249), passive, obedient, dependent, innocent, and chaste (Laidler & Hunt, 2001: 639). At the moment, the white, middle-class, and heterosexual woman define the ideal race, class, and sexuality of the hegemonic woman (O’Connor & Kelly, 2006: 249). However, according to Connell, hegemonic femininity, and rival femininities for that matter, place lower in the gender hierarchy than hegemonic masculinity. Schippers (2004) offers constructive criticism of Connell’s model, notably with regards to the difficulty in understanding the relation between masculinities and femininities given that men can perform femininity and vice versa (Schippers, 2004: 10). This is not the place to enter this particular debate, suffice to say that, just as with masculinities, there exist several competing ideas of what constitutes the ideal woman. The flow of women into the labour market has provided one alternative notion of femininity, although this conception has been unable to detach itself from the domestic prescriptions for women – instead they mesh together in a way that continues to emphasize the role of mother and care-giver.

Feminists have long claimed that female successes in education and work would transform the association between women and the home, family, and care giving and, eventually, reach a situation where work and parenting would co-exist in harmony,
for both men and women (Dillaway & Pare, 2008: 444). However, such a vision has not materialized as domestic duties continue to take priority over formal employment. For instance, by its very name, the term ‘supermom’, for those women who combine a career-oriented lifestyle with parenthood, implies that to be a mother is the primary function – the prefix merely notes that she is able to add additional tasks on top of her principal role (Ibid: 445). Moreover, Dillaway & Pare (2008: 446) cite the glowing media attention afforded high-profile women who have chosen to withdraw from the labour market in order to focus on home and family jobs as a further example of how gender norms continue to correlate femininity with the domestic sphere. There has also been a surge of conservative feminism and the public popularity of texts reaffirming traditional gender ideology such as *Men are From Mars, Women are From Venus* (Gray, 1992) and *The Surrendered Wife* (Doyle, 2001). Academics have also turned attention to the phenomenon of ‘maternal gatekeeping’, a situation in which mothers are unwilling to loosen control over the family to fathers and attempt to retain separate family roles for mothers and fathers (McBride et al, 2005: 362). Lastly, Dillaway & Pare (2008: 449) further mention a new kind of terminology has been employed, both through cultural messages from, for example parenting books, and by mothers themselves which draws on work concepts to describe the conditions and experiences of motherhood. Motherhood is viewed as a career choice alongside terms such as job skills, creativity, decision-making, and knowledge (Crum in Dillaway & Pare, 2008: 449).

### 4.4. Gender and the big picture

Scholars have woken to the fact that competing images of masculinities and femininities are in involved in constant struggles to obtain hegemonic status. A further point of agreement is that hegemonic masculinity and, in spite of its problematic name, hegemonic femininity continue to be defined by traditional qualities of manliness and womanhood. Despite real changes in the economic, social, and political spheres, the specter of motherhood contends that being a good mother requires constant physical proximity and undivided time dedicated to the child, both of which take precedence over paid employment. Pfau-Effinger (1998, 2002, 2004) has conducted cross-national
comparisons of different gender regimes which take into account not only institutional arrangements within a country, but also the gender norms or, what Duncan and Edwards (1997) call, ‘gendered moral rationalities’. Pfau-Effinger’s model is one that encompasses culture, structure, and action in trying to understand the gender arrangements within a country (Pfau-Effinger, 1998: 153). Moreover, the aim is to understand the interactions between culture, structure, and agency rather than analyzing them independently. For example, welfare benefits are now tied to individuals’ work rather than to families, emphasizing that both partners have a duty to be in paid employment (McDowell, 2005: 219). However, as has been shown, the prevailing belief that mothers should act as key care-giver persists. Although child care provision expanded after the election of New Labour in 1997, it has mostly been via the market with only high income families able to pay, and remains an inaccessible option for the majority of families (McDowell, 2001: 457). Here then is an instance of cultural gender norms working with institutions to configure overall gender arrangements. In Pfau-Effinger’s model of gender arrangements, the UK remains faithful to the male breadwinner model.

A thorough examination of a subject as extensive, multifaceted, and diverse as gender was not the intention of the preceding discussion. The aim, however, was to draw attention to the broad context in which couples negotiate and contest their gendered identities over the division of household labour and in this it has, hopefully, been successful. There seems at least a certain level of justification to presume that traditional notions of gender continue to act as loose structures when couples come together and interact, although this is not to downplay the alternative ideas which shape the contests and outcomes of gender battles. Indeed, these loose structures are in a constant state of flux, being both solidified and modified by the actions of those on which they impress. If this is justification that there are sufficient structures which enable couples to ‘do traditional gender’ when it comes to household labour, then, given the goals of this study, it follows that justification is needed that people may enact traditional gender roles in the transition to marriage and to parenthood.
4.5. Doing Marriage

Just as the previous part outlined the general gender culture in the UK, this part will delve deeper into that culture by examining the main prescriptions and recommendations surrounding marriage and marriage roles, and, on the flip side of the same coin, the missing instructions and norms for cohabiting couples. To be sure, gender is at work in both cohabiting and married households when it comes to the division of housework. The question posed here is whether or not there is variation in how gender is constructed between cohabiting and married households. I will begin by reporting on the key studies which look at union type and the division of household labour. The empirical findings will then be set in a gender construction context by pinpointing aspects of the gender relations within marriage and cohabitation which may lead to certain household labour behaviour. Finally, I will formulate a hypothesis for this study for the relationship between union type and the division of household labour.

A number of studies have found that cohabiters practice a more egalitarian division of household labour than married spouses (Shelton & John, 1993: South & Spitze, 1994: Baxter, 2005). Yet, cohabiting couples are known to differ across a range of variables, for example cohabiting women contribute more to family income than do their married counterparts (Baxter, 2001: 18), cohabiters are less likely to have children (Baxter, 2005: 305), and married men earn more income than cohabiting men (Waite, 1995). These factors are known to cause more traditional divisions in household labour, but whilst they account for economic and time availability explanations, they fail to investigate how gender operates in cohabitation and marriage. The problem then of scrutinizing cohabitation and marriage separately is that it becomes an arduous task to determine whether or not differences in the division of household labour stem from differences in the individuals (i.e. socio-economic factors) occupying those union types, or whether differences spring from differences in the conditions of marriage and cohabitation (Gupta, 1999: 701) Although much is known about how married couples and cohabiting couples divide housework, little is known about how the division is influenced by transitions from the latter to the former (Ibid: 700). Therefore, it becomes crucial to study transitions from cohabitation to marriage in order to make visible the causes.
To date, just two known study have carried out such research. Gupta (1999) uses two waves, 1987-1988 and 1992-1993, of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), a comprehensive national survey from the United States which later included a third wave in 2001-2003. Gupta found strong evidence of doing traditional gender, with men reducing housework hours when entering a heterosexual union and increasing housework hours when exiting a union, with opposite findings for women. However, the type of union, whether married or cohabiting, was not significant, indicating that it is the state of a man and woman living together which induces traditional gender displays rather than the form of that union (Ibid: 710). Grunow et al (2007) use five waves of German data, between 1988 to 2002, to analyse transitions to marriage and find that, in early marriage, the division of household labour becomes more even before gradually moving in a traditional direction over time. Given the rather hazy evidence concerning household labour and the transition to marriage, I will, instead, make use of the abundant cross-sectional accounts of the division of household labour and union type which predict a more traditional division of labour in marriage than in cohabitation.

In understanding the place of cohabitation, competing claims often describe it as either an alternative to marriage, or a new stage in the marriage process (Smock, 2000: 7). Rindfuss & VandenHeuvel (1992) suggest it would be more fruitful to compare cohabitation with single life in that both lack the idea of permanence and also have a close resemblance in terms of fertility planning, home ownership, and non-family activities (Ibid: 721). Indeed, South & Spitze (1994) hypothesize that the division of household labour in cohabiting couples fall between that for singles and married couples. However, married and cohabiting couples share similarities such as a common living space, a close emotional and sexual relationship, and at least some degree of commitment (Davis et al, 2007: 1246). What cohabiters are missing is the equivalent social and legal statuses bestowed upon spouses (Ibid: 1247). The absence of these statuses has been led to cohabitation being interpreted as an incomplete institution. Originally proposed by Cherlin (1978) to describe the condition of remarriages, he claims that first marriage presents ready-made roles, inscribed by law and custom, for husbands and wives to take up (Cherlin, 1978: 646). Later, Nock (1995) applied the idea of incomplete institution to cohabitation which can be seen as a condition lacking definite gender norms which leaves open the possibility of negotiating different,
perhaps more egalitarian roles (Yabiku & Gager, 2009: 985). Whilst cohabitation as an incomplete institution provides the main theoretical basis for predicting a more traditional division of labour within marriage, there are developments working in the opposite direction. Cherlin (2004) himself later retreated on his original thesis that remarriage, an incomplete institution, would sooner or later develop its own set of guiding norms and principles. Instead, he asserts that marriage has lost its institutionalized roles and norms whilst cohabitation has increasingly gained rights previously afforded only to spouses, blurring the boundaries between them (Cherlin, 2004: 855). In his view, all that marriage holds over cohabitation is a badge of prestige. Finally, in an important qualitative study of how gender works in cohabiting couples, Miller and Sassler (2005) cautiously suggest that, despite exceptions, cohabiters also stick to traditional gender norms. Given the rather conflicting claims concerning gender in cohabitation and marriage, it is with a fair amount of tentativeness that I make the following hypothesis.

**Hypothesis 1:** Couples making the transition from cohabitation to marriage will experience a greater shift towards a more traditional division of household labour than couples who cohabit in both waves, whilst controlling for a number of other factors known to influence the division, including the presence of young children, relative economic dependency, relative education levels, relative class position, relative time spent in employment, and age.

### 4.6. Doing Parenthood

This part will follow a similar structure to the last, replacing the construction of gender in the transition to marriage with a focus on how gender plays out in the move to parenthood. As with the evolution from cohabitation into marriage, the construction of traditional gender roles should already be in practice in households, when comprised of cohabiters or spouses, prior to the birth of a child. However, parenthood is alleged to lead to a condition in which parents are more likely to build more traditional gender roles, including in the domain of household labour. I will begin by reporting on three
longitudinal studies which report conflicting results concerning the transition to parenthood and the division of housework. Secondly, I will explore the theoretical explanations surrounding parenthood and housework. Lastly, given previous findings and theoretical interpretations, a hypothesis will be formulated for this study.

The transition to parenthood is one of, if not the most, challenging experience for couples (Kluwer et al, 2002: 930). Reduced leisure time, sexual satisfaction, time spent together, and marital satisfaction, alongside rising quarrels and disagreements highlight just some of the new obstacles (Ibid). Accompanying these challenges is the largest sudden rise in household work that couples will experience over the course of their relationship (Gjerdingen & Center, 2005: 113). Cross-sectional research suggests that this rise in housework is divided disproportionately with women doing more, resulting in a more traditional division of household labour (Berk, 1985; Shelton, 1992). Yet as Gupta (1999) demonstrated with cohabitation and marriage, these findings cannot confirm if the differences in household labour are due to the characteristics of the couples who have children, or whether the condition of parenthood induces a more traditional partition of housework. Longitudinal samples can separate these causes, yet they are not immune from problems. For example, couples expecting a child can be problematic to situate as either parents or non-parents (Sanchez & Thompson, 1997: 750). Sanchez & Thompson (1997) use the first two waves of the American survey, NSFH, from 1987-1988 and 1992-1994 and focus only routine housework. Their results confirm that the division of household labour becomes more traditional following the birth of one or more children. For couples who remained childless, men increased their housework hours and women reduced theirs. However, when couples had one or more than one children between waves, men’s housework hours increased slightly but women’s housework hours increased significantly more, almost doubling to 41 hours per week for mothers with more two or more children. In short, men’s housework followed similar trends regardless of parental status, whilst the presence of children had a much stronger effect on women. In the Netherlands, Kluwer et al (2002) collected data at three points in time either side of the birth of a child. As with Sanchez & Thompson, they discovered the transition to parenthood caused a small rise in the number of hours of household labour performed by men. The number of housework hours performed by new mothers increased more sharply. Evertsson & Nermo (2007) discovered the importance of parenthood for the division of household labour as an unintended
consequence. Testing the strength of relative economic resources in explaining the division, the authors in fact found the transition to parenthood to have greater explanatory power. They determined that women’s share of household labour increased with the presence of young children (Evertsson & Nermo, 2007: 465). In contrast to these results, Gjerdingen & Center (2005) declared that men reduced their housework hours after becoming a father whilst new mothers spent only slightly more time on household labour. Their study measured housework hours at two points, both before and after the move to parenthood, for 128 American couples. Also included was time spent on child care and in employment with the conclusion that total workload increases greatly, and reaches similar levels, after becoming parents, both for mother and father.

The rapid growth in housework, as well as a host of other changes, requires couples to modify pre-natal relations and agreements. Undoubtedly, this period of confusion allows new identities and roles to be negotiated, but new parents are also faced with more loose structures over appropriate behaviour for mothers and fathers. Viewed from this angle, a more traditional division of household labour in parenthood is attributed to parents’ awareness of norms about what it means to be a father or a mother (Dribe & Stanfors, 2009: 35). Just as cohabiting couples are doing gender, and spouses are, potentially, doing marriage, parents are doing parenthood (Walzer, 1997). As noted in section 4.3., unraveling motherhood and femininity has yet to materialize in the ideological sphere; in fact the notions that women should be both full-time mothers and workers often exist in contradiction (Walzer, 1997: 212-213). Therefore, the idea that doing housework is a key part of being a good mother persists (Baxter, 2008: 262). In her qualitative study of new parents, Walzer (1997) recounts that interaction between cultural norms, or loose structures, and institutional context. Some new mothers revealed that it appeared the natural decision for them to stay at home and their partners to remain in paid work whilst the labour market gave few incentives for new mothers to stay in work (Walzer, 1997: 224). For men, fatherhood offers the chance to fulfill cultural norms by acting as the family provider by increasing time spent at work (Baxter, 2008: 262). Despite the emergence of the nurturing father who takes a more active role in domestic affairs, Halford (2006: 385) claims this imagery has not been met in practice. However, according to Dribe & Stanfors (2009: 34), fathers have increased their time more in child care than in housework, further confirming verifying the need to investigate both child care and household labour in grasping more accurately
the overall situation of domestic labour. Nevertheless, with the absence of child care data, most empirical evidence and theoretical developments predict the same pattern for parenthood and the division of household labour.

**Hypothesis 2:** Couples who make the transition from a childless household to a household with at least one child will experience a greater shift towards a more traditional division of labour than couples who remain childless at both times. This is whilst controlling for union status, relative economic dependency, relative education levels, relative class position, relative time spent in employment, and age.
5. Data and Method

This section will be broken down into three parts. The first will introduce the data set from which information has been gleaned, the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS), and discuss its origins, scope, and sample size. Next, in part two, I will say some words about the Ordinary Least Squared (OLS) regression model which constitutes the key part of the analysis. In the third part I will detail the dependent and independent variables used in the analysis. Here, I will describe the modifications made to these variables and the final composition of the sample of respondents.

5.1. British Household Panel Survey (BHPS)

The BHPS is a longitudinal and nationally representative survey that was first conducted in 1991 and continues to this day. Carried out by the Institute of Social and Economic Research, based at the University of Essex, the BHPS has, since 2008, been incorporated into the UK Household Longitudinal Study (UKHLS), the largest panel survey in the world. The first wave consisted of approximately 5,500 household and 10,300 respondents. Each year the same households, and new households formed by original respondents, are included in the sample. All 18 waves, and the questionnaire content, are available online at: [http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/survey/bhps](http://www.iser.essex.ac.uk/survey/bhps). Information comes from structured personal interviews, with a small number of telephone interviews, and covers a vast array of topics. Household composition, employment, education, health, housing conditions, and social values are just some of the subjects dealt with. This study makes use of two waves of the BHPS. In the first, interviews were conducted between August 1996 and April 1997 with the vast majority taking place in September and October of 1996. For practical purposes I will from here on in label this wave as 1996. In the second wave used here, interviews were carried out between September 2005 and April 2006 with most occurring in September, October, and November of 2005. From now on this wave will be called 2005.

It should be noted that additional household samples were added to the main sample in 1999 for Scotland and Wales and 2001 for Northern Ireland. Since my
original sample comes from 1996 there is perhaps a slight England bias in the data. The selection of the first wave, and the time between waves, is, in a sense, arbitrary although the choices were not wholly random. The 2005 wave, as one of the most recent available waves, was chosen first whilst the 1996 wave was selected to allow for enough change in key variables such as union type and the presence in the household of a child as well as in variables forming background variables, including class, education, and income. The precise questions used to create the variables for this study are included in the appendix.

5.2. OLS regression

The data will be subject to a statistical technique known as Order of Least Squares (OLS) regression analysis which is a standard tool in the social sciences and in studies of the division of household labour. OLS regression investigates the relationship between a dependent variable (at the interval level) and one or several independent variables. This relationship is assumed to be linear. A further requirement of OLS regression is that the dependent variable is normally distributed. This proved problematic in this study with two of the three dependent variables found to be abnormally distributed and subsequently transformed using square root transformations. This is discussed in more detail in section 5.3. which covers the dependent variables. Other prerequisites which need inspecting in order to make a sound regression analysis, such as normally distributed residuals, heteroscedasticity, and multicollinearity, were also tested. None of these requirements were seriously violated. For instance, in checking for multicollinearity, the lowest tolerance figure across the three dependent variables was 0.26; the highest VIF figure was 3.87. Since this study will employ several independent variables, the analysis is called multiple OLS regression. OLS regression uncovers the relationship in three ways (Agresti and Finlay, 2009; 255). Firstly, it checks whether or not the dependent and independent variables are associated; secondly it allows us to see the strength of that association; thirdly it creates a prediction equation which allows us to predict a score on the dependent variable for a given score on the independent variable. In multiple OLS regression, these three aspects of the relationship are carried out whilst controlling for the effects of other independent variables.
With the exception of age, the remaining independent variables are nominal level variables, which mean they need to be converted into a series of dummy variables. In essence, creating dummy variables means constructing a series of dichotomous variables which can be treated as interval level variables in the regression analysis (Nie et al, 1975: 374). Each theoretical variable in this study, such as union status, presence of a child, social class, or education is broken down into a series of binary variables which contrast one category of the variable against all other categories. For example, union status is divided into three dummy variables; couples cohabiting in 1996 and 2005, couples married in 1996 and 2005, and couples cohabiting in 1996 and married in 2005. Given the construction process, it becomes necessary to exclude one of the dummy variables to be used as a reference category, against which other variables are compared. For instance, the reference category for union status is those couples cohabiting in 1996 and 2005. Any changes in the division of labour within other categories can be contrasted only against the reference category.

5.3. Dependent and independent variables

Prior to the analysis stage there were some preliminary actions necessary in order to satisfy the final sample criteria. Firstly, only household consisting of heterosexual couples with or without children were included, therefore ruling out household where other adults are present. Secondly, only couples who answered all relevant questions in both waves were included. As a result, unions which dissolved between 1996 and 2005 were not included, potentially leading to a sample bias of long-term unions. Indeed, including only couples whose relationships spans at least 1996 to 2005 excludes shorter term relationships that began and ended during that period. Consequently, this study can say nothing about the division of labour in short-term unions which may operate according to different principles and dynamics. Thirdly, any households in which one or both partners suffered from some health problem which inhibited the performance of housework were omitted. Conveniently, the health section of the BHPS includes the following question, ‘health hinders doing the housework?’, with the possible answers ‘yes’ and ‘no’. The main BHPS sample used here includes
individuals aged 16 and over, although, since 1994, a shorter questionnaire exists for children aged 11-15. No additional filtering was used, meaning that some or both partners were moving into retirement between waves, or that both couples were retired in both waves. Retirement offers added complexity to both gender construction and rational theories. Amongst other things, from a gender constructionist perspective, retirement, in most cases, eliminates the possibility of work, therefore removing a powerful source of gender identity which perhaps reflects on gender construction in the home. As an example from a rational point of view, a leveling of resources between couples upon retirement potentially has a different dynamic compared to changes in resources when both partners are active in the labour market. Without any evidence to suggest how exactly retirement is associated with household labour, I note here the possibility that it may impact on this study in unknown ways. Future research may benefit by separating working and retired couples, and by explicitly focusing on couples moving into, and those already in, retirement. After the filtering process, the final sample comprised 776 couples or 1,552 individual respondents.

**Dependent Variables**

**Woman’s share of Household labour:** This variable measures the relative share of routine household labour undertaken by the female partner in a household. The variable derives from the BHPS question ‘About how many hours do you spend on housework in an average week, such as time spent cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry?’ This type of survey question represents one of the two main methods of collecting time spent on housework, the other being through using time diaries (Lee & Waite, 2005: 328). In their study, Lee and Waite (2005) found that respondents tend to estimate more time spent on housework through surveys than via time diaries. Another of their conclusions was that time spent on housework varies by which household respondent is answering the question. Thankfully, the BHPS asks both couples about their own time spent on routine household labour. The woman’s share of household labour is calculated as the woman’s hours per week spent on housework divided by the total number of housework hours and is expressed as a percentage.
**Woman’s hours of household labour:** This represents the number of hours per week that the female partner spends on housework. This continuous variable is based on the same BHPS question mentioned above. Exploratory analysis revealed that this variable was not normally distributed – a prerequisite for OLS regression. This variable suffered from both high levels of skewness and kurtosis. Although there is no official consensuses as to what figures constitute unworkable skewness and kurtosis, there are general rules of thumb to guide decision-making. Bulmer (1979) defines distributions with scores greater than +1 or -1 as highly skewed. For kurtosis, a general guide is that it should fall within +2 to -2. Woman’s hours on household labour had a skewness of 1.18, a positive skew (or right skew), and a positive kurtosis value of 3.23. Therefore, it was necessary to transform the data which reduced the values to more workable levels; 0.26 for skewness and 0.17 for kurtosis. Square root transformation was applied to the data, whereby the square root of each value is used instead of the true values. Square root transformation is one of three popular methods of transformation; the others being log transformations and inverse transformations (Osborne, 2002: 3). Square root transformation is perhaps the weakest of the three, but Osborne (2002: 3) argues that researchers should use only the smallest amount of transformation necessary to bring the data up to an adequate level. Since, in this case, square root transformation was enough to make the variable (satisfactorily) normally distributed, no further changes were made. Potential problems arise with negative values or values of zero. The former was not possible in the case of this variable, though the latter was present. Because of this a constant of 1 was added to each individual value before squaring. The equation can be written thus:

\[
\text{Transformed value} = \sqrt{\text{original value} + 1}
\]

To illustrate, a woman who spends 24 hours per week on housework would be given a transformed value of 5 (the square root of 24 + 1). Transforming the data is not a problem-free process. It is important to remember that, after transformation, it is no longer the original data with which one is working. The principal adjustment is that the distance between original values is greatly reduced. For example, one person performing 24 hours of housework per week and another spending just 1 hour a week, using the original variable, would have much closer values of 5 and 1.41 respectively, after transformation. Furthermore, transforming this variable makes interpretation of
regression coefficients much more complex. Analysis was carried out without transforming the variable to test the effect of the transformation. Results were very similar with the transformed or non-transformed variable. It is important to note that this transformation impacts only the regression analysis. Earlier analyses and interpretation work with the original variable.

*Man’s hours of household labour:* As with the woman’s hours above, this variable stems directly from the aforementioned question. Including both the woman’s and man’s hours of household labour should provide a more accurate understanding of how fluctuations in the woman’s share of housework take place. Like the number of hours of housework performed by a woman, this variable also displayed an abnormal distribution. There was both high positive skewness (1.70) and high positive kurtosis (4.55). The same steps as above were taken to transform the data which returned more acceptable values of skewness (0.63) and kurtosis (0.20). Again, the transformation applies only to the regression stage of the analysis. The regression was tested with the original variable with that results that closely resembled the findings with the transformed data.

**Independent variables**

*Union type:* Due to the filtering process only two possible union types were available – cohabiting and married. Across the two waves, this amounted to three possibilities; (a) couples who were married in both 1996 and 2005 (N = 1306) – reference category, (b) couples who were cohabiting in 1996 and 2005 (N = 96), and (c) couples who were cohabiting in 1996 and married in 2005 (N = 150). There were no couples married in 1996 and cohabiting in 2005. No checks were made to ensure that all couples included in the final sample experienced continuous living-together arrangements between 1996 and 2005. There remains the possibility that some couples experienced a period of separation between the two waves.
Presence of a child: Children in this instance are defined as being under 12 years of age. The boundaries between being a child and being a non-child are uncertain therefore question marks linger over any choice of age. Defining children as those under 12 was to utilize the BHPS question ‘child/ren under 12 in household’ with possible ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answers. Over the two waves, the presence of at least one child under 12 in the household led to four possibilities; (a) no child in either 1996 or 2005 (N = 798) – reference category, (b) at least one child in 1996 but no child in 2005 (N = 316), (c) no child in 1996 but at least one child in 2005 (114), and (d) at least one child in the household in both 1996 and 2005 (N = 324). It is important to note that this study does not differentiate between the number of children in a household, only that there is at least one. In their study, Sanchez & Thompson (1997) separated between households with one child and those with two or more. They found that the differences in both men and women’s housework hours are far greater between having no children and having one child than between having one child and two or more. Although the effect of higher order children requires more attention, it appears fair to claim that the presence of at least child is more important than the number of children. Furthermore, I do not specify the timing of having a child. It is possible that couples could have been expecting a child in the 1996 interview or welcomed a child at any point up until the 2005 interviews. Again, the timing of the birth and the resulting division of household labour is something later research should take into account. Finally, whether or not the child is the biological offspring of the parents or enters the household by other means (for example fostering or adoption) is not differentiated. Therefore, a 10 year old child adopted into a family is treated in the same way as a newborn child, even though it is likely that they have different effects on the division of household labour.

Social class: Social class was categorized with reference to the Erikson and Goldthorpe (1992) class scheme. This variable was dichotomized into ‘high class’, those in class I and class II of the Goldthorpe class scheme, and ‘low class’, made up of everyone else. Respondents’ social class from 1996 was used as a control variable.

Relative change in social class: Building from the social class variable, a variable was constructed which measures the relative change in social class between couples between 1996 and 2005. For example, if in 1996 the male partner was high class and the female partner low class and in 2005 the male partner remained high class
and the female also became high class, then the woman would be deemed to have improved her position in relation to her partner. With this in mind, households can fall into one of three categories; (a) relative social class is unchanged (N = 1130) – reference category, (b) households in which the woman has improved her position relative to her partner (N = 238), and (c) couples where the man has improved his relative social class vis-à-vis his partner (N = 184). Relative social class is a common measure in economic theories explaining the division of household labour, be it the dependency, specialization, or bargaining strand of the theory. Economic theories predict that a relative increase in social class will reduce one’s share of household labour.

**Economic dependency:** Initially, income for each respondent was measured as annual labour income between 1.9.1995 and 1.9.1996. To calculate economic dependency the following calculation was made: (own income – partner’s income) / (own income + partner’s income). The resulting scores of economic dependence range between -1 and +1, where -1 indicates the respondent is entirely dependent on his/her partner and a score of +1 reveals that the respondent wholly supports his/her partner. Economic dependency from 1996 was included as a control variable.

**Change in relative economic dependency:** Change in economic dependency was judged to have taken place if there was a 10% or more increase or decrease in one’s economic dependency from 1996 to 2005. For example, a respondent with an economic dependency score of 0 in 1996 is deemed to have changed economic dependency in relation to his/her partner if the score in 2005 is greater than 0.20 or less than -0.20. Therefore, households fall into one of three groups; (a) unchanged relative economic dependency (N = 664) – reference category, (b) households where the woman has become less dependent economically on her partner (N= 540), and (c) households where the man has become less economically dependent on his partner (N = 348). Economic theory hypothesizes that those who become less economically dependent on their partner will decrease their share of housework.

**Education:** Respondents were coded as ‘high education’ if they possess a degree, a teaching qualification, or another higher qualification. All other respondents
were classified as ‘low education’. Education levels from 1996 were added to the regression model as a control variable.

*Change in relative education:* As with social class and economic dependency variables, couples within a household can be grouped in three categories; (a) households with no relative change in education (N = 1274) – reference category, (b) households where the woman improves her education level in relation to her partner (N = 142), and (c) households in which the man improves his education level vis-à-vis his partner (N = 136). Economic theory proposes that the partner who improves their relative education level will perform a reduced share of household labour.

*Hours spent in paid employment:* This variable measures the number of hours normally worked per week. The number of hours spent in employment per week in 1996 was included as a control variable.

*Change in relative employment hours:* Change in relative employment hours is deemed to have taken place in households where there has been a 10% increase or decrease in a respondent’s share of total employment hours. Couples are placed in one of three groups; (a) couples in households with unchanged relative employment hours (N = 800) – reference category, (b) households where the woman increases her relative employment hours in relation to her partner (N = 390), and (c) households where the man increases his relative employment hours vis-à-vis his partner (N = 362). Hours spent in paid work is the variable most often used to test the time availability theory. According to the theory, an increase in relative employment hours should be associated with a drop in the share of household labour.

*Age:* The age of the respondent in 1996 is added as a control variable.

*Sex:* The sex of the respondent is added as a control variable. Only male-female households in both waves were included. Therefore, an official change in sex in one of the couples would result in both partners being excluded from the final sample. However, the BHPS does not probe this sensitive area and does not ask subjective feelings of sex and gender. In fact, the questionnaire’s sex variable is binary – male or female – which may not adequately categorize all respondents.
6. Results

At the most basic level of analysis, the pattern of the division of household labour parallels the general trend found in other studies – namely that the share of routine household labour is moving, slowly, toward a more egalitarian division. In 1996 women’s share of housework was 76.8%. By 2005 this percentage had dropped to 74.8% (see Figure 2). Figure 3 reveals that this small shift in the share of household labour, at least on the surface, is due to changes in both men and women’s behaviour. Between 1996 and 2005, women have reduced the time spent on housework from almost 19 hours per week to under 18 hours, whilst men have increased their time spent in housework, albeit rather moderately, from 5.3 hours per week in 1996 to 5.6 hours per week in 2005.

Figure 2: Woman’s share of household labour in 1996 and 2005.
Figure 3: Changes in men and women’s time spent on housework between 1996 and 2005.

This broad pattern is confirmed by the changes in the percentage of households in which men and women perform certain percentages of household labour. Table 1 illustrates that women performed more than half of the housework (over 50%) in 86% of households in 1996. In the same year, women perform over 95% of the household labour in 19% of households. In 2005 the corresponding percentages of households had fallen for all thresholds of housework share for women, indicating that women are reducing the share of household labour they do in relation to their partners. In 1996, there were only 9% of households in which men performed over 50% of the housework. The percentage of households in which men undertake a vast share of housework are negligible or non-existent; men carry out more than 70% of housework in less than 3% of households. Again the trend by 2005 is that men are taking on a slightly greater share of the household labour, although there has been no change, or even a slight decrease, in men who perform extreme shares of housework. For example, the percentage of households in which men assume over 80% of household labour shrunk from 1.5% in 1996 to 1.2% in 2005.
Table 1: Percentage of households in which women and men are performing certain levels of household labour.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Share of housework in a household done by woman</th>
<th>Percentage of households</th>
<th>Share of housework in a household done by man</th>
<th>Percentage of households</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Over 50%</td>
<td>86.1</td>
<td>85.6</td>
<td>9.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 60%</td>
<td>79.5</td>
<td>75.1</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 70%</td>
<td>69.2</td>
<td>63.9</td>
<td>2.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 75%</td>
<td>59.7</td>
<td>55.3</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 80%</td>
<td>50.4</td>
<td>47.4</td>
<td>1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 90%</td>
<td>32.3</td>
<td>28.7</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 95%</td>
<td>18.9</td>
<td>15.1</td>
<td>0.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6.1. Cross-sectional findings

The very general trend towards a more equal sharing of housework is examined in more detail in Table 2 which displays cross-sectional descriptive statistics for the independent variables in relation to the share of household labour performed by women and the number of housework hours for men and women in 1996 and 2005. In many cases, it has been this kind of analysis that has provided evidence that cohabiting couples have a more equal division of housework, or that household labour is shared more traditionally in households with children. This study’s two key hypotheses cannot be answered though cross-sectional examination and this part of the analysis will make no attempt to answer them. In fact, one way of interpreting these results is to compare results here with the later regression analysis in order to identify their shortcomings. However, whilst later analyses investigate what happens in transitions to marriage and parenthood, table 2 does allure to the starting points, in terms of the share and time spent on housework, of different socio-demographic groups and the absolute levels of household labour.

In terms of union status, married couples demonstrate a more traditional division of labour compared to cohabitors in 1996. Married women carry out nearly
79% of housework in 1996 compared to just over 70% for cohabiting women. However, in 2005 the picture tells a different story. Here, women in cohabiting relationships perform a greater share of household labour than married women. Although the difference is minimal, the overall swing during the 9 year period is rather large. This change has been the result of changes in the number of hours spent on housework by married men and women, and cohabiting men and women. Married women are spending less time on housework whilst married men are dedicating more time. The reverse is true for cohabiting couples. Cohabiting men have reduced their time spent on routine household labour whilst cohabiting women are spending more time on housework. This is a surprising result given that cohabiters are typically found to practice a more equal division of household labour. Later analyses will be able to capture in greater depth how this phenomenon unfolds.
Table 2: Cross-sectional analysis showing the mean share and mean time spent on housework in a number of socio-demographic groups in 1996 and 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th></th>
<th>2005</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Woman’s share of housework (%)</td>
<td>Woman’s housework hours per week</td>
<td>Man’s housework hours per week</td>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Union status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>70.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>653</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of child</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child in house</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in house</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both low</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both high</td>
<td>69.4</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man in higher class position</td>
<td>83.9</td>
<td>21.6</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman in higher class position</td>
<td>66.4</td>
<td>13.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education level</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both low</td>
<td>78.7</td>
<td>19.6</td>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>361</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both high</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>14.8</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man has higher education</td>
<td>80.2</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman has higher education</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>18.4</td>
<td>5.7</td>
<td>94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic dependency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal dependency</td>
<td>73.6</td>
<td>20.6</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman dependent on man</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>20.0</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>528</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man dependent on woman</td>
<td>65.2</td>
<td>13.5</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment hours</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work same hours</td>
<td>74.2</td>
<td>18.5</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>226</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man works longer hours</td>
<td>80.7</td>
<td>20.4</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>378</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman works longer hours</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall</td>
<td>76.8</td>
<td>18.8</td>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>776</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table includes the same 776 couples in 1996 and 2005.
Couples, either married or living together, with at least one child under the age of 12 have a more traditional division of household labour than couples without any young children. This is the case in 1996 and 2005 although both have moved in the same direction, and at a similar rate, towards a more even division. This change is due to women reducing their number of housework hours and men increasing the time they spend per week on routine household labour. Mothers in 1996 spend 1 hour more per week on housework than mothers in 2005. Fathers spent an average of 5.2 hours per week on housework in 1996 and 5.6 hours a week in 2005. Women without children reduced their housework hours per week from slightly over 17 hours in 1996 to just under 17 hours a week in 2005. Men without children in 1996 undertook 5.3 hours per week compared with 5.6 hours in 2005. These findings are more in line with general recognized trends in that mothers carry out more, and a greater share, of household labour than non-mothers, and that there is a slow but clear tendency for the division of household labour to be shared more evenly.

The three variables representing the economic theories - class, education, and economic dependency – follow, more or less, expected patterns. Women’s share of housework is greatest when she has a lower class position, a lower education position, and is economically dependent on her partner. This holds true in both 1996 and 2005. Women perform the smaller shares of housework when she has a higher relative class position than her partner, when both she and her partner have high education levels, and when her male partner is economically dependent on her. Again, this is the case in both 1996 and 2005. However, it is interesting that in each of these categories where women undertake the smallest share of housework, the differences between 1996 and 2005 move in the opposite direction to the more general trend. In other words, whilst most categories of class, education, and economic dependency continue to shift towards a more equal division of household, those categories in which women fared best in 1996 experienced a change towards a more traditional division of housework in 2005, although they remain the categories in which women perform the lowest share of household labour. This suggests two potentially important dynamics. Firstly, the broad consensus is that household labour is becoming more even whilst these results reveal that women’s lowermost share of housework may already have occurred. Secondly, these figures potentially foreshadow future behaviour by suggesting that perhaps there is a ‘glass floor’ in place that prevents women from achieving a lower share of
housework. Trends do show a slow move towards more equal sharing of household labour. However, findings here hint that this trend may well have a limit, at which point the trend reverses. Also noteworthy is the large variation in the number of hours women spend on housework depending on their category within the economic theory variables. For example, women in a lower class position relative to her partner spent nearly 22 hours per week on housework in 1996 compared to less than 13 hours per week for women in households where both partners belong to a high class position. Variation in men’s housework hours is much smaller. The time availability theory is represented by the number of hours spent in employment per week. The findings are as expected; women do a greater share of the housework when the male partner works more hours relative to his female partner, and women perform a smaller share of housework when they spend more time in work than their partner. In both instances, the division of household labour is more egalitarian in 2005 than in 1996.

Although this part of the analysis cannot capture the movement across different life course events in order to answer the core research questions, it can lay down a challenge to the time availability and economic theories of the division of household labour. To elaborate, the economic and time availability theories are verified, to a point, by finding that women perform more of the housework when they are in weaker relative position in terms of education, class, and economic dependency, whilst women undertake less of the housework when they occupy stronger positions vis-à-vis their partner. Yet, closer inspection of the share of household labour reveals the limitations of economic and rational explanations of the division of household labour. For, even in households where women have a higher education level, social class position, or financial position, relative their partner, they continue to do more of the housework than their male partner. In fact, in the most egalitarian households women still carry out, on average, two thirds of the household labour. Furthermore, women who are in stronger positions than their partner on economic and rational variables spend 2-3 times longer on housework than their men. These findings run contrary to economic and time availability theories and once more reinforce the notion that something else is at work, besides rationally acting individuals, in determining the division of routine household labour. It must be stated once more that the limitations of economic and rational explanations do not naturally lead to their rejection. The evidence here merely suggests
that economic and time availability theories alone are not adequate in explaining the division of housework.

6.2. Effect on household labour of changes in the independent variables

The level of analysis moves up a notch in Table 3 which presents the mean share of household labour, as well as the mean hours of household labour, in relation to changes in the independent variables between wave 1 and wave 2. This part of the analysis is longitudinal in which each category (eg. cohabiting in 1996 and 2005) represents the same couples in 1996 and 2005. However, this part of the analysis falls short of the regression model in that it does not control for the simultaneous effect of each of the independent variables. Caution in interpreting Table 3 is then required since, what appears to be a large shift in either the share or hours of housework may in fact be a spurious association. What this analysis does reveal is some interesting variation in couples’ starting points of household labour in 1996, prior to socio-demographic changes. The net change represents the change in the woman’s share of household labour and housework hours per week between categories whilst taking into account the overall change in the dependent variables between 1996 and 2005. For example, there was an overall reduction in the woman’s share of household labour of 2% between 1996 and 2005. Therefore, if one category shows a 2% drop in the woman’s share of housework between 1996 and 2005 then the net change is 0. For women’s housework hours the change was +1.1 whilst the net change for men’s housework hours per week between 1996 and 2005 was -0.3.

The situation with regards to union status makes for interesting reading. The key respondents for this part of the analysis, those moving from cohabitation to marriage, do experience a more traditional division of household labour after entering a legally and socially sanctioned union. Amongst those couples who were cohabiting in 1996 but married in 2005, the woman’s share of household labour rose from nearly 69% in cohabitation to over 74% when married. This was mostly as a result of the newly married women performing a greater number of hours of housework per week, whilst men only slightly reduced their weekly hours. Couples cohabiting in 1996 and still
cohabiting in 2005 also experienced a shift towards a more traditional division of labour. However, the couples who cohabit in both years and those who later marry have very different starting points. Those who remain living together in cohabitation begin with a more traditional division of household than those who cohabit in 1996 but are married by 2005. From these separate starting positions, the cohabiters who later marry experience a sharper rise in the woman’s share of housework than those cohabiting at both time points so that in 2005 which means by 2005 the woman’s share of housework is rather similar for both categories. Interestingly, there is also convergence with the third union status category – those married in both 1996 and 2005. These couples had the most traditional division of household labour in 1996 but experienced a swing towards more equal sharing in 2005 so that, for all three union types, the woman’s share of housework had reached a similar level. In terms of the number of hours per week, the biggest changes occurred amongst women who moved from cohabiting to a married relationship. These now married women added nearly 4 hours of household labour to their 1996 levels. Those who are wives at both times reduced the number of hours they spend on housework whilst men who are husbands in both 1996 and 2005 spent more time doing housework in 2005. Men cohabiting in both waves reduced their time spent on household labour as did cohabiting women. The picture in terms of the division of household labour and union status is rather messy. The OLS regression, which controls for other possible important variables, will hopefully provide more detail to this blurry landscape.
Table 3: The effect on the mean share and hours spent on housework from changes in the independent variables between 1996 and 2005.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union status</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting in 1996 and 2005</td>
<td>73.4</td>
<td>75.2</td>
<td>+3.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married in 1996 and 2005</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>74.8</td>
<td>-1.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting in 1996 and married in 2005</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>74.3</td>
<td>+7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Presence of a child</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No child in 1996 or 2005</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>73.8</td>
<td>-0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in both 1996 and 2005</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>+1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in 1996 only</td>
<td>80.3</td>
<td>74.1</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child in 2005 only</td>
<td>68.9</td>
<td>78.9</td>
<td>+12.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social class</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>77.0</td>
<td>75.7</td>
<td>+0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative improvement for woman</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>-6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative improvement for man</td>
<td>71.4</td>
<td>73.0</td>
<td>+3.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Education level</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>76.3</td>
<td>74.5</td>
<td>+0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative improvement for woman</td>
<td>78.3</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>-2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative improvement for man</td>
<td>80.1</td>
<td>79.6</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Economic dependency</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>75.5</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>+0.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman relatively less dependent</td>
<td>82.2</td>
<td>74.0</td>
<td>-6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man relatively less dependent</td>
<td>70.9</td>
<td>77.7</td>
<td>+8.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Employment hours</th>
<th>Woman’s share of housework (%)</th>
<th>Woman’s housework hours per week</th>
<th>Man’s housework hours per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>75.8</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>+0.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman working more relative hours</td>
<td>83.6</td>
<td>73.9</td>
<td>-7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man working more relative hours</td>
<td>71.8</td>
<td>77.8</td>
<td>+8.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Table includes 776 couples, either married or cohabiting, who lived together in a household between 1996 and 2005.

*Calculated as ((woman’s share 2005 – woman’s share 1996) + 2.0). The +2.0 represents overall change in woman’s share of housework between 1996 and 2005.

**Calculated as ((woman’s hours 2005 – woman’s hours 1996) + 1.0). The +1.0 represents overall change in woman’s housework hours.

***Calculated as ((man’s hours 2005 – man’s hours 1996) – 0.3). The -0.3 represents overall change in man’s housework hours.
The pattern for parenthood is more straightforward. Women’s share of housework increases when there is a child in the household whilst her share falls when there is no child in the household (remembering that a child is defined as under 12 years of age). Changing hours women spend on housework appears to be the driving cause in these changes. Women with at least one child in 1996 but none in 2005 reduced their time spent on housework by nearly 4 hours per week, whilst women with no child in 1996 but at least one child in 2005 saw their time spent on household labour increase by 9 hours. Men, on the other hand, show only a minor change in the number hours spent on housework whether or not there are children in the household. In households with children in both 1996 and 2005 the female partner’s share of household labour remains almost stable whilst for couples with no children at either points in time the woman’s share of housework falls slightly. Just as with union type, a peculiar finding is the different starting points for couples with no children in 1996 and who will also be childless in 2005, and those with no children in 1996 but at least one child in 2005. The former have a much more traditional division of labour in 1996. By 2005 it is the latter group which is more traditional in its division. The very different positions in 1996, despite both couples cohabiting, is worthy of more scrutiny. A more comprehensive investigation would surely bear fruits. In such cases one needs to be more meticulous and take into account a number of possible explanations including, but not limited to, pregnancy at the first time point, the timing of receiving a child in relation to the change in housework share, and the degree to which future family plans dictate current behaviour.

As far as the economic theories are concerned, all relative changes across the three variables – social class, education, and economic dependency – worked in the expected direction. Women who improved their position vis-a-vis their male partner, in terms of class, education, and economic dependency, reduced their share of the housework. Women took on more of the housework share when her partner improved his relative position over the three variables. Where no change took place in relative positions between couples in social class, education, and economic dependency, women reduced their share of household labour, although in each instance this amounted to a small net increase. In terms of the number of hours spent on routine housework per week, a positive change in relative position for women causes women to reduce their
time spent on housework whilst men increase their number of hours. A negative change in relative position for women translates into more hours of household labour for women, except when the change occurs in relative education positions, whilst men’s behaviour is more unpredictable. For instance, when men experience relative progress in social class, relative to his partner, they actually spend more time on housework. The time availability theory, represented by the number of hours per work spent in employment, also acts in accordance to its hypothesis. Women’s share of the housework drops when they occupy a greater share of household employment time, whilst women increase their share of household labour when their relative hours spent in work decline in relation to their male partner. These changes are grounded in adjustments from both men and women in the time afforded to housework. In the first instance, where women increase their relative work hours, women decrease and men increase their respective time on household labour. In the second case, where men spend more time in work relative to their female partner, women perform longer hours on housework whilst men do less.

In this part, economic and rational theories mostly pan out as expected. Nevertheless, although changes in relative resources appear to have an effect on the division of household labour, part 6.1. demonstrated that, regardless of relative economic positions, women continue to carry out at least two thirds of household labour. Under such circumstances, it would appear that changes in relative resources have a degree of influence on how housework is partitioned, yet it does not account for the continued uneven division. To what extent does union status and the presence of young children fill this void? In this part, the importance of union status for understanding the division of household labour is, at best, unclear. The association between having children and the division of housework is more evident. Notwithstanding the results so far, it is the following part, the OLS regression analysis, which should expose the most crucial details. Regression will be able to identify the relationships between the dependent and independent variables whilst simultaneously controlling for the effects of each other, rather than examining each variable in isolation.
6.3. Regression analysis

Prior to the regression analysis proper, a series of nested model F-tests were used to determine whether the union status variables (couples cohabiting in 1996 and 2005, couples married in 1996 and 2005, and couples cohabiting in 1996 and married in 2005) and the presence of a child variables (no children in both years, at least one child in both years, a child in 1996, and a child in 2005) collectively have explanatory power in explaining each of the three dependent variables. A nested model F test assesses the significance of a group of variables by testing the difference in predictive power between a regression model in which the group of variables are omitted and a regression model where they are included (Agresti & Finlay, 2009: 345). There is strong indication that both union status variables and the presence of a child variables are significant determinants of each of the three dependent variables. Although the adjusted R-squared - the total amount of variation in the dependent variable explained by all independent variables - displays only small, or in some cases, no increase when union status or presence of a child is added, these additional independent variables do add significant explanatory power. The presence of a child variables appear to have a larger influence on the respective regression models than the union status variables. In two of the regression models the R squared figure increases when the presence of a child variables are included, from 0.30 to 0.31 in the regression model with woman’s share of housework as the dependent variable, and 0.24 to 0.26 in the regression model explaining woman’s hours per week spent on housework. In the other, where men’s household labour is the dependent variable, the presence of a child variables did not increase the R squared value of 0.24. The R squared value did not increase when union status variables were added to any of the regression models.
Table 4: OLS regression showing the effect of changes in the independent variables on woman’s share of household labour (Model A), woman’s housework hours (Model B), and men’s housework hours (Model C).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Woman’s share of housework 2005 – Model A</th>
<th>Woman’s hours spent on housework 2005 – Model B</th>
<th>Man’s hours spent on housework 2005 – Model C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>St. error</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>35.42***</td>
<td>4.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Union Status**
- Cohabiting in 1996 and 2005
  - Married in both 1996 and 2005: 1.57, 1.87
  - Cohabiting in 1996, married in 2005: -3.41, 2.31

**Presence of a child**
- No child in 1996 or 2005: 0.0, 0.0
- Child in both 1996 and 2005: 3.00**, 1.51
- Child in 1996 only: -0.72, 1.28
- Child in 2005 only: 4.67**, 2.32

**Social class**
- No change: 0.0, 0.0
- Relative improvement for woman: -3.76***, 1.38
- Relative improvement for man: -2.90**, 1.42

**Education level**
- No change: 0.0, 0.0
- Relative improvement for woman: -1.57, 1.52
- Relative improvement for man: 2.26, 2.30

**Economic dependency**
- No change: 0.0, 0.0
- Woman relatively less dependent: -1.24, 1.11
- Man relatively less dependent: 5.41***, 1.40

**Employment hours**
- No change: 0.0, 0.0
- Woman working more relative hours: -2.37**, 1.20
- Man working more relative hours: 3.95***, 1.32

**Adjusted R squared**
- 0.31

* p < 0.10
** p < 0.05
*** p < 0.01

Note: All the above models include controls for age in 1996, the sex of the respondent, social class in 1996, education level in 1996, economic dependency in 1996, and employment hours in 1996. Model A includes woman’s share of housework in 1996, model B includes woman’s housework hours in 1996, and model C includes man’s housework hours in 1996.
The previous uncertainty about the effect of union status on the division of household labour is substantiated in Table 4 – namely that there is no effect. This result is in line with the work of Gupta (1999) who found that the decisive factor in terms of doing gender, with regards to the division of household labour, to be a heterosexual union, irrespective of the type of union. Likewise, this study finds that couples who make the transition from cohabitation to marriage do not differ significantly in their division of housework to couples who remain cohabiting between 1996 and 2005. Moreover, there was no significant change in the number of hours newly married men and women put into housework compared to those who remain cohabiting. The share of household labour performed by married women in both waves also did not change significantly in comparison with the reference group – those couples who were cohabiting at both time points. Although married men and women did increase their time spent on routine housework, the concurrent rise in both means the woman’s share did not alter significantly. The evidence presented here contradicts hypothesis 1. Couples who move from a cohabiting relationship and into a marital union do not experience a more traditional division of labour and neither newly married men or women significantly adjust their time spent on routine household labour. In fact, although not significant, the results suggest that women’s share of the housework decreases upon entering marriage, compared to those who remain cohabiting. All this suggests that marriage roles are not strong enough to impress upon couples the need to negotiate a more traditional division of household labour. If couples are performing gender in the division of household labour, they are performing it in similar ways, or at least in terms of creating similar outcomes, both before and after the transition to marriage.

Contrary to the effect of union status, the transition to parenthood was found to have a significant effect on how routine household labour is apportioned, confirming this study’s second principal hypothesis. Couples who had no children in 1996 but then had at least one child in 2005 move significantly to a more traditional division of housework than couples who are childless at both times. The regression analysis in table 4 shows that becoming a parent increases the woman’s share of household labour by nearly 5% (b = 4.67). The change in the share of household labour is principally caused by women increasing their time spent on housework. The transition to fatherhood has no significant impact on the number of hours men dedicate to household labour. These
results are in line with previous research (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997; Perkins & DeMeis, 1996) which point out that parenthood induces change in mothers’ rather than fathers’ housework behaviour. On the other hand, making the transition from a house with at least one child to a house with no young children did not have a significant effect on the division of household labour. Whilst those couples who were parents to young children in 1996 but not in 2005 did experience a move towards a more equal sharing than couples with no children in either year, this was found not to be significant. The regression analysis reveals that, once again, it is women who change their behaviour, this time spending more time on housework after the household no longer has a young child present, compared to long-term childless couples. Thus, although these women may cut back on housework, the reduction is not enough to significantly influence their total share of household labour.

Rather unexpectedly, couples who have a child in both 1996 and 2005 experience a significant move towards a more traditional division of labour than couples who are childless at both times. Table 4 shows this move to a more traditional division means a 3% rise in the woman’s share of housework ($b = 3.00$). This is achieved by way of mothers spending longer on housework whilst the time fathers spend does not vary significantly. This is perhaps an instance of methodological flaws exposing themselves and so some qualifications are required. Couples with no children in both years and couples with children in both time points would, theoretically, be expected to follow similar trajectories in terms of gender construction since one of the key determinants of performing gender – parenthood – remains constant. However, this study does not account for the number and age of children which may well influence the amount and division of housework a household is tasked with. In short, this part of the analysis assumes a constant in the number of children when it may not be the case and, therefore, an important variable is omitted and results potentially undermined. Although the number and age of children may also be important when comparing the reference category (childless couples in both years) with other parental arrangements (couples gaining or losing children), these comparisons at least vary by the presence or non-presence of a young child. Yet whether the crucial difference is having one child, more than one child, or perhaps a child under 5 years of age remains to be seen. Still, this should provide more impetus to conduct more detailed research concerning parenthood and the division of household labour.
In this part of the analysis, the variables representing the economic and time availability theory do not perform so well. Changes in relative education have no impact on the woman’s share of household labour, influencing only the number of hours women spend on housework when women improve their relative education level. Social class has a significant effect when women improve their relative class position vis-à-vis their partner. As expected, in this instance women’s share of the household falls when they occupy a better relative class position. Contrary to theoretical suppositions, women’s share of household labour also drops when men make relative progress in social class. This is caused by men spending longer hours on routine housework. With relative changes in education and social class proving ambiguous in their relation to the division of household labour, how does economic dependency, the last of the economic variables, fare? The answer is rather better. When women become more dependent on their partner, their share of the housework significantly increases by over 5% (b = 5.41). In these circumstances, women spend significantly more hours on housework whilst men spend significantly less. However, despite the fact that women do reduce their share of household labour when their partners become more economically dependent on them, this was found not to be significant, even though men do significantly increase their time spent on housework. With regards to the time availability theory, women undertake a greater share of the housework, nearly 4% (b = 3.95), when men increase their relative work hours, and carry out a smaller share of housework, a decrease of over 2% (b = -2.37), when they increase their relative hours in work vis-à-vis their male partner. Both of these events are significant. In both situations it is the time women spend on household labour which changes significantly. Men do not significantly alter the time they contribute to housework whether they work more, less, or the same number of hours relative to their partner.

The time availability theory is mostly confirmed through the regression analysis. On the other hand, economic theories throw up a mixed set of results. Some follow expected patterns whilst others operate in the opposing direction. Changes in relative education do not appear to impact much on the division of housework, whilst an increase in men’s relative class position actually reduces the woman’s share of housework. Across all of the economic variables, it is at most only one category, either a relative increase for men or for women, which is both significant and theoretically
expected. Moreover, whether the significant changes derive from men or women’s relative change does not show any consistency. Women’s share of household labour grows when men become less dependent on their partner. On the other hand it is when women improve their relative class position that they reduce their share of housework. Whilst not rejecting outright economic explanations, these results at least propose that they are in need of refining. For example, whilst changes in social class may play a role in dividing household labour, these changes may operate differently depending on whether it is the woman or man who improves their relative class position.
7. Summary and discussion

At this point it is worth restating the goals of the study in order to set a clear focus for the following discussion of the results. Gender construction, although not directly measured in this study, is presumed to be taking place between heterosexual couples at the site of household labour. Although not unchallenged, traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity offer a constraining set of loose structures which render themselves visible when it comes to dividing up routine housework. This particular study takes this idea of doing gender one step by further by investigating if not only traditional masculinity and femininity are at work, but if traditional notions of marriage roles and parenthood exert an extra pressure when it comes to partitioning household labour. It is also worth reminding readers that this study is based on long-term, stable couples who have been living together for at least 9 years. As a result, this study cannot claim to be representative of how the division of housework operates in couples in more short-term unions. The first part of this section will stand these theoretical predictions alongside the empirical findings. Where the two are incommensurable I will offer some possible alternative explanations. In part two, I will take account of some of the empirical content from this study, as well as a few of its limitations, in throwing up some of the many possible pathways for future research on the subject.

7.1. Summary of key findings

The two life course factors examined here, transition to marriage and the addition of children, have no effect and a significant effect, respectively, on the division of routine housework. Couples who move from a cohabiting union to marriage do not significantly alter their division of housework compared to couples who remain cohabiting. Long-term married couples also do not modify their sharing of housework significantly compared to long-term cohabiters, although both long-term married men and women increase the time they spend on housework. These findings lean towards those illustrated by Gupta (1999). Unlike Gupta, this study did not look at transitions into and out of heterosexual unions, and, therefore, cannot confirm that joining a union provides the opportunities of doing gender in terms of housework, or that leaving a
union removes some of the constraints which pave the way for a more traditional division of household labour. However, what this study does share with Gupta’s work is that the type of union, whether it is marriage or cohabitation, does not seem to effect the division of housework. Acquiring the formal roles of husband and wife, and leaving behind the incomplete institution of cohabitation, does not appear to come with additional gender prescribed behaviour in terms of housework. Following Gupta, this study only assumes that heterosexual unions provide the platform in which to negotiate and carry out traditional masculine and feminine roles in the division of housework. However, this study can confirm Gupta’s findings that the type of union is of little importance.

It should be noted that the hypothesized association between union status and the division of household labour was put forward with the smallest amount of confidence. In fact, the theoretical position is not backed up by any empirical substantiation. Given the conflicting starting point and the results of this study it is clear that union status and its effect on the division of household labour is in need of both of rigorous empirical research and a theoretical overhaul. One potential explanation, which I later apply to the additional of a child, is the idea put forward by Grunow et al (2007) that the division of household labour is established early in a relationship and is, thereafter, resistant to change. If this were true, then changes in housework would be greater when joining or existing a union than when moving from cohabitation to marriage. Of course, the degree to which moving from marriage to cohabitation represents a new and distinct union, whereby older patterns of housework are undone and new ones forged, is debatable and in need of further elaboration. Yet according to both Gupta (1999), and this study, the transition to marriage does not cause household labour undergo substantial change.

Unlike the transition to marriage, becoming parents does seem to have a significant impact on who does what in the household. Becoming parents to a young child significantly moves the division of housework in a more traditional direction. This is whilst controlling for other factors which accompany the move to parenthood, such as relative changes in work hours, economic dependency, and social class. New mothers spend, on average, 10 hours extra on housework when there is at least one child present than she spent without any children. On the other hand, men do not seem to change the
number of hours they spend on household labour when they become fathers. There is then strong evidence that couples interact in traditional gendered ways after becoming parents. Becoming a mother and a father, and the socially prescribed norms that accompany them, brings an added gender dimension to consider in the negotiation of housework. Although only new mothers change their time spent on housework, this does not mean that it is only women who are acting out traditional gender, and mother, roles. New fathers can act out their new roles through avoiding housework chores. Since the addition of a child to the household raises the total amount of housework, the fact that men do not change their housework behaviour can be interpreted as a way in which they do gender through abstaining from household labour.

Unlike couples who gain a child to the household, those who lose a child do not experience a shift towards a more equal division of housework than those without children in both time points. In these circumstances women do significantly reduce their time spent on housework yet it is not sufficient to bring about a change in the share of housework. However, there is a potentially serious flaw in the operationalization of this variable. Though not without problems (for example, planning ahead and during pregnancy), the timing of becoming parents is easier to pinpoint than when parents stop being parents (if they ever do). This study uses an almost arbitrary cut off point where children are considered those under 12 years of age. In effect, there is probably very little or no difference in housework arrangements when a child is 12 or 13 years old, or maybe 14, 15, 16 etc. The number of children in a household is also excluded in this analysis. In other words, this study potentially categorizes in the same way couples with an 11 year old in 1996 and, by definition, no children in 2005, with couples who have 3 year old twins and a 5 year old in 1996 and, by definition, no children in 2005. One would probably expect housework to unravel differently over time for each of these hypothetical families. Previous longitudinal studies which investigate parenthood and the division of household labour have applied only very short time spans; for example, Gjerdingen & Center (2005) first measured household labour during the second or third trimester of pregnancy and followed this up 6 months after giving birth. One exception is the work of Sanchez & Thomson (1997) who, as with this study, measured at only two points in time, several years apart. Very little is then known about how the division of labour ebbs and flows over the entire life course from becoming parents to children exiting the parental home. Without taking account of the number of children and
employing an arbitrary definition of children, this study concludes that the division of household labour does not change significantly from the time of having at least one child to when that child enters his/her teenage years. It is clear this aspect of household labour and the life course is in need of much greater scholarly attention.

Another interpretation of these events could be the same phenomenon posited by Fox (2001) and Grunow et al (2007) which also acts as a potential explanation for the association between union status and the division of household labour. Fox (2001: 375) claims that patterns that are established in early parenthood are likely to remain and act as a pivot around which later patterns are structured. Grunow et al (2007: 15) suggest that the division of housework is fairly robust and not nearly as flexible as the economic theories would suggest. In short, household labour is unlikely to change because of a pay rise or an increase in work hours. Findings here point to the possibility that having a child, like forming a co-residential union, is a monumental change in family circumstances that requires the renegotiation of previous housework arrangements. Parenthood provides additional loose structures which mothers and fathers actively draw on in their everyday actions and interactions, including around the site of household labour. Since these loose structures ease the path, although couples can negotiate indefinite courses, towards a more traditional division, mothers find themselves undertaking a greater disproportion of household labour which proves difficult to change to any great degree. Just as the transition from cohabitation to marriage is perhaps less significant than the move from singlehood to a co-residential union, becoming parents is a more marked event than the transition from having young children to having older children, given that it is a continuous process with no prominent boundaries or end points. This is more speculative than factual, although the basic elements emerge from the results which give some justification to the idea. However, what makes this only speculation is the omission of three important factors.

Firstly, this conjecture is conflating two categories – those making the transition to parenthood and those who are parents in both waves. Although both experience a more traditional division of labour between 1996 and 2005, there is no evidence that those becoming parents will practice a traditional division in the long-term, just as it is not possible to infer that parents in both waves experienced a more traditional division of housework after first becoming parents. In other words, this speculation is based on
cross-sectional findings rather than longitudinal results. Secondly, I measure household labour at only two points, 1996 and 2005. If household labour changes after parenthood and thereafter remains relatively stable, then data from several points in time are needed. This study, by only using two points in time, does not track fluctuations in the division over the nine year period. Thirdly, this study does not account for the time at which couples became parents between 1996 and 2005, nor does it pinpoint when changes in the division of housework take place between those years. It is a stark possibility, without the effective measurement tools, that changes in the division of housework took place before the transition to parenthood and, from there on, remained unchanged. The notion that the division of household labour remains reasonably sturdy is contradicted by the fact that couples with at least one child in both 1996 and 2005 moved towards a more traditional division of housework than couples with no children in either year. Both are stable unions with no apparent change in family circumstances. However, given how this was operationalized, changes in family circumstances are, in fact, possible. As touched upon earlier, these two groups are not directly comparable since the number and age of children is not included.

The doing gender approach, or doing parenthood and marriage, is inferred rather than directly measured in this study. Whilst this means that the actual variation in the division of housework attributed to doing gender is unknown, the results here confirm that economic explanations of the division do not, alone, capture the whole variation. Cross-sectional findings revealed that, even in households where women are in stronger economic positions vis-à-vis their partner, it is women who continue to perform a much larger proportion of the housework. Longitudinally, changes in relative education levels have no effect on how household labour is shared, whilst, contrary to the theory, women’s share of housework falls when men improve their relative social class position. The time availability theory stood up to close scrutiny in terms of changes in working hours, with the relative employment hours of couples deemed to be important when it comes to dividing routine household labour. Yet this theory suffers from the same criticism leveled at economic theories – namely that women perform a greater share of housework irrespective of who works more hours. All in all, two important findings emerge from this. Firstly, whilst economic and rational explanations of the division of housework are important, they are certainly not sufficient by themselves in explaining the division. There is space for economic and gender construction
approaches to complement each other. Secondly, economic explanations need to be more refined rather than offering a single theoretical lump. Why is class but not education significant? Why does a relative increase in class position work differently for men than for women?

Finally, from the findings emerge the foundations on which to base another proposition. This idea centres on the possibility of a ‘glass floor’, a hypothetical boundary that proves problematic to lower. On the one hand, women’s overall share of housework has fallen between 1996 and 2005. On the other, women’s share of the housework grew in the categories in which they performed the lowest share of household labour in 1996. This hints that reductions in women’s share of the housework have taken place in households with extreme unequal divisions. If a 50% share of household labour is the benchmark of an egalitarian division, women are no closer to achieving this in 2005 than in 1996. What is more, the results of this study and the preceding discussion do not suggest that a more equal sharing is in the pipeline. In terms of the two life course factors examined here, transitions to marriage and parenthood, the division of household labour moves only in one direction – toward a more traditional division. Following Gupta (1999) who claims housework becomes more traditional with the formation of a heterosexual union, this study, as well as Gupta’s own research, finds that the division does not significantly change from cohabiting to marital unions. If getting married does not increase or decrease a woman’s share of housework, having children does tend to lead to a greater share of household labour. If Grunow et al (2007) are right, and small traces are evident in this study, that the division of household labour is difficult to change, once established, then there is more reason to think that women will continue to undertake an unequal share. Moreover, if hopes of attaining a more even division of housework rest on improving ones economic resources then, according to findings here, these hopes are in vain. This would imply that, sooner or later, women’s overall share of household will cease to fall. Given that women’s total share of housework has fallen for a number of years, it will be interesting to witness how this apparent contradiction plays out.
7.2. Future research

This paper has brought up a vast number of possible directions and themes for future research, both in terms of its empirical findings which can be refined and tested, and its limitations which can be overcome and improved. Moreover, both of these can be applied to domestic labour studies in general, and household labour studies which focus on transitions to marriage and parenthood in particular. Given the almost limitless plethora of possible research opportunities I will concentrate only a small section of the latter. It is hoped, however, that some of the more general criticisms, and potential, of the division of domestic labour studies have been made apparent throughout the study. With attention turned exclusively on future research on the division of housework across transitions to parenthood and marriage, this section will proceed in the following manner. Firstly, the need for more longitudinal research will be stressed. Not only that, I will argue, as with this study, longitudinal studies need to become more longitudinal to fully make sense of changes in household labour arrangements. Secondly, and partly related, is the need to be more accurate and detailed in understanding the effect of children, how many and what ages, on the division of household labour. Lastly, and this is a more general criticism too important not to include, a major drawback of this paper, and others which apply gender construction theory to quantitative data, is the indirect measurement of the key processes under study. Gender is assumed to be a daily accomplishment, an emergent identity forged, in part, by back and forth negotiation and conflict over the performance or avoidance of certain household chores without ever observing or measuring these everyday practices. Future enquiries must make an effort to directly examine these processes.

This study has measured household labour at two separate points, nine years apart, and taken changes in life course events within that period to be at least one cause of any changes in household labour. The potential for criticism is obvious. Without gauging precisely when couples undergo life course changes and when the division of housework changes, if it all, then there is always a risk of highlighting spurious associations. Undoubtedly, a significant problem is collecting such rich data and frequent data. For instance, the BHPS is an annual survey but one could argue that yearly intervals are too wide for purposes of household labour. Kluwer et al (2002) reported changes in the division of housework within months of the birth of a child.
whilst Grunow et al (2007) found many couples become more egalitarian in the division immediately after marriage before a long slide towards more traditional arrangements. With studies either measuring short intervals, as with Kluwer et al (2002), or long intervals, including Sanchez & Thomson (1997) and this study, it is more or less unknown if the division of housework varies from week to week, or month to month. Ideally, researchers should strive for continuous, uninterrupted data documenting household labour and other factors likely to impact upon the division, over as long a period as possible. Unfeasible as this may be, endeavoring to get as close as possible to these requirements will surely improve the quality of data with which to work on, analyse, and draw conclusions.

More depth and length of research is especially needed when looking at transitions to parenthood. The effect, both short-term and long-term, on household labour of having children remains very under-researched. Evidence from this study suggests the division of routine housework becomes more traditional when couples have a child. However, this association is again made without capturing the temporal sequence of events; did the division of labour change after becoming parents? Did it change before becoming parents? Did it change after birth and then change back? These are the kind of crucial questions to which unsatisfactory answers remain. Two further issues pertinent to the division of household labour and children are worthy of mention. Firstly, more clarity and consistency in defining who children are is a must. This study used an almost arbitrary boundary of 12 years of age to differentiate between children and non-children when. Other studies have used various cut-off points to delineate households with children from those without. What is needed is detailed research over a prolonged period in order to uncover when household labour changes in relation to the age and number of children in the household. Secondly, and this is drifting towards the more general criticisms of household labour, is the importance of incorporating child care, alongside housework. Not only is child care a worthy topic in its own right, but when many housework studies implicitly write that an unequal division of household labour is unfair and merits changing, without including how child care is divided, it takes on extra importance.

The final rallying call is intended for household labour studies in general, rather than aimed only at those centering on the effect of marriage and parenthood. Gender
construction theory has provided the framework for this study. The idea that gender is performed, emergent, and changeable from situation to situation has been explicit throughout the study, has informed the hypotheses, and guided the discussion of the results. However, all this has taken place without directly measuring gender, or distinctive parent roles, being produced. Numerous other studies are also guilty of implying gender performances, negotiations, and conflicts to changes in household labour arrangements through quantitative changes in the time or proportion spent on housework. Even if these works are right to assume gender production over household labour, how it is produced and how much of it remain unanswered. Understanding how gender is created daily, through actions and interactions, is also necessary to gauge the connections between structure and agency. If, in most cases, gender is only assumed to be at work, it is also assumed to work mostly in one direction. Presupposing a simple, linear relationship between structure, the gender norms prevalent in society, and agency, people’s everyday enacting of gender, is problematic and illogical given the nature of the relationship described throughout this study. Since individuals have the capacity to modify and reshape the instructions imposed from structural constraints, it follows that structural constraints themselves will take new forms, which will then impress on people in different ways. This study has taken structural constraints to mean traditional gender norms, although it has been sensitive to the fact that competing notions of gender exist. Moreover, it has assumed that, if gender construction is taking place, it shifts household labour in a more traditional direction. Undoubtedly, how couples receive cultural ideas about gender and parenthood, and how they manage these through housework is extremely complex and can take unlimited forms. But it is these intricate processes which need to be scrutinized to fully understand how gender is made possible through household labour. It is apparent that studies need to get much closer to the site of action in order to see gender or specific parental identities being formed.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Descriptive statistics and distributions of dependent variables:

**Woman’s share of household labour in 2005**

![Histogram of woman’s share of household labour](image)

- **Mean** = 74.85
- **Standard deviation** = 20.08
- **Minimum** = 0.00
- **Maximum** = 100
- **Skewness** = -0.83
- **Kurtosis** = 0.22

**Woman’s hours spent on housework in 2005**

![Histogram of woman’s hours spent on housework](image)

- **Mean** = 4.17
Standard deviation = 1.15
Minimum = 1.00
Maximum = 9.22
Skewness = 0.26
Kurtosis = 0.17

Man’s hours spent on housework in 2005

Mean = 2.38
Standard deviation = 0.95
Minimum = 1.00
Maximum = 6.40
Skewness = 0.63
Kurtosis = 0.20

Frequencies for all independent variables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Union Status</th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>1306</td>
<td>1456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cohabiting</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Change in union status between 1996 and 2005:
Married in 1996 and 2005 = 1306
Cohabiting in 1996 and 2005 = 96
Cohabiting in 1996, married in 2005 = 150

Presence of a child:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child in household</td>
<td>640</td>
<td>438</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No child in household</td>
<td>912</td>
<td>1114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in presence of a child between 1996 and 2005:
No child in 1996 or 2005 = 798
Child in both 1996 and 2005 = 324
Child in 1996, no child in 2005 = 316
No child in 1996 but child in 2005 = 114

Social class:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both low class</td>
<td>890</td>
<td>974</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both high class</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>160</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man in higher class position</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>260</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman in higher class position</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>158</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in relative class position between 1996 and 2005:
No change = 1130
Woman improved relative position = 238
Man improved relative position = 184
Education level:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Both low education</td>
<td>722</td>
<td>514</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both high education</td>
<td>296</td>
<td>454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man has higher education</td>
<td>346</td>
<td>368</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman has higher education</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>216</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in relative education level between 1996 and 2005:
No change = 1274
Woman improves her relative position = 142
Man improves his relative position = 136

Economic dependency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No change</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>392</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman more dependent</td>
<td>1056</td>
<td>870</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man more dependent</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>290</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in relative economic dependency between 1996 and 2005:
No change = 664
Woman relatively less dependent = 540
Man relatively less dependent = 348

Employment hours:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1996</th>
<th>2005</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Work same hours</td>
<td>452</td>
<td>612</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Man works longer</td>
<td>756</td>
<td>630</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woman works longer</td>
<td>344</td>
<td>310</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Change in relative employment hours between 1996 and 2005:
No change = 800
Woman working more relative hours = 390
Man working more relative hours = 362
Appendix B

List of questions used from the BHPS questionnaire which were used to form the dependent and independent variables:

- About how many hours do you spend on housework in an average week, such as time spent cooking, cleaning and doing the laundry?
- Are there child(ren) aged 12 or under living in the household?
  Yes................................ 1
  No................................ 2
- Thinking about your (main) job, how many hours, excluding overtime and meal breaks, are you expected to work in a normal week?
- Marital Status: ‘Married’ was used to represent married couples, ‘living as couple’ was used to form the cohabiting group.
  Married.....................1
  Living as couple.......2
  Widowed...................3
  Divorced...................4
  Separated..................5
  Never married..........6
  Under 16.................0
- Please look at this card and tell me which of these activities, if any, you would normally find difficult to manage on your own? **CODE ALL THAT APPLY**
  Doing the housework................................1

The remaining questions used were derived variables, meaning they were constructed by employees of the Institute for Social Economic Research from original questions asked in the questionnaire:

- Annual labour income (1.9.2004-1.9.2005)
- Goldthorpe Social Class: present job: The first two categories were used to indicate high social class, the remaining low social class.
  Service class,higher
  Service class,lower
  Routine non-manual
Personal service worker
Sml props w employee
Sml props w/o employ
Farmers,Smallholders
Foreman,Technicians
Skilled manual worker
Semi,unskilled manual
Agricultural workers

- **Household Type**: This variable was used to ensure that only households with a couple, with or without children, were included in the final sample.
  Single Non-Elderly
  Single Elderly
  Couple No Children
  Couple: dep children
  Couple: non-dep children
  Lone par: dep children
  Lone par: non-dep children
  2+ Unrelated adults
  Other Households

- **Highest educational qualification**: The first 4 categories, Higher Degree – Other Higher QF, were used to represent a high education, the remaining categories made up low education.
  Higher Degree
  First Degree
  Teaching QF
  Other Higher QF
  Nursing QF
  GCE A Levels
  GCE O Levels or Equi
  Commercial QF, No O
  CSE Grade 2-5,Scot G
  Apprenticeship
  Other QF
  No QF
Still At School No Q