Article

It was Gendered Before, so why not Again? US Young Adults' Expectations for Family Labor

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Abstract
In the present work, we investigated how young adults' perceptions of their own family's inequality in the past plays a role in shaping their expectations for future family life. Across 2 studies ($N = 763$), we investigated US heterosexual young adults (18–30 years; 65% White; 48.6% women, 47.8% men, and 3.5% non-binary) about their future expectations for household labor as predicted by (a) past parental division, (b) gender ideology, (c) evaluations of the past, and (d) own past involvement in household labor as a child. The results found strong relationships between the past family life (both experienced and idealized) and expectations for the future, modulated by gender and gender ideology. The findings highlight the important role of past family experiences and evaluations of these experiences in shaping expectations for future involvement in family responsibilities.

Keywords
future expectations, division of labor, gendered inequality, gender ideology

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Introduction

In the United States, and in many other nations, women take on the majority of their household's labor (Greenstein, 2009; Jansen et al., 2016; OECD, 2019). This gendered division of labor negatively influences women's health, decreases their labor force participation, and contributes to overall societal inequality (Coltrane, 2000; Oshio et al., 2013; Perry-Jenkins & Gerstel, 2020). Moreover, heterosexual young adult women expect their own future homes to also have an unequal and gendered division of labor (Askari et al., 2010; Erchull et al., 2010; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011). This finding is striking because it persists even when women report egalitarian attitudes or consider such a future division to be unfair (Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). That is, women expect unequal outcomes in their future despite perceiving that such outcomes are unfair.

Despite prior research showing evidence of the important role of past family inequality in predicting future expectations and behaviors (Croft et al., 2014; Platt & Polavieja, 2016), to date, a comprehensive investigation of what aspects of the past (beyond exposure to parental division) contribute to expectations for the future is relatively underexplored. Moreover, the majority of research on future expectations has not differentiated between types of household labor (e.g., investigating almost exclusively primarily "feminine" type tasks). The present study takes on this task by investigating young adults' future expectations for involvement across four types of household labor tasks (childcare, routine housework, maintaining social/financial activities, and maintenance tasks) as predicted by their (a) gender ideology, (b) past parental division, (c) evaluations of the past, and (d) *own* past involvement in household labor as children.

Gender Attitudes and Anticipated Household Labor Participation

Prior work presents a quandary: In spite of recent cultural changes and movements in gender egalitarian attitudes, women's career advancement, and representation, the majority of American heterosexual young adults continue to intend to have families in which women perform the majority of household labor (Allison & Ralston, 2018; Dernberger & Pepin, 2019; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021), despite expressing gender egalitarian attitudes and even a preference for an equal distribution of labor (Askari et al., 2010). In other words, young adults' preferences for the future fail to match their expectations of it, suggesting that attitudes and preferences alone cannot explain the propagation of inequality in future life.

In the present study, we explored some of the *mechanisms* through which young adults expect an unequal division of labor in their households. One previously explored potential predictor is young adults' gender-role attitudes.

Currently, there is mixed evidence regarding the role of gender attitudes in predicting anticipated household labor participation. For example, Askari et al. (2010) found that liberal feminist attitudes (e.g., positive attitudes towards women's status and women in general) did not predict ideal or expected chore participation, whereas it did predict expectations for child care participation, such that more liberal attitudes predicted more egalitarian ideal and expected divisions. On the other hand, some scholarship has found that liberal feminist attitudes predicted more egalitarian chore participation expectations (Erchull et al., 2010). However, in investigating future expectations prior studies measured general attitudes towards women, rather than specific attitudes towards gender roles within the family context. Here, we explored expectations in relation to beliefs about gender roles specific to within the family.

The Role of Past Family Life

In addition, developmental research suggests that there is a strong relationship between experiences within the family as a child and future expectations, which we explore in greater detail in the current studies. Prior longitudinal studies find that children that had a gendered division of labor in their homes during childhood perpetuate it within their own families as adults (Giménez-Nadal et al., 2019; Platt & Polavieja, 2016). Fulcher and Coyle (2011) found that across mid-childhood, adolescence, and emerging adulthood (79%–84% White across age ranges), girls were more likely to expect to stay at home and not work when they had a young child. However, mothers' employment status (working or staying at home) influenced whether a girl expected to stay at home when they had a young child. Croft and colleagues (2014) found that in a sample of 7–13-year-olds (child race and ethnicity not reported), girls were more likely to report expecting to be like their female primary giver (family focused) when they grew up in response to the degree that their female primary giver did more household labor tasks.

However, such developmental studies often did not include the individuals' perception of their family's past division of labor. The few studies that have investigated children's perceptions of their parents' gendered division of labor within the home have found that many report perceiving that their mothers did most of the household labor and yet finding the division fair (Beagan et al., 2008; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021; Midgette, 2020). For instance, in the only study to our knowledge to investigate young adult's perceptions of the past and expected future family life, found that in a sample of college-attending American heterosexual young adults (88.20% European American), 74.53% reported that their mothers did most or more of the housework, and 44.10% said their mothers did more or most of the childcare, and yet 70.81% reported finding their parents' division to be fair (Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021).

Moreover, Midgette and D'Andrea (2021) found that evaluation of past family division (housework and childcare combined) did not predict evaluation of the fairness of the predicted future family division. In light of these recent findings, there is a need to investigate the possible processes through which experiences and evaluations of the past may be associated with expectations and evaluations of the future gendered division of labor.

Own Involvement in Household Labor

In addition, prior research suggests that children's own involvement in housework may be a possible mechanism for explaining their future involvement. For instance, Penha-Lopes (2006) found that according to Black men's recollections, having to do housework as children served as a mechanism through which they were able to engage in household labor as adults ("socialization of competence") and may even help explain their more gender egalitarian attitudes. In another interview study, Gager (1998) found that men and women who performed household labor as children were much more likely to perform household tasks as adults. In other studies, mother's prior experience with other children (e.g., babysitting and taking care of children) was associated with their beliefs about how good they will be at various childcare tasks prenatally (Porter & Hsu, 2003; although this was replicated with mothers, the same was not found for fathers; Leerkes & Burney, 2007). However, these studies have been primarily retrospective, and as a result less is known about young adults' past involvement in household labor may predict their future intentions to engage in such labor. Thus, the present study investigates how young adults' past experiences within their childhood families (e.g., parental division and prior household labor involvement) and evaluations of their family's division (e.g., what *would have* been ideal), in addition to their gender ideology (beliefs about traditionalism vs. egalitarianism), contribute to their evaluations and expectations regarding their future household labor.

Household Labor Task Types

Finally, in our work, we independently examine how different *types* of tasks may differentially predict future expectations. Prior research has consistently shown that, on average, women tend to spend more hours doing household tasks and childcare tasks than their male partners (Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). The literature has also distinguished between the types of tasks: some tasks have been considered to be "feminine," some "masculine," and others have been considered to be gender-neutral. Feminine-typed tasks are often also considered the more time-consuming and often termed routine tasks (Coltrane, 2000), such as grocery shopping, meal

preparation, doing the laundry, dishes, and cleaning. Whereas masculine type tasks are considered to include working on cars and outdoor chores, and are often termed non-routine. Studies have found that women report spending more time on feminine tasks, while men report spending more time on masculine tasks (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Moreno-Colom, 2017). Kan and colleagues (2011) found that across four decades (60s–00s) and various countries (e.g., US, Israel, and Finland), on average women still take on the bulk of routine housework and childcare, while men tend to spend more of their time on non-routine domestic labor tasks (e.g., maintenance).

Study Rationale

Recent research suggests that heterosexual young women who are not yet cohabiting with a partner already anticipate that they will do more household labor in their future households (Erchull et al., 2010; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011), despite many finding it unfair (Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). Similarly, young adult women have been found to report expecting to do more household labor than they would consider ideal (Askari et al., 2010). Although children's parental division has been shown to contribute to their future expectations (e.g., Croft et al., 2014; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011), less is known about how their *evaluations* of what happened (e.g., is what happening the way it should be?) in their family, in addition to their *own past involvement* as children, may contribute to their expectations of what should happen in the future. In addition, the majority of the scholarship about future expectations has not differentiated between types of household labor, primarily having participants report on their expected and future involvement in stereotypically feminine and routine tasks (Askari et al., 2010; Erchull et al., 2010; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). Therefore, the current study contributes to the literature by investigating how the perception (who was seen as doing more) and evaluation (what would have been ideal) of past family divisions, their gender ideology, and their perceptions of time, and past involvement in household chores as a child, contributes to future expectations for involvement in both traditionally feminine and traditionally masculine household tasks.

Study 1

In Study 1, participants were asked to consider a list of common household tasks that spanned from *childcare* (e.g., diapering child; feeding child) to *housework* (e.g., repairing appliances; cooking dinner). Participants answered (a) what proportion of each chore was conducted by their mother when they were growing up (*retrospective inequality)*, (b) what proportion of each chore *they themselves* expected to conduct in the future (*prospective future inequality*), and (c) what proportion of each chore their mothers *should* have

completed (*idealized (in)equality*). We sought to investigate how retrospective, idealized, and prospective inequality related to one another, as well as whether participants' evaluations of their past experiences and their gender ideologies predicted their anticipated future division of household labor. We expected that (a) consistent with prior work, young adults would report a large degree of inequality in household labor (with mothers doing the majority of the work) and that (b) young adults' *future* expectations would be strongly shaped by their past experiences and evaluations of those experiences. Specifically, we expected that women who had experienced inequality and those who considered such a division ideal in their childhood homes would expect it in the future. Finally, we explored whether gender ideology would modulate the effect of experiences and evaluations of the past on future expectations.

Method

For each study, we report how we determined all data exclusions and manipulations, sample size, and measures in the study, consistent with reporting standards for quantitative research (Appelbaum et al., 2018). All data, analysis code, and research materials are available at: https://osf.io/nr4uw/. Data were analyzed using R Studio (2022). This study's design and its analysis were not pre-registered.

Participants

We recruited 369 US young adults (169 women; 187 men; 13 non-binary (note: non-binary participants were included in all analyses and reports, except for analyses involving gender as the small sample size precluded us from drawing meaningful inferences about this group) *Mean* age = 23.33; *Range* = 18–30 years) who grew up in two-parent different-sex households, and who themselves were not yet married nor had children, but expected to be partnered in the future. An additional 245 adults also completed the task but were excluded either due to not meeting our criteria for age ($n = 38$), expectation for a heterosexual relationship ($n = 149$), or 10 years minimum living with two parents during childhood ($n = 102$). All exclusion criteria were set a priori and prior to conducting data analyses (and no participants were further excluded after conducting data analyses). All participants completed a Qualtrics survey through Prolific, and participants were compensated $6 for completing the survey. Data was collected from December 2020 to August 2022.

A power analysis of our most complicated models suggested we needed 370 participants to detect a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.05$) with 90% power. Based on reviewer feedback, we expanded our recruitment from an initial 95 participants to meet this sample size standard.

Demographics

All participants completed basic demographics (e.g., gender, age, race/ethnicity, social status, and sexual orientation). Demographics also assessed current, past, and predicted future household composition (were parents married; did parents cohabitate; mothers' and fathers' profession). We used these questions as exclusion criteria.

Sixty-six percent of our participants identified as White; 14% as Asian or Pacific Islander; 8% as Black; 4% as an unspecified/other race; 1% as American Indian/Alaskan Tribe; and 7% as multi-racial. Fifteen percent identified as Latinx. Additional demographics are reported in our Supplemental Analyses (see: https://osf.io/nr4uw/).

Actual Past, Idealized Past, and Future Household Labor Division

Participants were asked about the household labor division in their families across 19 tasks (e.g., playing with children; keeping in touch with family and friends; doing the laundry). Tasks were drawn from past work (Askari et al., 2010; Coltrane, 2000) and also purposely included not only routine chores but also non-routine or stereotypically masculine tasks (e.g., doing maintenance). Tasks were presented in a randomized order. Participants were shown tasks in 3 blocks (actual past, idealized past, and expected future), whose order was also randomized across participants.

For the *actual past* block, participants were asked to indicate which percentage (out of 100) of the chores was completed by their mother. For the *idealized past* block, participants were asked to reflect on what percentage of chores should have been completed by their mother. Finally, for the *expected future* block, participants were asked to indicate which percentage of each chore (out of 100) they themselves expect to do in their own future households.

We subjected all scores from the *past block* to a factor analysis, which yielded four main categories of household task types: *childcare* (e.g., bathing kids; diapering kids); *routine housework* (e.g., cooking; cleaning; dishes); *maintenance* (e.g., yardwork; taking out trash); and organizing the family's *financial and social activities* (paying bills; organizing social activities) (see Supplemental Analyses for details on the factor analysis). Scores representing each category were thus averaged to create 4 separate task category scores (*Childcare; Routine Housework; Maintenance; Financial and Social Activities)*, and this was repeated for each block type (e.g., *Actual Past - Childcare; Idealized Past - Childcare; Predicted Future - Childcare*).

Gender Ideology

Finally, participants completed a gender ideology questionnaire (adapted from Gere & Helwig, 2012) assessing their beliefs in egalitarian (3 questions; e.g., "A husband should share equally in household chores if his wife works full time) as well as traditional (4 questions; e.g., "The husband should have primary responsibility for support of the family) gender role attitudes specific to the family context. Participants were asked to indicate their agreement to each question on a 7-point Likert scale ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). Answers were averaged (with egalitarian questions reverse coded) to create a *Traditional Gender Ideology Score*. Higher scores indicated holding more traditional gender attitudes about family life.

Additional measures on fairness judgements, household composition, and qualitative responses were collected for exploratory purposes (see open data materials for full list of questions asked and Supplemental Analyses for additional analyses with these questions).

Results

Characterizing Young Adults' Past, Ideal Past, and Expected Future Chore Division

We first characterized young adults' actual past, idealized past, and predicted future expectations across the four categories of tasks. Bar graphs are shown in Figure 1. As expected (Ha), young adults reported their moms as having performed the majority of three of the major household task types (childcare, routine housework, and organizing social/financial activities) but reported their moms as performing the minority of maintenance tasks (e.g., yardwork and fixing appliances). One-sample t-tests comparing responses tasks to 50% confirmed that childcare ($t(367) = 23.391$, $p < .001$), routine housework ($t(367) = 27.003$, $p < .001$), and social/financial activities ($t(368) = 11.557$, $p < .001$) were predominantly performed by mom, and maintenance tasks ($t(368) = -21.569$, $p < .001$) were predominantly performed by dad. There were no participant gender differences in young adults' reports of their past family division of childcare, routine housework, or maintenance tasks ($ps > 0.07$), but women reported their moms as performing more of the family's social/financial activities (M(women) $= 62.657$%, SD(women) $= 16.667$; M(men) $= 57.695$, SD(men) $= 17.039$)), $t(351.8) = 2.776$, $p = .006$.

As compared with their pasts, young adults reported more egalitarian splits for their *idealized pasts* (the percent of the housework their moms *should have* been doing), though most scores still did not approach completely egalitarian distributions (50%) and showed gendered expectations. Young adults rated their moms as ideally having done significantly *more* than 50% of the childcare, routine
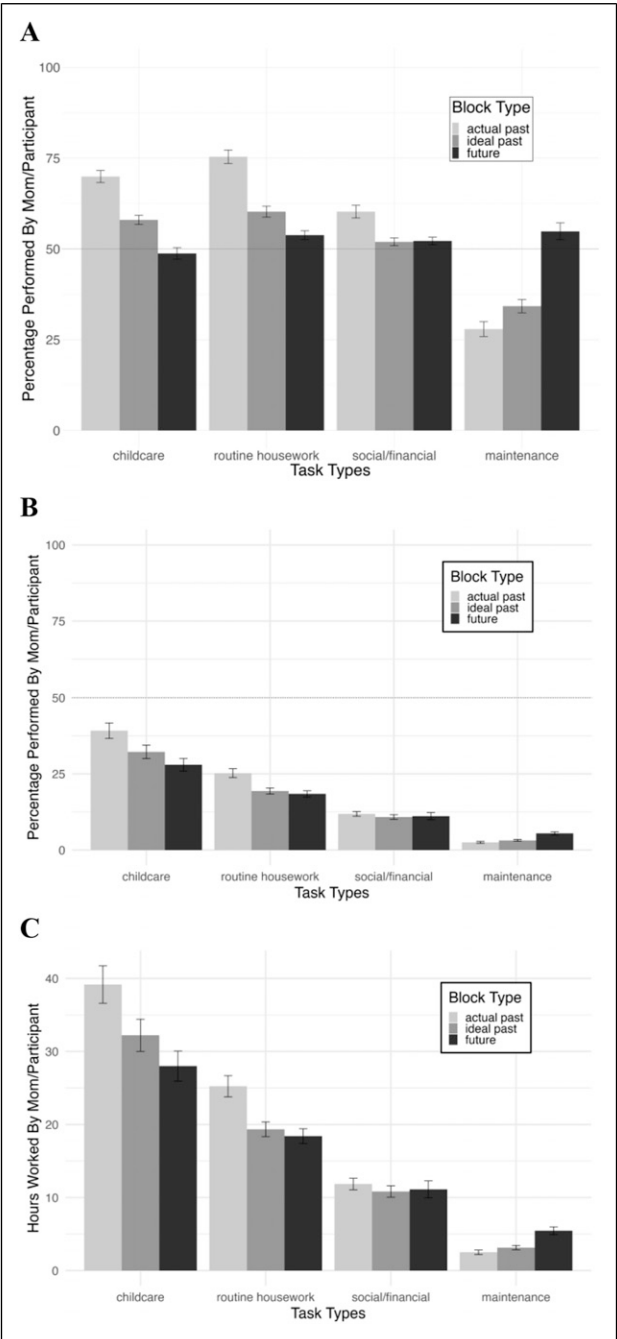
Figure 1. Past, idealized, and future expected household divisions in Study 1 (Panel A) and Study 2 (Panels B and C).

housework, and social/financial activities (one-sampled ts > 3.5, ps < 0.001) but significantly *less* than 50% of maintenance tasks, $t(368) = -17.129$, $p < .001$. All idealized scores (percent their moms *should have been* doing) in each task type were significantly more egalitarian (closer to 50%) than past scores (percent their moms *did* do), all ts > |6|, ps < .001.

Finally, young adults reported comparatively more egalitarian expected futures. Young adults' expected future scores were statistically different than their past scores and their idealized past scores across all task types (all ts > |8|, all ps < 0.001), with the exception of social/financial activities ($p = .0732$). Thus, overall, there were strong differences in what young adults expected out of their futures and what they watched their parents do.

What Predicts Young Adults' Expectations for Their Future Task Division?

We then looked at characteristics of what predicted young adults' expected future task division. In general, consistent with prior research, women expected to do more routine housework tasks ($M = 58.567$, $SD = 11.196$) than men ($M = 49.451$, $SD = 11.024$), $t(347.75) = 7.715$, $p < .001$. Similarly, women ($M = 51.459$, $SD = 17.724$) expected to do more childcare than men ($M = 46.967$, $SD = 12.247$), $t(290.59) = 2.742$, $p = .006$, and women expected to do a smaller proportion of maintenance tasks ($M = 36.935$, $SD = 15.419$) than men ($M = 70.918$, $SE = 15.690$), $t(351.51) = -20.594$, $p < .001$. There were no gender differences in the percentage of expected social/financial activity task involvement (and answers hovered around 50%, $p > .40$).

To investigate what predicted expectations for how future chores would be divided, we ran a series of linear regressions predicting each future chore type (routine housework, childcare, maintenance, and social/financial) from young adults' reported percentage performed by mom in the past (what % of this chore was done by mom; PPM), ideal percentage performed by mom (what % should have been done by mom; IPPM), gender, and their traditional gender ideology scores. Initial full models with all interactions revealed no strong interactions between PPM and our other predictors, and thus these were dropped from subsequent models. The results of our final models are shown in Table 1.

For routine housework and childcare, there were significant effects of IPPM, gender, and TGI (traditional gender ideology score), qualified by all interactions, including the 3-way TGI × IPPM × Gender interactions (shown in Figure 2). Contrary to expectations (Hb), however, there were no significant effects of PPM (see Table 1).

To further explore the 3-way interactions, we re-ran our models separately for those with traditional ideologies and those with egalitarian ideologies (defined via median split, *median* = 2.14). For those with egalitarian ideologies, there were no significant effects or interactions: instead those with

Table 1. Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors in Parentheses) for Models Predicting the Proportion of Tasks Participants Expect to do in Their Futures.

	Proportion of tasks participants expect to perform in the future			
	Routine housework	Childcare	Social/financial activities	Maintenance
Percentage performed by mom (PPM)	0.011 (0.031)	0.025 (0.052)	**0.085* (0.035)**	−0.065 (0.041)
Ideal percentage performed by mom (IPPM)	−0.176 (0.135)	**−0.528* (0.239)**	−0.135 (0.201)	**0.354* (0.148)**
Gender (1 = male)	**−32.494*** (12.219)**	**51.630*** (19.434)**	4.450 (15.332)	**47.634*** (8.604)**
Traditional gender ideology (TGI)	**−8.762* (3.910)**	**−14.625* (6.502)**	−4.024 (4.337)	**−5.597** (2.127)**
IPPM × gender	**0.611*** (0.198)**	**0.999*** (0.328)**	−0.072 (0.288)	**−0.806** (0.218)**
IPPM × TGI	**0.179*** (0.057)**	**0.299*** (0.101)**	0.113 (0.081)	0.085 (0.060)
Gender × TGI	**17.670*** (4.982)**	**22.770** (8.098)**	5.004 (5.600)	**6.180* (2.981)**
Gender × TGI × IPPM	**−0.373*** (0.073)**	**−0.461*** (0.126)**	−0.113 (0.103)	−0.004 (0.079)
Intercept	**63.793*** (8.443)**	**73.623*** (14.471)**	**50.738*** (10.622)**	**31.066** (5.656)**

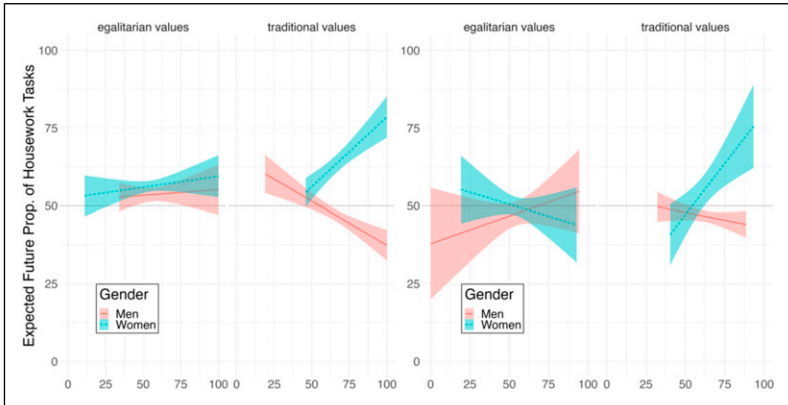Note. Significant effects ($p < .01$) in bold.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

Figure 2. Participants' future expectations of housework (Panel A) and childcare (B). Tasks as a function of gender, gender ideology, and ideal proportion performed by mom scores. Note. Gender ideology was defined based on a median split of traditional gender ideology score. Dashed line indicates expectations of a 50% split (egalitarian split).

egalitarian ideologies, regardless of gender, tended to believe they would perform approximately 50% or slightly above 50% of the housework and childcare, regardless of their gender or the proportion of housework and childcare their mom performed.

In contrast, there were continued gender effects and IPPM × gender interactions for those with traditional values, for both childcare (Gender: $B = -39.777$, $SE(B) = 11.069$, $p < .001$, Gender x IPPM, $B = 0.771$, $SE(B) = 0.174$, $p < .001$) and routine housework (Gender: $B = -31.979$, $SE(B) = 7.610$, $p < .001$, Gender × IPPM, $B = 0.731$, $SE(B) = 0.113$, $p < .001$). There was also a significant main effect of IPPM for housework, $B = -0.290$, $SE(B) = 0.068$, $p < .001$. To explore the two-way interaction, we re-ran the regression separately for men and women with traditional values: Men with traditional values showed a *negative* relationship between IPPM and their future expected housework proportion, $B = -0.291$, $SE(B) = 0.069$, $p < .001$, whereas women showed a *positive* one, $B = 0.442$, $SE(B) = 0.099$, $p < .001$.

Thus, while men and those with egalitarian ideologies, to some degree, showed a decoupling from their idealized past experiences, women with traditional gender ideologies generally showed strong relationships between their idealized experiences and their future expectations.

For maintenance tasks, there were significant main effects of gender, TGI, and IPPM scores, qualified by a Gender × IPPM interaction as well as a Gender × TGI interaction (shown in Figure 2). To further explore these interactions, we ran separate regressions for men and women. For men, there was a significant negative effect of IPPM, $B = -0.382$, $SE(B) = 0.184$, $p = .039$, and a significant negative effect of PPM, $B = -0.130$, $SE(B) = 0.063$, $p =$

.042: the more men saw their mothers do maintenance tasks, and the more they believed their mothers *ought* to have done maintenance tasks, the fewer maintenance tasks they themselves expected to do in the future. In contrast, for women, there was a significant *positive* effect of IPPM, $B = 0.327$, $SE(B) = 0.134$, $p = .016$, and a significant negative effect of traditional gender ideology, $B = -0.561$, $SE(B) = 1.912$, $p = .004$: the more women believed their moms should have performed maintenance tasks, and the more traditional their gender ideology, the more likely they were to expect that they themselves would perform those tasks.

Finally, for social/financial activities, we found a positive relationship between the proportion of tasks they reported their moms as doing and the proportion they expected to do themselves, though we did not find such a relationship for the other three tasks. Thus, in general, as predicted (Hb), women expected past experienced and idealized inequality to propagate into their futures, in particular with traditionally gendered chores such as maintenance, childcare, and housework. However, this was largely true for women who held *traditional* gender ideologies. In contrast, those with egalitarian ideologies showed flexibility in how they viewed their futures and how they perceived the past—those with egalitarian ideologies could say that a gendered division was ideal for their past family but didn't necessarily expect one for their future family.

Study 1 Discussion

In Study 1, we found relationships between *idealized* inequality and future expectations, but not *experienced* inequality. In Study 2, we created a more sensitive measure to capture inequality, that takes into account that some tasks may take longer (e.g., cooking dinner) than others (e.g., taking out the trash).

Study 2

In Study 2, we sought to replicate Study 1, as well as explore the potential role of *own* past involvement in predicting future expectations. In particular, we wanted to know whether one's *own* past involvement in household tasks changes young adults' expectations based on their prior experience. Participants thus completed the same measures from Study 1. Additionally, participants were asked (a) to provide a *time estimate* for each task (hours/week) reflecting the number of hours per week they believed each task should take and (b) about their *own* involvement in each task, by indicating whether they themselves participated in this task as children.

Using this new measure, we were able to calculate the actual time they reported their moms having spent on tasks (vs. their dads) in order to give us a more comprehensive understanding of the degree of inequality in the household. This is important because timing may differ even when

proportions do not (e.g., if one parent is responsible for 2 labor-intensive tasks and another for 2 5-min tasks). Using this more sensitive measure, we tested once again (Ha) whether young adults would report a large degree of inequality in household labor (with mothers doing the majority of the work). We also expected that (Hb) young adults' *future* expectations would be strongly shaped by their past experiences and evaluations and gender ideologies as in Study 1. Finally, we expected that (Hc) young adults' future expectations would be partly shaped by their own involvement in household tasks as children.

Participants

We recruited a convenience sample of 394 US adults (202 women; 178 men; 14 non-binary (included in any analyses *not* including gender, but due to small sample size, excluded from any analyses involving gender); *Mean* age = 23.944; *Range* = 18–30 years) who grew up in two-parent households, and who themselves were not yet married nor had children, but expected both as a possibility in their future.

An additional 142 adults also completed the task but were excluded either due to reporting that they explicitly did not expect a heterosexual relationship in the future ($n = 45$) and/or reported that their parents did not cohabitate for at least 10 years during their childhood ($n = 1–2$). We note that as in Study 1, some participants were excluded for *multiple* criteria (exclusion criteria were not mutually exclusive). All participants completed a Qualtrics survey through Prolific. Data were collected from September 2021 to August 2022.

A power analysis of our most complicated models suggested we needed 370 participants to detect a small effect size ($f^2 = 0.05$) with 90% power. We expanded our recruitment from an initial 115 participants to meet this sample size standard.

Sixty-five percent of our participants identified as White; 16% as Asian or Pacific Islander; 8% as Black; 4% as an unspecified/other race; and 7% as multi-racial. Thirteen percent identified as Latinx. Additional demographics are reported in our Supplemental Analyses.

Results

Our measures allowed us to estimate the number of hours that participants believed: (1) their moms actually worked, (2) their moms should have worked, and (3) that they themselves expect to work in the future. We thus used these time estimates to calculate the number of expected hours for each task type: We did so by using the time estimate for each task and multiplying it by the percentage that participants said their mom did (or they themselves expect to do). For example, a participant who estimated laundry taking 2 hours per week

and expected to do 50% of it would be coded as someone who expects to spend 1 hour on laundry each week. We summed total hours across each of the four task categories (routine housework, childcare, social/financial activities, and maintenance) to create total hours mom worked (actual past), mom should have worked (idealized past), and participants expected to work (future).

Characterizing Young Adults' past, Ideal past, and Expected Future Chore Division

We first characterized young adults' actual past, idealized past, and predicted future expectations across the four categories of chores. Bar graphs are shown in Figure 1. As in Study 1 and as expected (Ha), young adults rated their moms as having performed the majority of three of the major household task types (childcare, routine housework, and organizing social/financial activities) but rated their moms as performing the minority of maintenance tasks (e.g., yardwork and fixing appliances). One-sample t-tests comparing responses tasks to 50% confirmed that childcare ($t(391) = 24.917$, $p < .001$), routine housework ($t(393) = 26.127$, $p < .001$), and social/financial activities ($t(392) = 10.746$, $p < .001$) were predominantly performed by mom, and maintenance tasks ($t(393) = -23.7857$, $p < .001$) were predominantly performed by dad. There were small gender differences in young adults' reports of all four task types: namely, women reported their moms as doing more of each type of task (5 h more routine housework, $t(370.56) = 2.59$, $p = .01$; 6 h more childcare; $t(368.41) = 3.503$, $p < .001$; 5 h more of planning social/financial activities, $t(375.67) = 3.168$, $p = .002$; and 5 h more maintenance tasks, $t(377.81) = 2.946$, $p = .003$).

As compared with their pasts, young adults reported more egalitarian splits for their *idealized pasts* (the percent of the housework their moms *should have* been doing), though most scores still did not approach completely egalitarian distributions (50%). Young adults rated their moms as ideally having done significantly more than 50% of the childcare, routine housework, and organizing the family's social and financial activities (one-sampled ts > 3, ps < .001), but significantly less than 50% of the maintenance tasks (one-sample $t(393) = -21.867$, $p < .001$). However, all idealized scores (percent their moms *should have been* doing) in each task type were significantly more egalitarian than past scores (percent their moms *did* do), all ts > |5|, ps < .001.

Finally, young adults reported comparatively egalitarian expected futures. Young adults reported that they themselves would perform the majority of routine housework chores (one-sample $t(393) = 8.272$, $p < .001$) and organizing the family's social/financial activities (one-sample $t(393) = 3.208$, $p = .001$), though reported future splits that were relatively egalitarian for childcare and maintenance tasks (ps > 0.25). Young adults' expected future scores were statistically different than their past scores and their idealized past scores across all task types (all ts > |3|, all ps < 0.002), with the exception of

social/financial activities, ($p = .80$). Overall, these results replicate those found in Study 1 almost exactly: young adults reported gendered distribution of labor in their past, reported it as being less than ideal, and expected their futures to be more egalitarian than either their pasts or their idealized pasts.

We also looked at these analyses using estimated hours per week by using young adults' time estimates of each task multiplied by the percentage they said they expect to perform (e.g., if someone said laundry takes 2 hours per week and that they expect to do 50% of it, they would expect to spend 1 hour on laundry each week). Overall, young adults estimated their moms as having worked over 35 h/week more than their dads ($M_{mom} = 787.727370$, $SE_{mom} = 2.2984.324$; $M_{dad} = 43.101532$, $SED_{dad} = 1.5953.314$) paired $t(382111) = 15.0516.775$, $p < .001$ (*see* Supplemental Figure 1 for details on time estimates).

What Predicts Young Adults' Expectations for Their Future Chore Division?

We next sought to characterize what predicts young adults' *expected* division of future chores. Here, we used expected future *hours* as our main outcome measure, since we reasoned that this measure provides us with a more sensitive measure of how participants reasoned about their futures, since some tasks are estimated to take a shorter amount of time than others (e.g., doing 50% of a task that takes 1 hour is a smaller time commitment than doing 50% of a task that takes 8 h).

As in Study 1, we looked at characteristics of what predicted young adults' expected future chore division. In general, women expected to do approximately 11 extra hours/week of childcare (M(women) = 33.146, SE(women) = 1.661; M(men) = 22.381, SE(men) = 1.399; $t(369.45) = 4.956$, $p < .001$) and about 5 h more of routine housework (M(women) = 20.924, SE(women) = 0.851; M(men) = 15.542, SE(men) = 0.619; $t(355.74) = 5.116$, $p < .001$), but about 4.5 fewer hours/week of maintenance tasks (M(women) = 3.358, SE(women) = 0.215; M(men) = 8.000, SE(men) = 0.504; $t(238.8) = 8.474$, $p < .001$). There were no gender differences in the hours of expected involvement in social/financial activity tasks ($p = .27$).

To investigate what *predicted* expectations for how future chores would be divided, we followed analyses from Study 1 and ran a series of linear regressions predicting the hours participants expected to do for each future chore type (routine housework, childcare, maintenance, and social/financial) from hours performed by mom (HPM), ideal hours performed by mom (IHPM), gender, and their traditional gender ideology (TGI) scores. Unlike in Study 1, using a more sensitive measure of inequality (using hours, rather than percentages), as expected (Hb), we saw strong interactions with HPM (hours performed by mom) and our other predictors. Therefore, interactions with these variables were included in the model. We also added participants' *own*

involvement in these tasks as a predictor—for each task type (routine housework, childcare, and social/financial activities), we calculated the proportion of tasks that participants said they were involved in as children. The results of the final models are shown in Table 2.

As expected (Hb), ideal hours worked by mom in the past positively predicted how many hours participants themselves predicted for all task types suggesting that the more participants believed their moms *should* have done, the more they themselves believed they would do in the future. As expected (Hc), own past child involvement in routine housework and childcare (but not social/financial activities or maintenance tasks) predicted the number of hours participants expected to do in the future for each of those chores. There were no gender differences in reports of own involvement in chores for routine housework, childcare, or social/financial activities tasks (all $ps > .20$). However, men reported being involved in a greater proportion of maintenance tasks as children than women ($M_{men} = 0.597$, $SD_{men} = 0.33$, $M_{women} = 0.347$, $SD_{women} = 0.49$), $t(253.65) = -5.927$, $p < .001$.

For routine housework, there was a significant HPM × TGI interaction, qualified by a significant Gender x HPM × TGI interaction. To further investigate this interaction, we ran regressions separately for each gender. For men, there was a (marginal) continued TGI × HPM interaction, $B = -0.084$, $SE(B) = 0.042$, $p = .050$, as well as main effects of HPM ($B = 0.370$, $SE(B) = 0.120$, $p = .002$) and IHPM ($B = 0.397$, $SE(B) = 0.090$, $p < .001$). Since the effect was marginal and not expected, we do not explore the interaction here. For women, there was a strong TGI × HPM interaction, $B = 0.107$, $SE(B) = 0.034$, $p = .002$, as well main effects of TGI, $B = -3.447$, $SE(B) = 1.155$, $p = .003$, and IPPM, $B = 0.635$, $SE(B) = 0.073$, $p < .001$. A Johnson–Neyman interval on the interaction showed that except for women with extremely egalitarian ideologies (values below 0.66), there was a strong relationship between their past experiences and future expectations.

For social/financial activities, there was an HPM × Gender interaction, qualified by a significant Gender x HPM × TGI interaction. To explore the three-way interaction, we ran regressions separately by gender. For women, there was no HPM × TGI interaction. However, for men, there was a significant TGI × HPM interaction, $B = -0.275$, $SE(B) = 0.099$, $p = .006$. A Johnson–Neyman interval on the interaction showed that for women with egalitarian gender ideologies (values below 2.27), there was a significant negative relationship between the hours worked by mom and their future expectations: In other words, women who held egalitarian ideologies expected different households than they themselves experienced.

Table 2. Regression Coefficients (Standard Errors in Parentheses) for Models Predicting the Hours of Each Task Participants Expect to do in Their Futures.

	Number of hours participants expect to perform in the future			
	Routine housework	Childcare	Social/financial activities	Maintenance
Ideal hours performed by mom (IHPM)	**0.529** (0.057)**	**0.568** (0.063)**	**1.412** (0.068)**	**0.716** (0.090)**
Hours performed by mom (HPM)	**0.099** (0.080)**	−0.027 (0.107)	−0.063 (0.162)	0.293 (0.325)
Gender (1 = male)	−2.282 (3.665)	6.113 (6.792)	6.715 (3.700)	0.778 (1.562)
Traditional gender ideology (TGI)	**−3.449** (1.211)**	−2.420 (2.343)	1.581 (1.171)	0.395 (0.540)
Own involvement as a child score	**1.870* (0.731)**	**9.540** (3.338)**	0.215 (1.624)	0.917 (0.495)
HPM × gender	0.216 (0.133)	−0.077 (0.154)	**−0.812** (0.272)**	0.427 (0.417)
HPM × TGI	**0.110** (0.036)**	0.084 (0.043)	−0.135 (0.079)	−0.068 (0.150)
Gender × TGI	3.033 (1.563)	−2.694 (2.816)	−2.947 (1.553)	1.218 (0.662)
HPM × gender × TGI	**−0.209*** (0.053)**	0.019 (0.060)	**0.409** (0.117)**	−0.032 (0.181)
Intercept	**7.113** (2.560)**	8.780 (5.141)	−4.142 (2.452)	−0.599 (1.167)

Note. Significant effects ($p < .01$) in bold.
$*p < .05$; $**p < .01$; $***p < .001$.

Discussion

The current study investigated the role of experiences and evaluations of past family division as predictors of how young adults expecting heterosexual relationships plan to divide their future family life responsibilities. Across two studies using two separate measures of household inequality (proportion of time in Study 1; hours spent in Study 2), young adults' past experiences with inequality and what was considered ideal for the past predicted their future expectations of it. Thus, believing one's mother should have done more in the past positively predicted one's own future involvement. This finding suggests that not only young adults who are exposed to family inequality come to expect it themselves (Croft et al., 2014; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011; Platt & Polavieja, 2016), but also that idealized past inequality predicts future expectations. Moreover, we find important modulators of this effect: specifically, young adults' genders and gender ideologies predicted the extent to which they expected to break the generational cycle. Men and women who held egalitarian beliefs expected more egalitarian divisions than those they experienced or even that they considered ideal for their past families. These findings are encouraging in the respect that cultural messaging around family roles (which presumably shapes ideology) may help prepare young adults to de-couple their experiences from their future expectations. In addition, we found that prior experience with routine housework and childcare tasks as children predicted young adults' expectations for their involvement in the future. Thus, not only exposure to and evaluations of past parental division but own experiences in tasks as children may serve as an important source of intervention for contributing to more equitable arrangements in future family life.

Importance of the Past in Predicting Expectations for the Future

As expected, in both studies young adults reported their mothers doing on average the majority of routine household tasks, social/financial activities, and childcare, tasks that in the literature have often been found to be feminine typed and routine and most time-consuming (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Coltrane, 2000; Moreno-Colom, 2017). Moreover, also consistent with past literature (Coltrane, 2000; Kan et al., 2011), fathers were reported as doing the majority of maintenance tasks, which are also less time-consuming. This adds further support to the notion that children are aware of their parents' gendered division of household labor (Midgette, 2020; Sabattini & Leaper, 2004).

Prior research has found a link between past exposure to a gendered division of labor and future involvement in household tasks (Croft et al., 2014; Fulcher & Coyle, 2011; Platt & Polavieja, 2016). As found in prior studies, women expected in general to do more of the routine housework and childcare

(Askari et al., 2010; Erchull et al., 2010), and consistent with prior findings with older heterosexual couples, less maintenance tasks (Kan et al., 2011). In the present study, we found that past exposure to parental division of labor played a significant role in future expectations, particularly if inequality is measured through hours rather than percentages, but its influence differed by gender ideology, gender, and task type. Our findings may shed insights into why prior research has been inconsistent when it comes to finding the influence of gender ideology on future expectations (Askari et al., 2010; Erchull et al., 2010; Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021). It may be that ideology plays a different role depending on not only gender but also young adults' prior family chore distribution. Future research may further investigate how making sense of the past influences future expectations to engage in family responsibilities.

We believe our work also points to the importance of studying task specialization in future studies on home inequality. The majority of prior work on future household expectations has looked at home inequality primarily according to routine type tasks and childcare (Askari et al., 2010; Erchull et al., 2010) without considering other *types* of tasks that show inequalities. The results of our factor analysis suggest that across two studies, young adults very consistently rated these tasks differently in terms of amounts of inequality. We also found the most significant effects on tasks that happen to also show strong gender specialization. Studies have found that women report spending more time on feminine tasks, while men report spending more time on masculine tasks (Chesley & Flood, 2017; Moreno-Colom, 2017). Thus, the expectations young adults have for each of these task types are understandably different, and in fact, we find that the effect of both gender ideology and gender differently affects future expectations depending on task type.

Idealizing the Past

Surprisingly, in both studies, although young adults reported that the past would ideally be more egalitarian than what it was, they still thought it would be ideal that mothers did more of the childcare, organizing financial and social activities, and routine tasks, and less of the maintenance tasks. Although this is the first investigation into what young adults think would have been an ideal distribution for their past family, these findings are consistent with prior research that found that children think their mothers should take on more of their family's responsibilities (Sinno, 2007; Sinno & Killen, 2009). This particular finding is important to consider in light of how structural inequalities are generationally transmitted—even when young adults recognized that their moms performed more labor than they *should have (descriptive),* they still considered moms doing more as ideal for how things should have been, and their beliefs of what would have been ideal in the past still influenced their future expectations, suggesting that young adults may

hesitate to postulate that the past and the future should be radically different than what they experienced. Indeed, as has been found in prior work (Midgette & D'Andrea, 2021), even participants with strong egalitarian beliefs generally rate the past (descriptive norm) as fair (prescriptive norm). It may also be that young adults may assume there is a more egalitarian division than exists because both parents are responsible for the same number of tasks (e.g., dad does yardwork and trash; mom does cooking and childcare), without adjusting for the amount of time each task takes. Future work may explore the possibility that individual differences in time perception may help modulate some of the effects of how young adults perceive past and anticipate future home inequalities.

Own Past Involvement

Interestingly, we found a strong effect of one's *own* involvement in childcare and routine housework tasks on future expectations. This finding provides prospective evidence to prior findings of retrospective interview reports of the role of prior experience with childcare and household labor in engagement in these tasks as adults (Gager, 1998; Penha-Lopes, 2006). Thus, one positive implication of this finding is that parents who wish to create more equitable futures for their children may wish to consider how much to include their children in household labor. Future studies may further investigate this possibility by looking at the effect of parents' beliefs on involving children in household tasks and what practices may support parents' encouragement of children's engagement in these tasks as children.

Overall, we propose that how the family labor is divided in the past has important implications for young adults' future family life aspirations, and consequently other aspects of their lives such as their career aspirations, work–life balance, and overall well-being. Our findings suggest the importance of parental division on young adults' expectations to perpetuate the gendering of this division in their future. Educational interventions should consider the opportunity to both encourage more child and adolescent involvement in household tasks and discuss past family division as a context for young adults' future decision making and career aspirations.

Author Contributions

Allegra Midgette and Nadia Chernyak contributed to the initial study conception and design. Material preparation: Allegra Midgette. Data collection: Nadia Chernyak. Analysis: Nadia Chernyak. Writing: Allegra Midgette and Nadia Chernyak. All authors commented on and edited previous versions of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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Ethical Statement

Ethical Approval

This study involved research with adult human participants. This study received approval by the Institutional Review Board at the second author's university (No.# 2018-4715).

Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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Data Availability Statement

All data, analysis code, and research materials are available at: https://osf.io/nr4uw/?view_only=7e0b073e2cbb440e8efceb7cfef0c927

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

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