

# When Does Gender Trump Flexibility?

## Workplace Flexibility and Domestic Task Assignment

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### Abstract

Does workplace flexibility reshape expectations about who should perform household and childcare tasks within different-gender couples? Organizations have adopted flexible work arrangements to ease the work-family friction that stalls women's entry and advancement in the workplace. Yet these effects may be limited by resilient gender norms, particularly essentialist beliefs that women and men are suited for different tasks. I theorize task assignment as governed by two competing logics, a practical logic of availability, which allocates tasks to whichever partner can more easily perform them, and a gendered logic of suitability, which codes tasks as women's work or men's work. Drawing on an original survey experiment with a demographically representative sample of 1,200 U.S. adults, I randomly vary each partner's flexibility, isolating the effect of flexibility from the selection that confounds observational studies. When both partners have flexibility, gendered task assignments persist. When only the man has flexibility, respondents expect him to assume substantially greater responsibility for female-typed tasks, showing that the availability logic can override the suitability logic. Taken together, even when organizational policies provide the structural resource of flexibility, norms about who should do what at home are not automatically rewritten. Policies that deliberately place flexibility with men may be more effective than policies that expand flexibility for everyone.

**Keywords:** Gender, Domestic Labor, Flexible Work Arrangements, Remote Work, Schedule Control, Social Norms

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# 1 Introduction

Work-family conflict is increasingly recognized as a systemic impediment to worker productivity and gender equity rather than merely a personal trouble (Padavic et al. 2020). Despite organizational efforts to retain talent, the “ideal worker” norm, predicated on continuous availability, continues to disadvantage employees with significant caregiving responsibilities (Acker 1990; Reid 2015). Research indicates that rigid temporal and spatial demands create persistent friction between professional and private spheres, limiting the advancement of women, contributing to the stalling of gender convergence in the workplace (Goldin 2014).

To address these work rigidities, organizations have widely adopted Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) aimed at decoupling work performance from work rigidity (Kelly and Moen 2007; Perlow and Kelly 2014). By removing strict time and location constraints, these policies theoretically enable a “logic of availability”, the expectation that domestic responsibilities should be allocated to whichever partner has the practical bandwidth to perform them, regardless of gender (Becker 1981; Bianchi et al. 2000). Under this logic, flexibility should translate into increased domestic contribution for especially male employees who have traditionally contributed less (Noonan et al. 2007). Thus, FWAs are expected to mitigate the friction between workplace demands and domestic obligations by allowing labor to be reorganized based on practical considerations rather than gendered scripts.

However, this focus on formal policy design may overlook the resilience of informal social institutions. Organizational actors are embedded in deep-seated cultural schemas and a “logic of suitability”, the essentialist belief that women and men are inherently better suited for different types of tasks (Charles and Bradley 2009; Crompton and Lyonette 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987). While formal policies may alter an employee’s schedule and location, they do not necessarily erase the cultural coding that defines specific tasks as “women’s work” or “men’s work” (Ridgeway 2011; Tak et al. 2019). Consequently, the practical availability provided by flexibility comes to compete with these persistent beliefs about gendered

competence. This creates a critical theoretical tension: formal organizational design provides the opportunity for a practical division of labor, but informal social norms may constrain how that opportunity is interpreted (Bittman et al. 2003).

Despite this theoretical tension, prior research has not sufficiently examined the boundary conditions under which the “logic of availability” can successfully override the “logic of suitability.” While scholars debate the efficacy of FWAs, most existing studies rely on observational data which cannot isolate whether normative expectations shift due to the policy itself or due to selection bias, as women with traditional gender views may self-select into flexible jobs to accommodate domestic demands (Wang and Cheng 2025). Consequently, it remains unclear whether providing the structural resource of flexibility is sufficient to alter the normative assignment of tasks, or if the gendered coding of those tasks renders them immune to organizational intervention.

To address this gap, this study employs an original survey experiment to identify the causal effect of workplace flexibility on normative expectations. By randomly assigning flexibility conditions, I isolate the impact of the organizational policy from selection effects (Doan and Quadlin 2019; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). In doing so, this study advances the literature in two key ways. First, I examine norms at the task-specific level (Baxter 2000; Tai and Treas 2013). Previous research often relies on aggregate measures of domestic labor, which obscure precisely where workplace flexibility can initiate change and where it encounters resistance (Milkie et al. 2025). By analyzing how specific tasks, ranging from emergency childcare to maintenance, respond differently to flexibility, I map the contours of gender rigidity and identify where the potential for change exists.

Second, this study adopts a couple-level approach to flexibility. Existing studies generally focus on an individual’s access to policy, often overlooking the partner’s status (Wang and Cheng 2024). However, the “logic of availability” is inherently relative. Domestic responsibilities are divided based on the comparative circumstances of the couple. By examining scenarios where both partners, neither partner, or only one partner possesses flexibility,

I directly test whether the practical availability of one partner can override the gendered suitability of the other.

Specifically, I conducted a survey experiment with a demographically representative sample of 1,200 U.S. adults, randomly assigning participants to read about hypothetical couples with different flexibility conditions. The experiment manipulated workplace flexibility, defined as being able to decide start and end times of work, as well as work from home two days a week, across four conditions: a baseline condition in which neither partner has flexibility, a symmetric condition in which both partners have flexibility, and two asymmetric conditions in which only the woman or only the man has flexibility. Participants then allocated the main responsibility to one of the partners for ten specific domestic tasks, including female-typed (e.g., meal preparation, caring for a sick kid), male-typed (e.g., auto repairs, home maintenance), and gender-neutral tasks (e.g., picking up kids).

The results show both the limits and the potential of workplace flexibility. When neither partner had flexibility, respondents overwhelmingly assigned female-typed tasks to women and male-typed tasks to men following the gender essentialist logic of suitability. Providing workplace flexibility to both partners resulted in minimal changes in task assignment. However, when only the man had flexibility, respondents assigned him substantially greater responsibility for female-typed tasks, indicating that flexibility may shift expectations by shaping perceptions of who is more available. However, this logic of availability was highly gender asymmetric. When only the woman had flexibility, male-typed tasks shifted toward her far less than female-typed tasks shifted toward the man, and they remained predominantly assigned to the male partner. This is potentially because certain male-typed tasks were perceived as more rigidly ‘masculine’ than female-typed tasks were ‘feminine’, creating a barrier more difficult to overcome.

Taken together, these findings demonstrate that even when organizational policies provide the ability to share labor, gender essentialist beliefs remain the governing force ([England 2010](#)). For policymakers, this implies that gender-neutral flexibility policies may be insuf-

ficient to promote equity if they operate within a broader culture that views women’s and men’s work as fundamentally distinct (Chung and Booker 2023; Gonalons-Pons 2023). Effective interventions should therefore go beyond structural accommodation to actively challenge the cultural categorization of the tasks themselves.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

### 2.1 Institutional Constraints vs. Gender Essentialism

To understand the boundary conditions of workplace flexibility, I first locate the tension between changing institutional constraints and persistent normative settings. Today, a majority of Americans endorse the principle that men and women should play equal roles in both public and private spheres (Knight and Brinton 2017; Scarborough et al. 2019). At the same time, a substantial number of Americans continue to hold essentialist beliefs that women and men inherently differ in their skills and interests and, therefore, are suitable for different tasks (Cotter et al. 2011; Dernberger and Pepin 2020; Pepin and Cotter 2018). Thus, even when men and women participate in both paid and domestic labor, their specific contributions are often expected to align with these presumed inherent differences.

Nonetheless, some scholars remain optimistic that normative expectations for men’s domestic contributions will eventually rise to match women’s contributions as women’s workforce participation increases to match men’s (Esping-Andersen 2009; Goldscheider et al. 2015). They posit that men will increasingly be expected to share housework and caregiving as women’s earnings become essential to household income, potentially spurring further change toward greater convergence in domestic responsibilities.

Whether this optimism is realized depends in part on the workplace policy context. In the United States, workplaces offer minimal family support, leaving individual couples to manage personal challenges on their own (Collins 2019; Gornick and Meyers 2003). Simultaneously, the workplace itself has become increasingly demanding and precarious (Kalleberg

2011; Kelly and Moen 2021). Consequently, many default to traditional gender expectations as feasible solutions to unmanageable demands from paid work and family (Gerson 2011; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). This suggests that providing workers with flexibility could promote gender equality at home.

However, another line of scholarship casts doubt on this perspective, questioning whether normative expectations for an equal division of labor are genuinely constrained by external conditions (Dernberger and Pepin 2020; Pepin and Cotter 2018; Pepin and Scarborough 2025; Wong and Daminger 2024). Women’s greater domestic burden may stem not only from misalignment between egalitarian norms and gendered institutions, but also from deeply rooted gender essentialist beliefs that assign different tasks to men and women (Charles and Bradley 2009; Crompton and Lyonette 2005). In such contexts, workplace flexibility policies may have limited impact if they do not challenge underlying gender beliefs.

Building on these insights, this study explores whether and to what extent workplace flexibility might shift norms around domestic labor. Specifically, I investigate how expectations about who should be responsible for specific domestic tasks differ when rigid work schedules and physical presence are alleviated (Chung and Booker 2023; Lyttelton et al. 2022).

## 2.2 The Logic of Suitability: Gender Typing of Domestic Tasks

A critical step in understanding the potential for normative shifts is to disaggregate domestic labor into specific tasks. Some tasks may respond strongly to workplace flexibility when their assignment depends on time-sensitivity (Noonan et al. 2007). Such tasks are especially open to the practical logic of availability. Other tasks, however, may show little response to improved flexibility, either because flexibility is less relevant for their completion or because they carry stronger gendered meanings (Tai and Treas 2013; Twiggs et al. 1999). Understanding these divergent responses is important for mapping the dynamics of change and designing more effective interventions (Milkie et al. 2025).

Existing research has consistently demonstrated that household and childcare tasks are strongly gender-typed among different-gender couples (Baxter 2000; Schneider 2012; West and Zimmerman 1987). Female-typed household tasks typically include cooking, cleaning, laundry, and grocery shopping, while male-typed tasks include auto repairs, home maintenance, and yard work (Cooke and Hook 2018; Doan and Quadlin 2019). Female-typed tasks are usually more time-consuming, more frequent, and more likely to conflict with paid work, whereas male-typed tasks are more discretionary, often deferred to weekends, and thus less burdensome (Hook 2010; Milkie et al. 2025).

Compared to routine household labor, research on the gender-typing of childcare is relatively scarce. Childcare is generally considered female-typed, given its interpersonal and caregiving content (Bianchi et al. 2006). Recent work documents that fathers now spend more time with children than in past decades (Pepin et al. 2018; Sullivan 2013). However, fathers' increased involvement has been concentrated primarily in interactive activities such as playing and reading, rather than in routine caregiving tasks such as bathing, feeding, and dressing children (Gracia and Esping-Andersen 2015; Roeters and Gracia 2016). Like female-typed household tasks, routine childcare is relatively time-intensive, frequent, and cannot be easily delayed. However, it remains unclear whether this behavioral shift reflects changed normative expectations, and if so, which childcare tasks (e.g., playing vs. routine caregiving) the change applies to.

Another underexplored, yet particularly significant dimension is the gender-typing of time-sensitive or emergency tasks, such as caring for a sick kid or managing unexpected day-care closures. These tasks merit attention because they substantially impact workplace roles and are exactly where flexibility could matter most. Studies have acknowledged that childcare emergencies that conflict with employment schedules often default to mothers (Buzard et al. 2025; Cunningham-Burley et al. 2006). However, we know little about whether parallel expectations attach to male-typed emergency tasks, such as handling auto repairs after an accident. Investigating these female-typed and male-typed emergency tasks allows us to test

whether flexibility reshapes expectations based on time-sensitivity or whether the gender coding of tasks persists.

Existing explanations of gender-typing emphasize how tasks become linked to gendered competencies and interests rooted in socialization. From childhood, girls are more often trained in ‘feminine’ tasks such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, while boys are encouraged to develop ‘masculine’ skills related to mechanics or physical labor (Cunningham 2001; West and Zimmerman 1987). When individuals interpret gendered divisions of labor as a reasonable specialization (Carlson and Hans 2020; Daminger 2020), the result is a justification for the disproportionate burden of women, since most domestic labor is coded as female-typed and female-typed tasks are more burdensome (Baxter 2000; Hochschild and Machung 1989).

However, recent studies point out that male-typed tasks tend to be “stickier” than female-typed tasks (Christopher 2024; Milkie et al. 2025). For men, traditionally masculine tasks such as home maintenance serve as sites of masculine identity work, reinforcing gender identity through technical skill and physical strength (Gorman-Murray 2008). Furthermore, male-typed tasks are typically shorter in duration and less frequent, making them less sensitive to workplace flexibility (Milkie et al. 2025). Lastly, because the majority of domestic tasks are coded as female-typed, men performing female-typed tasks is viewed as a necessary step toward correcting gender inequality. By contrast, women taking on male-typed tasks does not carry the same significance (Christopher 2024). Together, these factors suggest that male-typed and female-typed tasks may not respond symmetrically to different flexibility conditions.

To investigate these task-level dynamics, this study assesses the gender-typing of relatively unexplored domestic tasks, including childcare and time-sensitive tasks. Furthermore, I use supplementary survey data to examine the default task assignment logic and how task attributes shape the impact of flexibility. Specifically, I distinguish the roles of tasks’ gendered qualities, such as presumed competencies and interests, and their technical demands,

such as time-sensitivity and perceived burden, testing whether tasks respond to the practical logic of availability or remain bounded by the gendered logic of suitability.

### **2.3 The Logic of Availability: The Role of Workplace Flexibility Policies**

Workplace flexibility policies represent a key organizational intervention that could potentially alleviate institutional constraints that limit egalitarian divisions of domestic labor between different-gender couples. These policies encompass arrangements that allow employees to control when, where, and how long they work (Hill et al. 2008; Kelly and Moen 2021). While workplace flexibility takes many forms, from compressed workweeks to part-time positions, this study focuses on two common arrangements, namely the ability to work from home and control one’s work schedule. This operationalization captures meaningful flexibility while remaining prevalent in U.S. workplaces and does not carry the large hourly wage penalties associated with part-time arrangements (Ishizuka 2021; Kelly and Moen 2021; Webber and Williams 2008).

In theory, workplace flexibility should enable more egalitarian divisions of domestic responsibility by allowing better adjustment between paid work and unpaid domestic responsibilities, particularly among male partners who have traditionally focused more on paid work (Gerson 2011; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Working from home eliminates commuting, which provides more time for housework and childcare and allows some multitasking between workplace and domestic tasks (Carlson et al. 2021; Chung and Booker 2023), while schedule flexibility permits coordination of time-specific domestic responsibilities (Chung and Van der Horst 2018; Noonan et al. 2007).

Empirical evidence, however, reveals more complex and often contradictory patterns. Some studies report positive, albeit specific, effects of workplace flexibility on gender equality. For instance, wives having flexible work schedules do less housework, and their husbands do more (Noonan et al. 2007). Similarly, fathers who work from home spend more time on routine childcare (Carlson et al. 2021). Yet, a larger body of research documents how

flexibility might reinforce the traditional division of labor. When mothers gain flexibility, they often increase their own time spent on childcare, while fathers' contributions may correspondingly decrease or stay the same (Chung et al. 2021; Lyttelton et al. 2022; Noonan et al. 2007; Wang and Cheng 2024). These mixed findings imply that flexibility may produce modest behavior changes without generating clear normative shifts.

Critically, previous studies have focused on behavioral outcomes, limiting our understanding of normative expectations, especially at the specific task level. Norms operate at a broader cultural level than individual behavior. They shape what people expect should be done in any given situation, while individual behavior often reflects situation-specific responses to immediate constraints (Ridgeway 2009; Swidler 1986). As a result, behavior may shift when situations change while the underlying norms remain stable. If norms do not move alongside changes in situations, behavioral shifts may not be durable. Studying whether workplace flexibility shifts normative expectations is therefore essential for understanding whether persistent inequality at home reflects institutional constraints or sticky gender essentialist beliefs, and thus whether this type of organizational intervention can produce durable change.

Studying the effects of workplace flexibility on norms has long presented methodological challenges. First, flexibility in behavioral studies is typically endogenous as a result of individual or employer choice, making it difficult to estimate the causal effect of flexibility on normative shifts. For example, women with traditional gender attitudes might choose flexible jobs and take on the majority of domestic labor. Second, potential confounding factors such as occupation can simultaneously affect couples' access to flexibility and occupation-specific norms around the division of labor. A survey experiment addresses these challenges by presenting respondents with hypothetical scenarios independent of their personal circumstances, isolating the effect of workplace flexibility.

## 2.4 Empirical Predictions

Drawing on the debate between institutional constraints and gender essentialism, I first examine the condition in which both partners have access to workplace flexibility. If the expectations for egalitarian division of domestic labor are primarily constrained by workplace rigidity, providing flexibility to both partners should alleviate barriers to men’s participation, leading to expectations for more egalitarian division of female-typed tasks (Gerson 2011; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Conversely, if gender essentialist beliefs dominate, improved flexibility will not make a difference in expectations, as respondents will continue to view female-typed tasks as inherently women’s responsibility (Tai and Treas 2013; Twiggs et al. 1999). Male-typed tasks are expected to remain assigned to men under both perspectives, given their stronger gendered coding, lower sensitivity to flexibility, and lesser significance for correcting gender inequality (Christopher 2024; Gorman-Murray 2008). Gender-neutral tasks are typically divided more equally with or without flexibility (Milkie et al. 2025). This reasoning leads to the first hypothesis.<sup>1</sup>

*Hypothesis 1. The female partner is less likely to be assigned female-typed tasks when both partners have workplace flexibility than when neither partner has workplace flexibility.*

When flexibility is asymmetric and available to only one partner, it introduces a practical logic of availability that may reinforce or compete with a gender logic of suitability. When only the female partner has flexibility, she is expected to assume greater responsibility for female-typed tasks, as she is viewed as both practically available and naturally suited for these responsibilities. Her responsibility is also likely to increase for gender-neutral tasks. Male-typed tasks are expected to remain largely unaffected, for the reasons discussed above. This motivates the second hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 2. The female partner is more likely to be assigned a) female-typed and b) gender-neutral tasks when only the female partner has workplace flexibility than when neither partner*

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<sup>1</sup>All hypotheses are pre-registered. The pre-registration is available at <https://aspredicted.org/yzs6-5j59.pdf>.

*has workplace flexibility.*

When only the male partner has workplace flexibility, his increased availability creates a conflict with gendered suitability. For female-typed tasks, his increased availability makes it difficult to justify assigning these tasks to the less available female partner. Gender-neutral tasks, lacking strong gender coding, also shift toward the more available partner. Consequently, his responsibility is expected to increase for both female-typed and gender-neutral tasks. For male-typed tasks, his practical availability aligns with the gender logic, so expectations are unlikely to change. This motivates the third hypothesis.

*Hypothesis 3. The female partner is less likely to be assigned a) female-typed and b) gender-neutral tasks when only the male partner has workplace flexibility than when neither partner has workplace flexibility.*

The last hypothesis posits that workplace flexibility operates asymmetrically depending on which partner receives it. When only the female partner has flexibility, respondents may assign her slightly more responsibility for female-typed tasks, but this increase may be limited because women already hold high baseline responsibility for these tasks. By contrast, when only the male partner has flexibility, his practical availability challenges the gendered assignment of female-typed tasks to women more directly. Therefore, I expect the difference from the baseline condition (when neither partner has workplace flexibility) to be larger when only the man has flexibility than when only the woman has flexibility.

*Hypothesis 4. The difference in likelihood of female-typed tasks assigned to the female partner is smaller when comparing conditions where only the female partner has flexibility and only the male partner has flexibility to the condition where neither partner has workplace flexibility.*

Table 1: Summary of empirical predictions by hypothesis and task type

| <b>Comparison</b><br>( <i>vs. Neither Flexible</i> )                                   | <b>Theoretical Mechanism</b>                                                                                           | <b>Predicted Responsibility Assignment to Woman</b>                                               |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>H1: Both Flexible</b>                                                               | <b>Institutional Constraints:</b><br>More flexible workplaces allow greater egalitarianism.                            | <b>Female-typed:</b> Decrease<br><b>Male-typed:</b> No Change<br><b>Gender-Neutral:</b> No Change |
| <b>H2: Only-Woman Flexible</b>                                                         | <b>Flexibility Reinforces Gender:</b> Her availability aligns with traditional expectations.                           | <b>Female-typed:</b> Increase<br><b>Male-typed:</b> No Change<br><b>Gender-Neutral:</b> Increase  |
| <b>H3: Only-Man Flexible</b>                                                           | <b>Flexibility Overrides Gender:</b> His availability makes traditional expectations harder to justify.                | <b>Female-typed:</b> Decrease<br><b>Male-typed:</b> No Change<br><b>Gender-Neutral:</b> Decrease  |
| <b>H4: Comparison</b><br>( $ \Delta\text{Only-Woman} $ vs. $ \Delta\text{Only-Man} $ ) | <b>Gender Asymmetry:</b><br>The effect is stronger when flexibility overrides vs. reinforces traditional expectations. | <b>Female-Typed:</b><br>The decrease in H3 is larger than the increase in H2.                     |

### 3 Data and Methods

The survey experimental data were collected through Prolific, an online survey platform. The study recruited a demographically representative sample of 1,200 U.S. adults using Prolific’s stratified quota sampling framework,<sup>2</sup> which matches the demographic distribution of respondents to the U.S. adult population based on age, sex, and race/ethnicity using the U.S. Census Bureau’s American Community Survey 1-year estimate from 2023.<sup>3</sup> The descriptive statistics for the key demographic variables of the sample are presented in Appendix A. The survey was fielded between March 10 and 12, 2025.

<sup>2</sup>While quota sampling is not probability-based, studies comparing online samples from MTurk/Prolific and population-based probability samples show high correspondence in effect sizes and directions, suggesting that causal estimates from online samples are mostly generalizable (Mullinix et al. 2015).

<sup>3</sup>Sampling quotas were set for age (18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54, 55+), sex (Female, Male), and race/ethnicity (Asian, Black, Mixed, Other, White).

### 3.1 Experimental Design

The study employed a between-subjects experimental design in which respondents were randomly assigned to a vignette describing a hypothetical different-gender couple with one of four workplace flexibility conditions. The four conditions were (1) neither partner has flexibility, (2) both partners have flexibility, (3) only the female partner has flexibility, or (4) only the male partner has flexibility. To capture a meaningful amount of flexibility while remaining realistic, I operationalized workplace flexibility as working at a firm that allows employees to both work from home two days a week and decide the start and end times of the workday. Furthermore, I specified that partners actually use these flexibility policies to ensure respondents understood these were utilized benefits, not merely available options.

Gender was operationalized through names. I selected “Jessica” and “Michael” consistent with the most popular names for male and female babies born during the 1980s and 1990s based on Social Security Administration data<sup>4</sup> to ensure that couples were perceived approximately the same age.

As an example, the vignette below describes the condition in which only the female partner has flexibility (*italics* show manipulated conditions):

Jessica works at a firm that *allows employees to work from home two days a week*. Her firm also *allows employees to choose when to start and end the 8-hour workday*. Michael works at a firm that *requires employees to be in the office Monday through Friday*. His firm also *requires employees to follow a 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule*. Jessica *works from home two days a week and chooses when to start and end the workday*. Michael *works in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM*.

All vignettes held constant other couple characteristics such as work hours (40 hours per week), earnings (described as equal), and professional position to ensure that any dif-

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<sup>4</sup>Social Security Administration. n.d. “Popular Baby Names.” Retrieved December 15, 2025 (<https://www.ssa.gov/oact/babynames/index.html>).

ferences in task assignment were driven solely by the workplace flexibility manipulation and to signal high workplace demands. Additionally, the couples were described as married with two preschool-aged children to represent a common family type in the U.S. experiencing significant family demands. Within each condition, the order of the partners was randomized to eliminate order effects. The complete vignette texts for four conditions are shown in Appendix B.

### 3.2 Outcome Measurement

After viewing one of four vignettes, respondents were asked to indicate who (Jessica or Michael) should have the main responsibility for each of 10 household and childcare tasks, presented in a randomized order.<sup>5</sup> Additionally, I followed up with a question asking how much responsibility they believed each partner should have for each task, allowing them to allocate 0–100 percent to each partner, with the total summing to 100 percent. The results using this continuous measure were largely similar and are further discussed in the robustness checks section.

I created three task type variables that combine related task items, as pre-registered. These tasks were selected to include routine household labor, childcare, and time-sensitive tasks, covering both female-typed and male-typed domains. The female-typed task variable combines preparing the meals, cleaning the house, giving kids baths and dressing them, taking care of their sick kid, and arranging childcare during daycare closures. The male-typed task variable combines handling auto repairs after an accident, outdoor and other household maintenance, and disciplining kids.<sup>6</sup> The gender-neutral task variable combines

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<sup>5</sup>The forced-choice format, in which respondents assigned main responsibility to one partner rather than dividing tasks evenly, was used to minimize social desirability bias. Americans tend to endorse gender egalitarianism even when their behaviors are more gendered (Gerson 2011), and asking respondents to choose between partners forces them to weigh competing options and reveal their genuine preferences. While respondents cannot directly express a preference for equal division, egalitarian preferences still surface in the aggregate. A respondent who views a task as equally shared has no reason to favor either partner and would choose between them at random. Across the sample, these random choices average out and produce no gender pattern (Doan and Quadlin 2019).

<sup>6</sup>Disciplining kids has features of both male-typed tasks (authority) and female-typed tasks (routine childcare). I classify it as male-typed in the main analysis. Results based on a typology that classifies it as

picking up and dropping off kids and reading and playing with kids. Each task type variable was calculated by summing the number of tasks where main responsibility was assigned to the female partner and dividing by the total number of tasks included, resulting in a scale from 0 to 1.<sup>7</sup> The full text for survey instruments is presented in Appendix C.

### 3.3 Analytic Strategy

First, I tested Hypotheses 1–3 using ordinary least squares (OLS) regression to compare the proportion of tasks assigned to the female partner across workplace flexibility conditions.<sup>8</sup> The dependent variable was the share of tasks assigned to the female partner within each task type (female-typed, male-typed, or gender-neutral), ranging from 0 to 1. The independent variable was the experimental condition, with “neither partner has flexibility” as the reference category. Given the bounded nature of the dependent variable, I conducted fractional logit regression as a robustness check. The results were largely consistent and are discussed further in the robustness checks section.

Next, to test Hypothesis 4 on the asymmetric effects of flexibility, I estimated and compared the coefficients of the regression models. Specifically, I compared (1) the effect of only the female partner having flexibility versus neither partner having flexibility and (2) the effect of only the male partner having flexibility versus neither partner having flexibility. The difference between these coefficients was evaluated using two-tailed t-tests.

While the random assignment of respondents to experimental conditions enables the identification of treatment effects without control variables, as a robustness check, I included the following demographic controls. These were age (18–29, 30–39, 40–49, 50–59, 60+), gender (Male, Female), race/ethnicity (White, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific

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gender-neutral are largely similar and reported in Appendix F.

<sup>7</sup>This scale is numerically identical to the average of the proportion of respondents who assigned the main responsibility to the female partner across tasks within the type.

<sup>8</sup>In the pre-registration, I specified binary logistic regression comparing the likelihood of assigning responsibility to the female partner across workplace flexibility conditions by individual task, and I also pre-registered the use of an aggregated task type variable that combines related tasks. For ease of presentation, the main text reports the results from OLS using the aggregated task type measures.

Islander, Mixed/Other), marital status (Married, Single, Divorced/Separated/Widowed), parental status (No children, Has children), employment status (Full-time, Part-time, Self-employed, Unemployed, Other), educational attainment (High school degree or less, Some college, Bachelor’s degree, Graduate degree), and Census region (Northeast, Midwest, South, West). Additionally, I controlled for gender ideology using a 6-item scale adapted from the General Social Survey ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ). Items included traditional statements (e.g., “A man’s job is to earn money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family”) and egalitarian statements (e.g., “A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work”). The results were largely consistent with and without control variables and are further discussed in the robustness checks section.

In the final analytic sample of 1,157 respondents, I excluded (1) respondents who failed the attention check and (2) respondents who did not complete the survey, as pre-registered. Respondents who failed the manipulation check were retained, as excluding them could introduce bias because such respondents may differ systematically from others.<sup>9</sup> The results were consistent when restricting the sample to those who passed the manipulation check (N=1,001) and are discussed further in the robustness checks section. The full texts for the attention check and manipulation checks are presented in Appendix D.

### 3.4 Supplementary Surveys

In addition to the main experiment, I conducted two supplementary surveys to (1) measure task-level perceptions of gendered suitability and technical characteristics and (2) validate the task typology. These surveys were fielded between June 23 and July 15, 2025, using the same Prolific sampling framework as the main experiment. Respondents (N=1,000) were randomly assigned to either the first supplementary survey (N=487), which captured perceived femininity/masculinity and technical attributes of each task, or the second (N=511),

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<sup>9</sup>The manipulation checks asked whether respondents correctly understood treatment (whether the female and/or the male partner had access to workplace flexibility) and the two key controls, equal earnings and equal work hours.

which captured perceived gender differences in suitability for each task. These measures are further discussed in the Possible Mechanisms section, and complete instruments are shown in Appendix E.

## 4 Results

First, I describe the pattern of task assignments under the baseline condition in which neither partner had workplace flexibility. Figure 1 shows the share of tasks assigned to the female partner for each task type in all four flexibility conditions.

When neither partner had flexibility, female-typed tasks were assigned predominantly to women, male-typed tasks to men, and gender-neutral tasks showed a relatively balanced distribution between partners at 0.57 to the woman, consistent with the task typology used in this study. Notably, the extent to which male-typed tasks are assigned to men (0.17 to the woman or 0.83 to the man) is slightly stronger than the extent to which female-typed tasks are assigned to the woman (0.78). While this gender-typed pattern persists across conditions, substantial differences emerge when only the man or only the woman had flexibility, which are discussed in more detail in the section below.

When disaggregated by individual tasks (shown in Figure A3 of Appendix G), the pattern closely aligns with the pattern by task type shown in Figure 1. Supplementary survey results, which capture task assignment without flexibility cues from the vignette, also validate the task typology used in the study (shown in Figure A4 of Appendix H).

### 4.1 The Effect of Workplace Flexibility

Next, I examine the effects of workplace flexibility conditions on the task assignment to women. The coefficients for each workplace flexibility condition were estimated relative to the condition in which neither partner has flexibility. Table 2 summarizes the results of the OLS regression by task type. For ease of interpretation, Figure 2 visualizes these coefficient estimates.

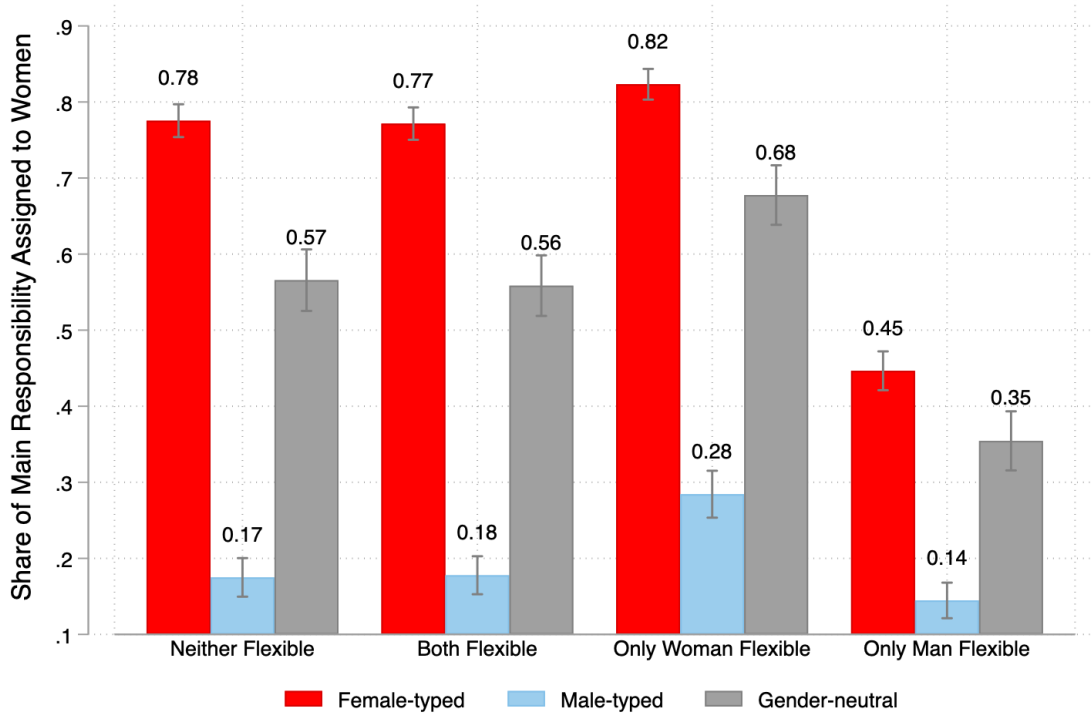


Figure 1: Distribution of task assignment to women across flexibility conditions

*Note:* Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Hypothesis 1 posited that the female partner would be assigned fewer female-typed tasks when both partners had flexibility compared to when neither partner had flexibility. The coefficient for "Both Flexible" in Model 1 of Table 2 is statistically indistinguishable from zero, providing no support for H1. The same null effect appears for male-typed tasks in Model 2 and gender-neutral tasks in Model 3. In other words, there is no statistically significant difference between conditions in which both partners had flexibility and neither partner had flexibility across any task type. These findings are consistent with the perspective that gender essentialist beliefs shape task allocation by assigning certain activities to one gender, while offering little empirical support for the perspective that removing workplace constraints would promote expectations of equal domestic responsibility.

Hypothesis 2 predicted that the female partner would be assigned more female-typed and gender-neutral tasks when only the woman had flexibility compared to when neither partner had flexibility. The coefficient for "Only-Woman Flexible" in Model 1 of Table 2

Table 2: Effects of workplace flexibility on task assignment to women

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                 | —                     |
| Both Flexible           | -0.00<br>(0.02)     | 0.00<br>(0.02)    | -0.01<br>(0.03)       |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 0.05*<br>(0.02)     | 0.11***<br>(0.02) | 0.11***<br>(0.03)     |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -0.33***<br>(0.02)  | -0.03<br>(0.02)   | -0.21***<br>(0.03)    |
| Constant                | 0.77***<br>(0.01)   | 0.18***<br>(0.01) | 0.57***<br>(0.02)     |
| Observations            | 1157                | 1157              | 1157                  |

*Note:* Coefficients represent the difference from the reference condition. Standard errors in parentheses.  
\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

shows a modest but significant increase ( $0.05, p < .05$ ), while Model 3 of Table 2 shows a greater increase for gender-neutral tasks ( $0.11, p < .001$ ), which supports H2. At the same time, Model 2 shows that the assignment of male-typed tasks to women also increased significantly ( $0.11, p < .001$ ), which counters the expectation that these tasks would remain tied to men. This suggests that the logic of availability may partially override gendered task assignments even for male-typed tasks.

Hypothesis 3 anticipated that women would be assigned fewer female-typed and gender-neutral tasks when only the man had flexibility compared to when neither partner had flexibility. The results strongly support this prediction. The coefficient for "Only-Man Flexible" in Model 1 of Table 2 shows a large decline in the assignment of female-typed tasks to women ( $-0.33, p < .001$ ), indicating that respondents in this condition assigned substantially more responsibility to the male partner compared to the baseline condition. Model 3 shows a smaller but still substantial reduction for gender-neutral tasks ( $-0.21, p < .001$ ) while Model 2 confirms that male-typed tasks remained primarily assigned to men, as expected.

Figure 2 visualizes the OLS estimates as percentage-point changes in the share assigned to the female partner relative to the baseline condition in which neither partner had flexibility. It highlights the same pattern shown in Table 2. Coefficients remain near zero when both partners had flexibility, turn positive when only the woman had flexibility, and decline most sharply for female-typed tasks when only the man had flexibility.

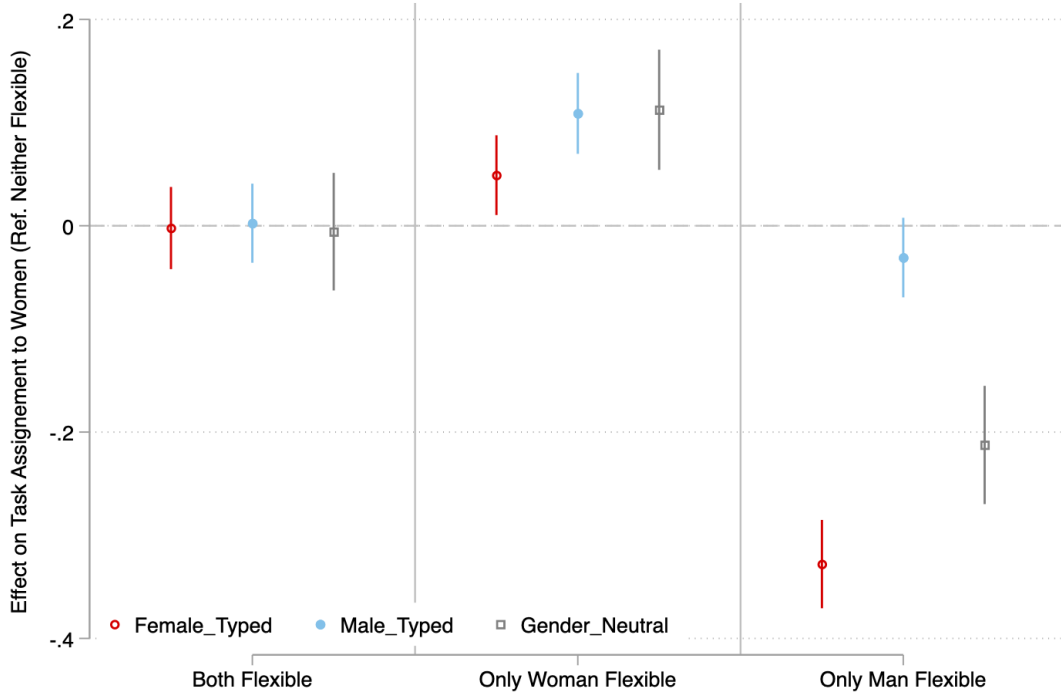


Figure 2: Effect size of workplace flexibility on task assignments to women  
*Note:* Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Hypothesis 4 predicted that the effects of workplace flexibility would differ depending on the gender of the flexible partner, such that for female-typed tasks, the difference from the baseline condition in which neither partner had flexibility would be smaller when only the woman had flexibility than when only the man had flexibility. As shown by the coefficients in Table 2 and Figure 2, the results support this prediction. A two-tailed t-test comparing the only-woman and only-man coefficients confirms this asymmetry ( $p < .001$ ).

## 4.2 Possible Mechanisms

The main results demonstrate three key patterns. First, even when both partners are provided with flexibility, strongly gendered task assignments persist. Second, when only one partner has flexibility, the assignment of tasks shifts away from gendered expectations and moves toward the flexible partner. Third, the increase in men’s responsibility when only the man has flexibility is larger than corresponding shifts in women’s responsibilities when only the woman has flexibility. To explain these patterns, I draw on two supplementary surveys that provide task-level evidence on the possible mechanisms underlying them.

### *Why Does Symmetric Flexibility Not Shift Expectations?*

The first pattern to explain is the null effect of providing flexibility to both partners. One possible explanation is that when availability is symmetric, the practical logic of availability is not activated, and the gender suitability logic continues to govern the expectation. To assess this, I examine task-level perceptions of cultural gender suitability or technical task characteristics.

Specifically, I construct three sets of task-level measures. Cultural gender suitability captures the extent to which each task is coded as belonging to one gender, measured by the perceived femininity/masculinity and the task-specific women–men gaps in five attributes (skill, enjoyment, attention to detail, physical energy, and emotional sensitivity).<sup>10</sup> Flexibility sensitivity captures how much a task’s completion depends on workplace flexibility. Other technical attributes include perceived typical frequency, duration, and interference with paid work. Full descriptive statistics for each measure appear in Appendix I.

Then, I merged the task-level measures with the main experimental data and calculated the correlation between each measure and the share of respondents assigning each task to

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<sup>10</sup>I randomly assigned respondents to one of two groups: one rating perceptions of most women on each task and the other rating most men. This design helps minimize social desirability bias that might arise if respondents evaluated both groups at the same time. I then constructed each task-level measure by subtracting the mean response for most women from the mean response for most men.

the female partner under the baseline condition in which neither partner had flexibility. The baseline condition allows us to best observe the default allocation logic. All task-level correlations are computed across the 10 tasks. Given this small number of observations, I treat the correlations as descriptive characterizations of task-level patterns rather than as formal hypothesis tests.

Table 3: Correlations between task characteristics and task assignment

|                                    | Share to Woman<br>(Neither Flexible) |
|------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| <i>Cultural gender suitability</i> |                                      |
| Femininity/Masculinity Rating      | .971***                              |
| Women–Men Skill Gap                | .909***                              |
| Women–Men Joy Gap                  | .824**                               |
| Women–Men Attention Gap            | .887***                              |
| Women–Men Strength Gap             | .888***                              |
| Women–Men Emotion Gap              | .630                                 |
| <i>Flexibility sensitivity</i>     |                                      |
| Importance of Flexibility          | .157                                 |
| <i>Technical attributes</i>        |                                      |
| Typical Frequency                  | .550                                 |
| Typical Duration                   | -.237                                |
| Typical Paid Work Interference     | -.060                                |
| Observations (tasks)               | 10                                   |

*Note:* Pearson correlations computed across the 10 tasks. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

As reported in column 1 of Table 3, default task assignment was strongly and positively correlated with cultural suitability measures. Tasks rated as more feminine were overwhelmingly assigned to the female partner, as were tasks on which women were perceived to have greater skill, enjoyment, attention to detail, and physical energy. By contrast, associations with technical attributes – importance of flexibility, frequency, duration, and interference with paid work – were substantially weaker and not statistically significant at the task level. Taken together, cultural gender coding of tasks better predicts task assignment than tech-

nical demands.<sup>11</sup>

### *Why Does Asymmetric Flexibility Shift Expectations?*

While symmetric flexibility left task assignment unchanged, asymmetric flexibility produced substantial shifts toward the flexible partner. To examine whether this shift operates through the practical logic of availability, I turn to the task-level patterns in Figure 3.

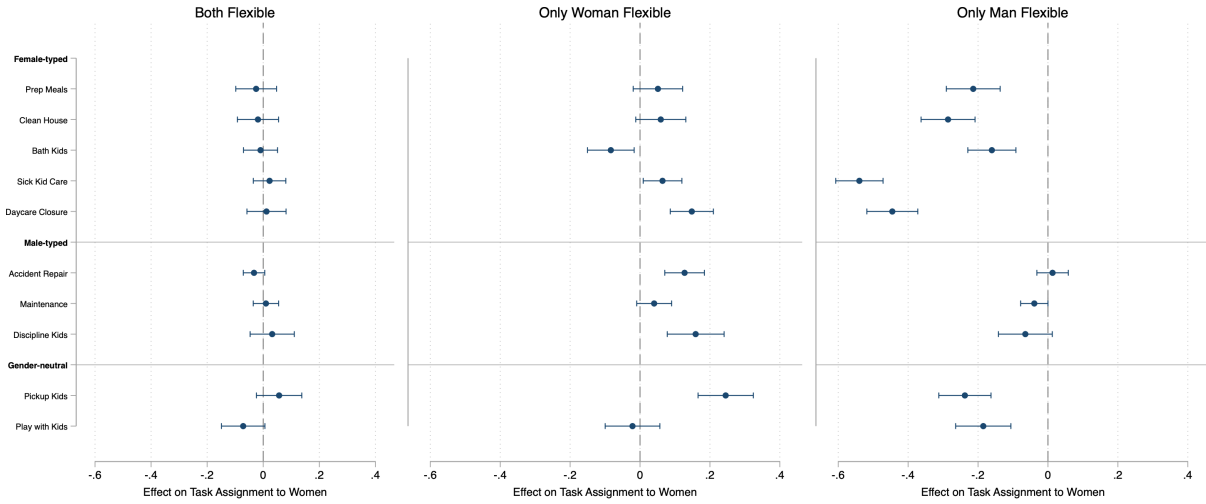


Figure 3: Task-level effect size of workplace flexibility on task assignment to women

*Note:* Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 3 displays the per-task effect of each flexibility condition relative to the baseline. The clearest pattern emerges when only the man has flexibility, where the three tasks that move most strongly toward the male partner — sick kid care, daycare closure, and kid pickup — are all rated above 3.1 out of 4 on the importance of flexibility, well above the across-task mean of 2.7 (see Appendix I). These are the tasks where workplace flexibility most directly shapes expectations, and their large shifts when only the man has flexibility are consistent

<sup>11</sup>Because cultural suitability was measured in the supplementary survey while task assignments came from the main experiment, these correlations cannot establish whether individual respondents drew on cultural gender coding when making assignments. To address this, I examine whether respondents' own gender ideology, measured alongside their task assignments in the main experiment, predicts those assignments. More egalitarian respondents assign fewer female-typed and gender-neutral tasks, and more male-typed tasks, to the female partner. Details are shown in Appendix J.

with a practical availability mechanism, where tasks that depend more on flexibility are most readily reassigned to whichever partner has it.

When only the woman has flexibility, the corresponding shifts move in the same direction but are smaller in magnitude. The most informative case is auto repair after an accident, which is rated 3.09 out of 4 on the importance of flexibility (see Appendix I), comparable to the three flexibility-sensitive female-typed tasks above. Despite this, when only the woman has flexibility, auto repair shifts substantially less than the other three tasks. This suggests that flexibility sensitivity alone does not fully account for the pattern, and that other forces can override the availability logic.

### *Why Do Expectations Move Asymmetrically?*

For the gender asymmetry, three candidate explanations exist, namely stronger gender coding of male-typed tasks, lower flexibility sensitivity of male-typed tasks, and lesser perceived significance of reassigning male-typed tasks for correcting gender inequality. With only a handful of tasks in each gender-type category, this comparison is descriptive rather than conclusive, but I assess each in turn with the best available evidence.

First, suggestive evidence supports the stronger gender coding explanation. On the femininity/masculinity scale, male-typed tasks (accident repairs, home maintenance) receive the most extreme ratings, deviating from the neutral midpoint by an average of 1.72 points, compared to 1.42 points for female-typed tasks (see Figure A5 in Appendix I). This may explain why respondents continue to assign male-typed tasks to the male partner even when the female partner has flexibility.

Alternatively, male-typed tasks might be less sensitive to flexibility in the first place, so flexibility cannot reshape them. The case of auto repair argues against this as the full story. Although auto repair is perceived to be highly flexibility-sensitive, it shifts only modestly when only the woman has flexibility. This pattern suggests that other forces beyond flexibility sensitivity sustain male-typed task assignment.

A third possibility is that assigning male-typed tasks to women is not perceived as meaningfully advancing gender equality, since most domestic labor is female-typed (Christopher 2024; England 2010). Women already shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic responsibility regardless of their workplace flexibility, so when the woman is the flexible partner, respondents may not view her flexibility as a reason to extend her burden into male-typed tasks. This explanation is plausible but not directly testable with the current data. I return to this in the Discussion.

### 4.3 Robustness Checks

Robustness checks support the main findings across alternative measurement, sample, and model specifications. First, using the percentage of each task assigned to the female partner (0–100%) instead of the binary measure produces similar patterns. The only difference is that the effect for male-typed tasks is no longer significant when only the woman had flexibility, consistent with the earlier discussion that male-typed tasks shift only modestly under this condition. Second, excluding respondents who failed manipulation checks, adding demographic controls and gender ideology, and estimating fractional logit models yield largely similar results. These checks, summarized in Tables A6–A9 of Appendix K, indicate that the findings are not artifacts of analytic decisions (the forced-choice measure, sample selection, covariate adjustment, or use of OLS for proportional outcomes).

## 5 Discussion and Conclusion

Do Flexible Work Arrangements (FWAs) succeed in their organizational mandate to rationalize the division of labor at work and home? Specifically, does the provision of flexibility enable a "logic of availability", allocating duties based on practical considerations, or does the "logic of suitability" continue to govern the division of labor? While prior scholarship has examined how individuals utilize flexibility in their own lives, it remains less clear how the policies themselves shape the normative landscape. Drawing on an original survey ex-

periment, this study tested the boundary conditions of organizational flexibility, examining whether the provision of practical availability is a strong enough force to displace gendered essentialist beliefs.

The findings indicate that task assignment is generally dominated by gender essentialist beliefs about which gender is suited to which tasks. Removing barriers for both partners does not disrupt these gendered expectations. Even when only the woman has flexibility, tasks seen as strongly masculine shift toward her only modestly and remain predominantly assigned to men. However, when only the man has flexibility, the logic of practical availability becomes strong enough to override the gender logic, and respondents expect men to assume more responsibility.

This tension between practical availability and gendered suitability offers a nuanced perspective on the "stalling of gender convergence" in the workplace. Existing research has largely focused on the structural barriers preventing women from meeting the "ideal worker" norm ([Reid 2015](#)). The results presented here suggest a complementary barrier in the domestic domain, which is the asymmetric interpretation of organizational resources. Respondents appeared willing to validate the "logic of availability" for men, rationalizing the assignment of care tasks when their circumstances permitted. Yet, they remained resistant to applying the same rational logic to women for male-typed tasks, such as auto repairs, even when she was the more available partner. This implies that the "logic of suitability" is not uniformly applied. The masculine coding of technical and maintenance tasks may function as a stricter identity boundary than the feminine coding of care tasks. Thus, organizational policies do not simply unleash availability but their effectiveness is constrained by the specific gendered coding of the task at hand.

In terms of policy implications, these findings indicate that workplace flexibility policies may be insufficient to promote equity, as gender-neutral policies alone do not challenge gendered expectations ([Gonalons-Pons 2023](#)). At the same time, the results suggest that men's participation is most effectively endorsed when their availability makes the traditional

division of labor difficult to justify. This implies that well-designed policies providing targeted incentives for men could create the conditions necessary to reshape the norms. For instance, parental leave policies that reserve a specific time for fathers, which expires if unused, have successfully boosted leave uptake ([Kaufman 2020](#)). By making men’s domestic involvement a practical reality, such interventions may increase men’s exposure to domestic labor, thereby weakening the cultural ties between specific domestic tasks and gender.

This study is not without limitations, which point to important directions for future research. First, although I weigh three candidate explanations for the observed gender asymmetry, the small number of tasks within each gender-type category makes that evidence descriptive rather than conclusive. While it is plausible that stronger gender rigidity around male-typed tasks may play a role, it is also possible that the stronger shift for female-typed tasks might reflect respondents’ assumptions about men’s limited baseline contributions, or a tendency to undervalue women’s competence in male-typed tasks. Future research examining more detailed perceptions of each task, especially in relation to each other, could better illuminate the mechanisms. Second, the generalizability of the findings is limited by the vignette design, which focused on professional married couples. Although focusing on professional married couples isolates the effect of workplace flexibility by ruling out other constraints (e.g., shift work, wage disparities, additional family duties), it limits the scope of the conclusions. The relationship between expectations about domestic responsibilities and the partners’ availability may differ for couples with other socioeconomic backgrounds or family structures. Future research could examine how interpretations of practicality vary across contexts.

While this study demonstrates that deeply embedded gender norms often limit the potential of organizational policies, it also shows that these norms are not deterministic. Although individuals default to traditional gender expectations in the absence of strong countervailing signals, they are not completely bound by norms when default arrangements are considered impractical. By strategically leveraging these moments of change, policymakers can design

interventions that go beyond simply accommodating work-life balance. Instead, by actively structuring men's availability, policies can challenge the underlying cultural gender-coding of tasks, ultimately promoting a more egalitarian division of labor.

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## A Descriptive Statistics of Key Demographics

Table A1: Sample characteristics

| Variable                      | Proportion/Mean (SD) |
|-------------------------------|----------------------|
| Observations                  | 1,157                |
| <i>Age</i>                    |                      |
| 18–29                         | 20.57%               |
| 30–39                         | 19.71%               |
| 40–49                         | 15.38%               |
| 50–59                         | 24.46%               |
| 60+                           | 19.88%               |
| <i>Sex</i>                    |                      |
| Male                          | 50.17%               |
| Female                        | 49.83%               |
| <i>Race</i>                   |                      |
| White                         | 61.54%               |
| Black                         | 11.58%               |
| Hispanic                      | 7.78%                |
| Asian                         | 6.22%                |
| Others                        | 12.88%               |
| <i>Marital status</i>         |                      |
| Married                       | 47.23%               |
| Divorced/Widowed/Separated    | 16.55%               |
| Single                        | 36.22%               |
| <i>Parental status</i>        |                      |
| No children                   | 44.28%               |
| At least one child            | 55.72%               |
| <i>Employment status</i>      |                      |
| Full-time                     | 48.49%               |
| Part-time                     | 15.56%               |
| Self-employed                 | 9.94%                |
| Unemployed                    | 14.61%               |
| Others                        | 11.41%               |
| <i>Educational attainment</i> |                      |
| HS or below                   | 12.96%               |
| Some college                  | 33.88%               |
| BA                            | 32.76%               |
| Post BA                       | 20.40%               |
| <i>Region</i>                 |                      |
| Northeast                     | 33.10%               |
| Midwest                       | 21.95%               |
| South                         | 20.03%               |
| West                          | 24.91%               |
| Egalitarian attitude          | 0.68 (0.33)          |

*Note:* Standard deviations in parentheses for continuous variables.

## **B Vignette Texts for Four Experimental Conditions**

*Note: The order of names was randomized within each condition. Additionally, when Jessica and Michael had the same flexibility condition, the order of the flexibility description (e.g., allowing employees to work from home and choose their schedule) and the rigidity description (e.g., requiring employees to be in the office and follow a fixed schedule) was also randomized.*

### **Neither Partner Has Flexibility**

Jessica and Michael are a married couple raising two preschool-aged kids together. Both are working professionals, earning about the same amount. They work 40 hours per week, sometimes working overtime when work gets busier. Jessica and Michael work at firms that do not allow employees to work from home. Their firms also do not allow employees to choose when to start and end the 8-hour workday. Their firms require employees to be in the office Monday through Friday. Their firms also require employees to follow a 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule. Jessica and Michael work in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

### **Both Partners Have Flexibility**

Jessica and Michael are a married couple raising two preschool-aged kids together. Both are working professionals, earning about the same amount. They work 40 hours per week, sometimes working overtime when work gets busier. Jessica and Michael work at firms that allow employees to work from home two days a week. Their firms also allow employees to choose when to start and end the 8-hour workday. Their firms do not require employees to be in the office Monday through Friday. Their firms also do not require employees to follow a 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule. Jessica and Michael work from home two days a week and choose when to start and end the workday.

### **Only the Female Partner Has Flexibility**

Jessica and Michael are a married couple raising two preschool-aged kids together. Both are working professionals, earning about the same amount. They work 40 hours per week, sometimes working overtime when work gets busier. Jessica works at a firm that allows employees to work from home two days a week. Her firm also allows employees to choose when to start and end the 8-hour workday. Michael works at a firm that requires employees to be in the office Monday through Friday. His firm also requires employees to follow a 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule. Jessica works from home two days a week and chooses when to start and end the workday. Michael works in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.

### **Only the Male Partner Has Flexibility**

Jessica and Michael are a married couple raising two preschool-aged kids together. Both are working professionals, earning about the same amount. They work 40 hours per week, sometimes working overtime when work gets busier. Jessica works at a firm that requires

employees to be in the office Monday through Friday. Her firm also requires employees to follow a 9 AM to 5 PM work schedule. Michael works at a firm that allows employees to work from home two days a week. His firm also allows employees to choose when to start and end the 8-hour workday. Jessica works in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM. Michael works from home two days a week and chooses when to start and end the workday.

## C Main Survey Instruments

*Note:* The Survey instruments are adapted from [Doan and Quadlin \(2019\)](#).

1. **Instruction presented before the vignette:**

We would like to know what you think about the following couple. Please take a few moments to form an impression after reading their story. Then, answer the questions that follow based on your impressions of the couple.

2. **Instruction presented after the vignette:**

We will be asking how you think the couple should manage 10 different tasks. Although you may feel that you don't have a lot of information about the couple, we are interested in your initial impressions of them.

3. **Task assignment questions presented to respondents:**

**Who do you think should have the main responsibility for preparing the meals?**

A binary choice form with two radio button options. The first option is 'Jessica' and the second option is 'Michael'. Both options are preceded by an empty radio button.

☐ Jessica

☐ Michael

Figure A1: Binary measure of main responsibility assignment

**How do you think Jessica and Michael should split the responsibility for preparing the meals? Please indicate each person's share, making sure the total is 100%.**

A continuous measure form consisting of two horizontal sliders. Above the sliders is a scale from 0 to 100 in increments of 10. The first slider is for 'Jessica' and the second is for 'Michael'. Each slider has a circular handle at the 0 position. To the right of each slider is a text box containing the number '0'.

0 10 20 30 40 50 60 70 80 90 100

Jessica

Michael

Figure A2: Continuous measure of percentage responsibility assignment

## **D Attention Check and Manipulation Check Items**

### **Attention Check**

1. **What is your favorite color? Regardless of your favorite color, please select “Purple” from the list below.**
  - (a) Yellow
  - (b) Blue
  - (c) Red
  - (d) Green
  - (e) Purple

### **Manipulation Check**

1. **Based on the story you just read, which of the following best describes Jessica and Michael’s working conditions?**
  - (a) Both Jessica and Michael work in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.
  - (b) Both Jessica and Michael work from home and choose when to start and end the workday.
  - (c) Jessica works from home and chooses when to start and end the workday. Michael works in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.
  - (d) Michael works from home and chooses when to start and end the workday. Jessica works in the office Monday through Friday from 9 AM to 5 PM.
2. **Based on the story you just read, who earns more money?**
  - (a) Jessica
  - (b) Michael
  - (c) Both earn about the same amount.
3. **Based on the story you just read, how many hours per day do Jessica and Michael each work?**
  - (a) Jessica works 8 hours, and Michael works less than that.
  - (b) Jessica works 8 hours, and Michael works more than that.
  - (c) Michael works 8 hours, and Jessica works more than that.
  - (d) Michael works 8 hours, and Jessica works less than that.
  - (e) Both work 8 hours a day.

## E Supplementary Survey Instruments

**Instruction:** This survey asks how dual-earner, married, heterosexual couples raising two preschool-aged kids in the U.S. usually handle household and childcare tasks. Please answer based on what you think is the most typical or common in such families, not your own family or personal preferences. You'll be asked about 4 tasks with 9 questions per task.

*\* Note: Respondents were randomly assigned to 4 tasks out of 10 tasks.*

### Survey 1

*Note: The questions presented are for preparing meals, but the same set of questions was used for the other nine tasks as well.*

1. How often do parents prepare meals?
  - (a) More than once a day
  - (b) Once a day
  - (c) A few times a week
  - (d) Once a week
  - (e) Less than once a week
2. How long does it take to prepare meals?
  - (a) Less than 30 minutes
  - (b) 30 minutes to 1 hour
  - (c) 1 to 2 hours
  - (d) 2 to 4 hours
  - (e) More than 4 hours
3. How difficult does preparing meals make it for parents to do their paid jobs?
  - (a) Not at all difficult
  - (b) Slightly difficult
  - (c) Moderately difficult
  - (d) Very difficult
4. For preparing meals, how important is it that parents have flexible work options (e.g., setting your own schedule or working from home)?
  - (a) Not at all important
  - (b) Slightly important
  - (c) Moderately important
  - (d) Very important

## Survey 2

*\* Note: The order of response options for Questions 1–2 was randomized. The respondents were randomly assigned to answer about most women or most men for Questions 3–7.*

1. Who do you think should have the main responsibility for preparing meals?
  - (a) The male partner
  - (b) The female partner
2. Most people think preparing meals is \_\_\_\_\_. (Please choose one to fill in the blank.)
  - (a) Very masculine
  - (b) Moderately masculine
  - (c) Slightly masculine
  - (d) Equally masculine and feminine
  - (e) Slightly feminine
  - (f) Moderately feminine
  - (g) Very feminine
3. When preparing meals, how much skill do most women/men have?
  - (a) None
  - (b) A little
  - (c) Quite a bit
  - (d) A lot
4. When preparing meals, how much enjoyment do most women/men get?
5. When preparing meals, how much attention to detail do most women/men pay?
6. When preparing meals, how much physical energy do most women/men have?
7. When preparing meals, how much emotional sensitivity do most women/men have?  
*(Response options for Questions 4–7 are the same as those for Question 3.)*

## F Alternative Task Classification: Disciplining Kids as Gender-Neutral

As a robustness check, I reclassified “disciplining kids” from male-typed to gender-neutral, given its conceptual ambiguity as a male-typed task. The male-typed category now includes only auto repairs and home maintenance, while the gender-neutral category includes picking up kids, reading/playing with kids, and disciplining kids. Table A2 reports the re-estimated results. The patterns are substantively unchanged.

Table A2: Effects of workplace flexibility on task assignment to women (disciplining kids reclassified as gender-neutral)

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed (Alt) | (3)<br>Gender-neutral (Alt) |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                       | —                           |
| Both Flexible           | -0.00<br>(0.02)     | -0.01<br>(0.02)         | 0.01<br>(0.02)              |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 0.05*<br>(0.02)     | 0.09***<br>(0.02)       | 0.13***<br>(0.02)           |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -0.33***<br>(0.02)  | -0.01<br>(0.02)         | -0.16***<br>(0.02)          |
| Constant                | 0.77***<br>(0.01)   | 0.08***<br>(0.01)       | 0.50***<br>(0.02)           |
| Observations            | 1157                | 1156                    | 1157                        |

*Note:* Coefficients represent the difference from the reference condition. Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## G Task Assignment Pattern by Individual Tasks

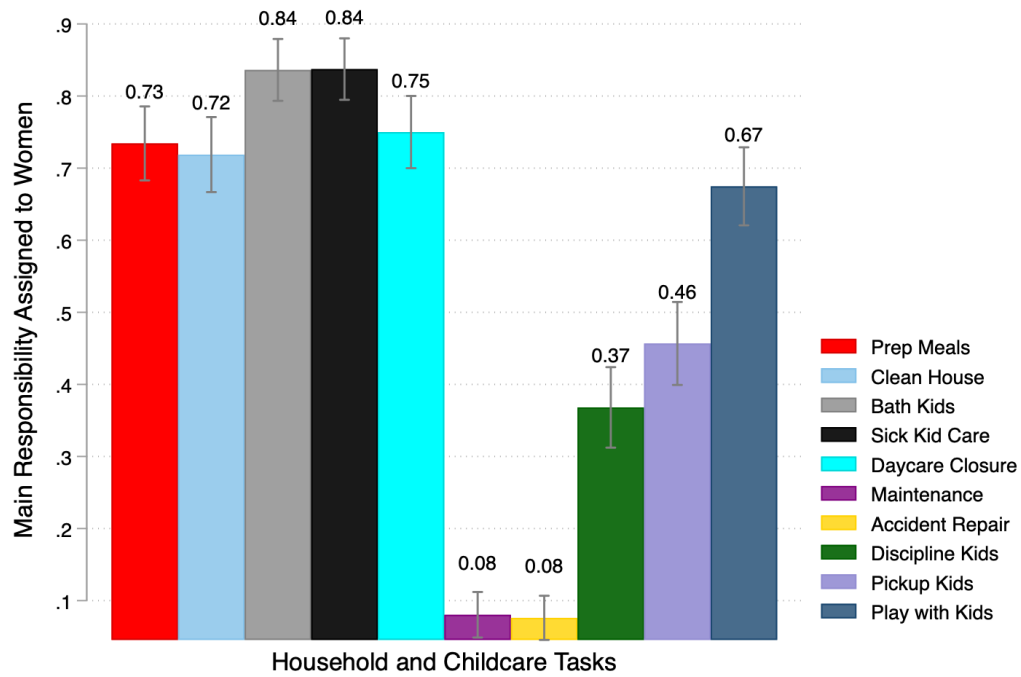


Figure A3: Distribution of task assignment to women when neither partner had flexibility

## H Task Typology Validation

The first supplementary survey asked respondents to indicate who should have the main responsibility for each of the 10 tasks (female or male partner, randomized order) without any contextual cues from the experimental vignettes. The responses, shown in Figure A4, validate the task typology used in the main experiment.

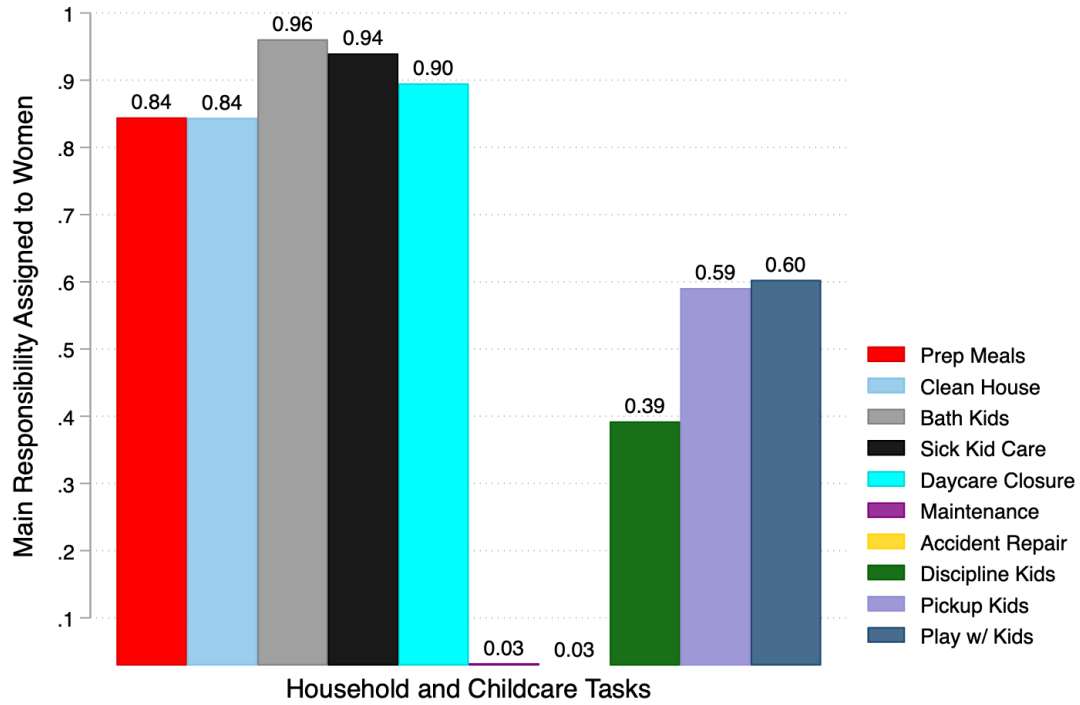


Figure A4: Distribution of task assignment to women with no flexibility cues

# I Descriptive Statistics of Task Characteristics

Table A3: Gender and technical attributes by task

|                             | Femininity/              | Technical Attributes (Mean) |          |               |            |
|-----------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------|----------|---------------|------------|
| Task                        | Masculinity <sup>a</sup> | Freq.                       | Duration | Job Conflicts | Flex. Imp. |
| <i>Female-Typed Tasks</i>   |                          |                             |          |               |            |
| Preparing meals             | 5.26                     | 4.73                        | 2.16     | 2.10          | 2.46       |
| Cleaning house              | 5.65                     | 3.35                        | 2.64     | 2.04          | 2.39       |
| Bathing Kids                | 5.50                     | 4.11                        | 1.75     | 1.75          | 2.22       |
| Sick kid care               | 5.41                     | 3.04                        | 4.29     | 3.27          | 3.60       |
| Daycare closure             | 5.28                     | 1.87                        | 2.55     | 3.09          | 3.33       |
| <i>Male-Typed Tasks</i>     |                          |                             |          |               |            |
| Accident repairs            | 1.71                     | 1.49                        | 4.24     | 3.13          | 3.09       |
| Home maintenance            | 1.94                     | 1.99                        | 3.29     | 2.11          | 2.28       |
| Disciplining Kids           | 3.19                     | 3.25                        | 1.27     | 1.88          | 2.14       |
| <i>Gender-Neutral Tasks</i> |                          |                             |          |               |            |
| Picking up Kids             | 4.50                     | 4.32                        | 1.79     | 2.50          | 3.14       |
| Playing w/ Kids             | 4.45                     | 4.06                        | 2.53     | 1.99          | 2.65       |

*Note:* Values represent task-level mean ratings calculated from the supplementary survey.

<sup>a</sup> Scale: 1 = Very Masculine, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Very Feminine.

Table A4: Perceived gender gap in task suitability

| Task                        | Women – Men Gap <sup>a</sup> |       |           |        |         |
|-----------------------------|------------------------------|-------|-----------|--------|---------|
|                             | Skill                        | Joy   | Attention | Energy | Emotion |
| <i>Female-Typed Tasks</i>   |                              |       |           |        |         |
| Preparing meals             | 0.42                         | 0.35  | 0.62      | 0.10   | 0.50    |
| Cleaning house              | 0.69                         | 0.56  | 0.97      | 0.28   | 0.78    |
| Bathing Kids                | 0.45                         | 0.41  | 0.70      | 0.16   | 0.55    |
| Sick kid care               | 0.58                         | 0.08  | 0.62      | 0.08   | 0.63    |
| Daycare closure             | 0.56                         | 0.08  | 0.54      | 0.35   | 0.64    |
| <i>Male-Typed Tasks</i>     |                              |       |           |        |         |
| Accident repairs            | -0.54                        | -0.68 | -0.44     | -0.45  | 0.29    |
| Home maintenance            | -0.28                        | -0.22 | -0.10     | -0.40  | 0.52    |
| Disciplining kids           | 0.26                         | -0.26 | 0.42      | -0.09  | 0.53    |
| <i>Gender-Neutral Tasks</i> |                              |       |           |        |         |
| Picking up kids             | -0.07                        | 0.09  | 0.40      | 0.12   | 0.38    |
| Playing with kids           | 0.21                         | 0.07  | 0.44      | 0.06   | 0.54    |

*Note:* Positive values indicate higher ratings for women and negative values for men.

<sup>a</sup> Values represent (Mean rating assigned to "Most Women") minus (Mean rating assigned to "Most Men").

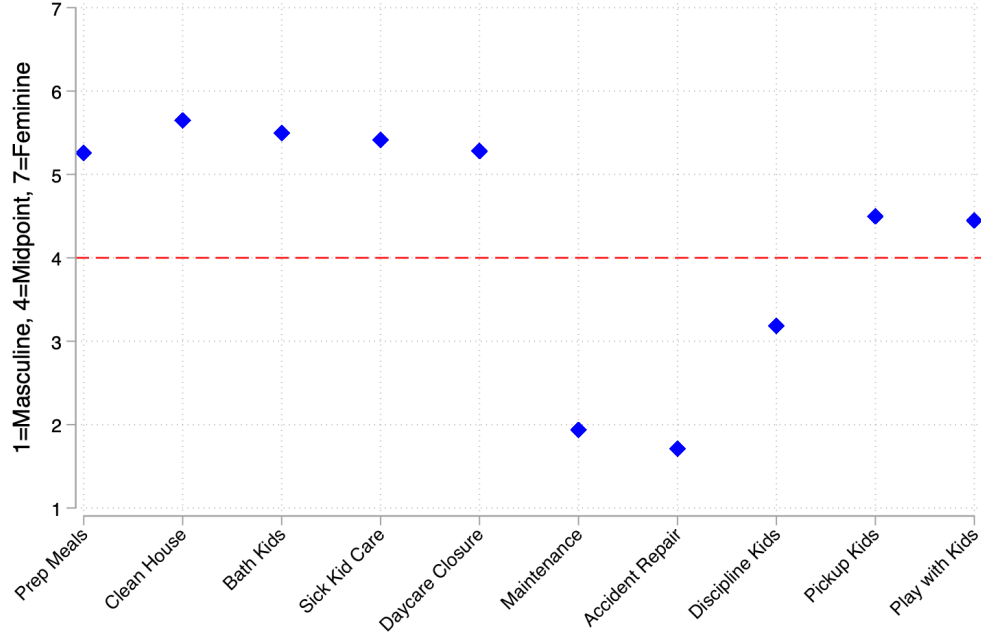


Figure A5: Average femininity/masculinity ratings by task

*Note:* Each point represents the mean rating of the task on a 7-point scale (1 = Very Masculine, 4 = Neutral, 7 = Very Feminine). Dashed line marks the neutral midpoint.

## J Main Effects of Gender Ideology on Task Assignment

Table A5 reports the main effects of gender ideology on task assignment, pooling across experimental conditions. The dependent variables are the share of tasks assigned to the female partner within each task type (female-typed, male-typed, gender-neutral), and the key predictor is respondents' gender ideology, measured using a 6-item GSS-based egalitarianism scale. Models control for experimental condition fixed effects and demographic characteristics (age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, parental status, employment status, education, and Census region).

The results indicate that more egalitarian respondents assign substantially fewer female-typed tasks to the female partner ( $b = -0.24$ ,  $p < .001$ ), more male-typed tasks to the female partner ( $b = 0.14$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and fewer gender-neutral tasks to the female partner ( $b = -0.16$ ,  $p < .001$ ). These patterns are consistent with the interpretation that cultural logic shapes task assignment at the individual level. Respondents who more strongly endorse egalitarian beliefs allocate tasks in a less gender-typed manner across all three task categories.

Table A5: Main effects of gender ideology on task assignment to women

|                                  | (1)<br>Female-typed  | (2)<br>Male-typed   | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Gender Ideology (Egalitarianism) | -0.238***<br>(0.022) | 0.144***<br>(0.019) | -0.162***<br>(0.032)  |
| Treatment condition FE           | Yes                  | Yes                 | Yes                   |
| Demographic controls             | Yes                  | Yes                 | Yes                   |
| Observations                     | 1,126                | 1,126               | 1,126                 |

*Note:* OLS estimates with robust standard errors in parentheses. Gender ideology is a 6-item GSS-based egalitarianism scale ( $\alpha = 0.84$ ), scored so that higher values indicate more egalitarian attitudes. Demographic controls include age, gender, race/ethnicity, marital status, parental status, employment status, education, and Census region. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## K Robustness Checks

Table A6: Effects of workplace flexibility on percentage assignment to women (0–100 scale)

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed  | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                  | —                     |
| Both Flexible           | -0.09<br>(0.86)     | 1.62<br>(1.18)     | -1.07<br>(0.71)       |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 4.82***<br>(0.94)   | 2.28<br>(1.17)     | 4.84***<br>(0.92)     |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -8.73***<br>(0.94)  | -0.92<br>(1.07)    | -8.57***<br>(0.85)    |
| Constant                | 56.76***<br>(0.59)  | 35.37***<br>(0.76) | 51.36***<br>(0.46)    |
| Observations            | 1117                | 1095               | 1084                  |

*Note:* Coefficients represent the difference from the reference condition. Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table A7: Effects of workplace flexibility (manipulation check passed)

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                 | —                     |
| Both Flexible           | 0.00<br>(0.02)      | 0.01<br>(0.02)    | -0.02<br>(0.03)       |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 0.04<br>(0.02)      | 0.14***<br>(0.02) | 0.13***<br>(0.03)     |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -0.34***<br>(0.02)  | -0.03<br>(0.02)   | -0.21***<br>(0.03)    |
| Constant                | 0.77***<br>(0.01)   | 0.17***<br>(0.01) | 0.56***<br>(0.02)     |
| Observations            | 1001                | 1001              | 1001                  |

*Note:* Coefficients represent the difference from the reference condition. Standard errors in parentheses.

\*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table A8: Effects of workplace flexibility (with demographic controls)

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                 | —                     |
| Both Flexible           | -0.01<br>(0.02)     | 0.01<br>(0.02)    | -0.01<br>(0.03)       |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 0.05*<br>(0.02)     | 0.11***<br>(0.02) | 0.11***<br>(0.03)     |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -0.34***<br>(0.02)  | -0.03<br>(0.02)   | -0.20***<br>(0.03)    |
| Constant                | 0.92***<br>(0.04)   | 0.07<br>(0.04)    | 0.68***<br>(0.06)     |
| Observations            | 1126                | 1126              | 1126                  |

*Note:* Models include controls for age, gender, race, marital status, parental status, employment, education, region, and gender ideology. Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Table A9: Effects of workplace flexibility (fractional logit model)

|                         | (1)<br>Female-typed | (2)<br>Male-typed | (3)<br>Gender-neutral |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
| Neither Flexible (Ref.) | —                   | —                 | —                     |
| Both Flexible           | -0.01<br>(0.12)     | 0.02<br>(0.13)    | -0.02<br>(0.12)       |
| Only-Woman Flexible     | 0.31*<br>(0.12)     | 0.62***<br>(0.13) | 0.48***<br>(0.13)     |
| Only-Man Flexible       | -1.45***<br>(0.11)  | -0.23<br>(0.14)   | -0.87***<br>(0.12)    |
| Observations            | 1157                | 1157              | 1157                  |

*Note:* Coefficients are log-odds ratios representing the difference from the reference condition. Standard errors in parentheses. \*  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .