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DOI:10.1111/j.1548-1417.2009.01029.x

Children and Chores: A Mixed-Methods Study of Children's Household Work in Los Angeles Families

Wendy Klein, California State University, Long Beach

Anthony P. Graesch, University of California, Los Angeles

Carolina Izquierdo, University of California, Los Angeles

Abstract

This ethnographic study investigates children's contributions to household work through the analysis of interview data and scan sampling data collected among 30 middle-class dual-earner families in Los Angeles, California. We discuss convergences and divergences between data collected with two independent methodologies: scan sampling and interviewing. Scan sampling data provide an overview of the frequency of children's participation in household work as well as the types of tasks they engaged in during data collection. Children's interview responses reflect their perceptions of their responsibilities, how

they view family expectations regarding their participation in household work, and whether allowance is an effective motivator. Comparative analysis reveals that most children in our study spend surprisingly little time helping around the house and engage in fewer tasks than what they report in interviews. Within the context of children's minimal participation in household work, we find that allowance is not an effective motivator, but that children in families with access to paid domestic help tend to be less helpful than children in families without. We suggest that while most children are aware that their working parents need help, in some families, inconsistent and

unclear expectations from parents negatively affect children's participation in household work.

Keywords: children, household work, ethnographic mixed methods, scan sampling, working families, United States

Introduction

The substantial increase in dual-earner families in the United States in recent decades, along with changes in child-rearing approaches, has complicated the issue of household work distribution, and no clear model of children's contributions has emerged. This ethnographic study examines children's participation in household work among 30 dual-earner middle-class families in Los Angeles. Our investigation covers new ground on the topic of children's involvement in household work by merging the analysis of quantitative and qualitative datasets, each of which derives from uniquely ethnographic data-collection methods. Specifically, we use a comparative analytical framework to present the results of: (1) over 11,000 person-centered observations of parents' and children's activities; and (2) 52 interviews with children about household chores. This approach allows for the examination of children's accounts of their lives along with the tabulation of actual occurrences of children engaging in household chores.

Children's household work is a crucial site of socialization into family roles, responsibilities, and obligations, yet very little recent ethnographic research focuses on this topic as an area of inquiry in contemporary American family life. Historical examination of children's household work in the United States document the changes that were brought on by industrialization and the institutionalization of schooling (Nasaw 1985; West and Petrick 1992; Zelizer 1994). Zelizer discusses the shift in parental attitudes in the United States from initially viewing children as an economic asset in the 19th century, when they were engaged in the labor force, to their emotional value as "priceless" in the 20th century. As laws regulating children's work participation curtailed their economic contributions, people had fewer children, and children began to spend an increasing amount of time on schoolwork and extracurricular activities. Today, most children are expected to help with household tasks, yet the level and consistency of their participation appears to vary greatly across families (Coltrane 2000).

This study analyzes two subsets of data – scan sampling and interview data – collected for a larger ethnographic project on working families carried out by the Center on Everyday Lives of Families (CELFL) at the University of California, Los Angeles. Scan sampling data reveal the frequency of children's par-

ticipation in household work as well as the types of tasks they engaged in during CELFL visits to families' homes. Children's responses to questions in interviews provide information about the tasks for which they view themselves as responsible, their attitudes toward participation in household work, and whether they receive an allowance. Our analyses evaluate the contribution of each data collection method and consider the points at which the findings intersect and diverge.

Background

Ethnographic research as early as Mead's (1928) study of Samoan culture demonstrates that children's responsibilities and household task allocation reflect the social organization of family groups and the strong relation between kinship and obligation. Indeed, cross-cultural studies have found that when children are relied on for performing tasks that contribute to their families' survival, they tend to show less antisocial behavior and act more responsibly than children in cultures who do not take on such work (Whiting and Whiting 1975; Munroe et al. 1984). Ethnographic studies of household activities indicate that tasks such as sibling care, running errands, fishing, weaving, and cultivating crops, are undertaken at an early age in certain parts of the world and serve to socialize family roles and obligations (Mead 1928; Rogoff et al. 1975; Whiting and Whiting 1975; Ochs 1986, 1988; Loucky 1988; Whiting and Edwards 1988). More recent anthropological inquiries into children's household work have further enriched our understanding of child socialization and children's roles in families (Schieffelin 1990; Solberg 1990; Nieuwenhuys 1994; Weisner et al. 1994; Klein et al. 2008; Ochs and Izquierdo 2009). Solberg (1990), for example, found that children in Sweden who had parents employed outside the home and were held responsible for certain domestic tasks reported a higher degree of autonomy than those who were not assigned such duties. Further, these children gained a sense of competence by managing basic chores and, in turn, this resulted in children's sustained contribution to household work. Similarly, Weisner (2001) stresses the significance of children contributing to the family for their own successful development, pointing out the importance of understanding what children do as well as their willingness or resistance to participate in household work.

Much of the research addressing children's contribution to household work in the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom, has been conducted by sociologists and psychologists, many of whom use questionnaires, interviews, and time diaries as their data collection instruments (Coltrane 2000). According to some of these studies, children in

single-parent and dual-earner families are often required to take on domestic chores on a regular basis (Benin and Edwards 1990; Blair 1992a; Bowes and Goodnow 1996). Questionnaire data indicate that in addition to receiving assistance, parents believe that the assignment of chores helps to socialize their children into becoming responsible, independent, and skilled individuals (White and Brinkerhoff 1987; Goodnow 1988; Blair 1992a; Grusec et al. 1996). Other studies report that as children get older, the tasks they assume become more gender-specific, with girls performing primarily inside chores (e.g., cooking and cleaning) and boys engaging mostly in yard work (Benin and Edwards 1990; Antill et al. 1996). These studies, however, rely primarily on information provided by parents and do not examine children's perspectives or actual participation in domestic activities. We argue that the results indicate more about parents' perceptions than about the nature and quality of children's involvement in household work. In this study we demonstrate the utility of an ethnographic approach to investigating children's daily routines, task allocation in families, and children's attitudes toward participation in household work.

Sample and Methods

Families that participated in the CELF study were recruited from the greater Los Angeles area as part of an interdisciplinary investigation into the everyday lives of middle-class, dual-earner families with children.¹ To be eligible to participate in this study, parents (*n* = 60) were required to each work outside the home for at least 30 hours per week, be homeowners with a monthly mortgage, and have at least two children living at home, including one target child between 8 and 10 years of age (Table 1). Families were recruited through flyers in schools and recreational facilities as well as with advertisements in community newspapers, and all families were paid in exchange for their participation. Members of participating families self-identified with a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds, including European, Asian and South Asian, African American, and Latino.² Parent's occupations were also varied and included, among others, lawyer, restaurant manager, architect, teacher, and firefighter.

Ethnographic data were collected in 2002 to 2004 using a range of instruments, including semistructured interviews, questionnaires, video-recording of daily activities, sampling of stress hormones, mapping and photographing families' homes and belongings, and scan sampling of family members' activities and use of space. Ochs et al. (2006:393) provide a detailed overview of the organization of data collection procedures. At the core of the project was the video recording of the routine activities that oc-

Table 1. Number of Children in the Study (by Age Group and Gender)

Age	Number of children		
	Male	Female	Total
5-7	7	6	13
8-10	15	17	32
11-14	8	4	12
15-17	0	3	3
Total	30	30	60

cupied parents and children across a typical week, including the weekend. This entailed two video-ethnographers spending approximately 20-25 hours with each family. During this time, a third ethnographer - working independently of the cameras and videographers - used a modified scan sampling method for systematically recording behavior, uses of space, and uses of objects at timed intervals.³ This entailed the ethnographer walking through the house every 10 minutes and using a hand-held computer to document the location and primary and secondary activities of each person occupying interior and exterior home spaces (Ochs et al. 2006; Broege et al. 2007; Graesch 2009). Unlike the corpus of video data, the resulting scan sampling datasets reflect the activities and locations of *each* family member in the home at regular intervals. This provides a high-resolution window onto the frequency and range of household chores enacted by children and parents alike.

Our three-person ethnographic teams captured families' routines on two weekday mornings, before family members left the home for work and school, and during the afternoons and evenings, when parents and children returned home and up to the point that children went to bed. CELF researchers also visited families' homes on a Saturday morning and almost all day Sunday. The CELF "Children's Interview," however, was conducted on a different day, after the 4-day videotaping and scan sampling component of the study was completed. The interview was designed by a group of CELF researchers who focus on children's well-being in the family. The questions cover several domains of children's lives: family, school, friendships, participation in sports, extended family relationships, perspectives on their parents' work, and details about how their household operates. The latter category includes questions about whether the children have chores, how they feel about their involvement in household work activities, and whether they received an allowance. We recognize that embedded in the question of whether the children had household chores is the expectation that

they did or should engage in helping around the house, and this assumption may have influenced their responses to some degree. Nevertheless, interviews allowed us to capture children's understandings, in their own words, of their responsibilities around the house and their degree of participation in household work.

Observations of Children's Contributions to Household Work

Our scan sampling dataset reflects a systematically documented account of parent's and children's activities over the course of 4 days in CELF project families' homes. As such, we gain a unique window onto children's contributions to the work required for maintaining and meeting the daily needs of dual-earner households. Specifically, our scan sampling data reflect a wide range of children's activities that can be classified as household work, including feeding pets, taking out the trash, making beds, setting the table, folding laundry, among others. For the purpose of this analysis, we used children's interview responses (discussed below) to define six categories of household work-related activities by which scan sampling observations could be grouped: (1) cleaning bedroom, (2) meal preparation, (3) cleaning house, (4) sibling care, (5) pet care, and (6) outside chore. "Cleaning bedroom" comprised tasks performed to keep children's bedrooms orderly, including making the bed, folding and storing clothes, organizing desk and/or dresser surfaces, and keeping the floor free of clutter. "Meal preparation" included work involved in cooking, preparing, and plating food for individual or family consumption as well as setting the table for a meal. Oftentimes, these tasks were performed in collaboration with a parent, although some observations of food preparation entailed children preparing their own meals. Activities classified as "cleaning house" included all cleaning tasks (e.g., washing dishes, washing windows, sweeping, and vacuuming) in interior house spaces other than children's bedrooms, and "outside chore" activities included all chores (e.g., garbage-related tasks, washing the car, and yard work) performed in exterior home spaces. "Pet care" comprised tasks related to family pets, such as feeding and watering animals, cleaning cat boxes, and picking up after their dogs in yard spaces. "Sibling care" included changing diapers, combing hair, dressing, and supervising younger siblings.

Despite the wide range of children's household chores represented in our dataset, we observed children attending to these tasks in no more than a handful of instances. Over the course of 4 days with 30 families, scan sampling methods were used to document 6,213 observations of children's activities, including leisure activities, schoolwork at home, eat-

ing, and household chores, among others. However, fewer than 3 percent ($n = 175$) of these observations reflect children engaged in activities classified as household work. In contrast, over 27 percent of all observations of mothers' activities (including non-chore activities) and nearly 15 percent of all observations of fathers' activities entailed some type of household work.

These parent-child differences in household work have been observed elsewhere in the United States. In a 30-year old ethnographic study of children in six unique cultural contexts, Whiting and Whiting (1975) found that middle-class children in Orchard Town (their U.S. sample) participated in housework in only 2 percent of their observations. The Orchard Town sample consisted of nine families with a total of 24 children, all of whom engaged in a range of household activities similar to that documented with CELF research. Importantly, Whiting and Whiting (1975) also calculated children's contributions to household work in relation to *all* activities that transpired during in-home visits.

CELF scan sampling data addressing children's work can be analyzed at even finer scales. Table 2 details the number and proportion of household chores observed and recorded for children by gender and age. Note that percentage data reflect the number of observations of particular household chores divided by all observations of children for particular gender and age categories. For example, 5-7-year-old girls were observed cleaning their bedrooms in only 1.1 percent of all observations recorded for girls of this age group (see Table 2). When age and gender groups are collapsed, we see that "meal preparation" ($n = 58$), "clean bedroom" ($n = 46$), and "clean house" ($n = 44$) tasks were the most frequently recorded household chores. In contrast, activities classified as "outside chore," "pet care," and "sibling care" tasks were rarely observed and documented in fewer than half of the CELF project families.

When organized by gender categories, scan sampling data indicate that girls in CELF project families made greater contributions to household work than boys (3.4 percent versus 2.3 percent; see Table 3). Our sample, however, is too small to assign statistical significance to this difference. Nevertheless, we observed this pattern for all age groups for which both genders are represented in the dataset. It is interesting to note that despite the overall difference in girls' and boys' contributions to household work, we did not observe the strongly gendered "inside-outside" distinction in chore responsibilities reported by other researchers (e.g., Antill et al. 1996).

Children's age seemingly also affected their participation in household work. Data in Table 4 show that older children - girls *and* boys - engaged in

Table 2. Number and Proportion of Scan Sampling Observations in Which Children Engaged in Household Work Activities During CELF Visits to the Family Home on Two Weekdays and a Weekend

Age/gender	Household work activities											
	Clean bedroom		Meal preparation		Clean house		Sibling care		Pet care		Outside chore	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
5-7												
Female (<i>n</i> = 6)	7	1.1	9	1.4	5	.8	-	-	1	.2	-	-
Male (<i>n</i> = 7)	1	-	6	.8	2	.3	-	-	-	-	1	.1
8-10												
Female (<i>n</i> = 17)	12	.7	17	1.0	6	.3	4	.2	4	.2	4	.2
Male (<i>n</i> = 15)	11	.7	9	.6	6	.4	1	.1	-	-	1	.1
11-14												
Female (<i>n</i> = 4)	3	.9	7	2.0	4	1.2	-	-	2	.6	3	.9
Male (<i>n</i> = 8)	5	.6	8	.9	16	1.8	1	.1	-	-	5	.6
15-17												
Female (<i>n</i> = 3)	7	2.5	2	.7	5	1.8	-	-	-	-	-	-

^aPercentages reflect the number of observations of household chore categories divided by all observations of children for particular gender and age categories. For example, 8-10-year-old boys participated in meal preparation activities in only .6 percent of *all* observations recorded for boys of this age group.

household work activities more frequently than younger children. Specifically, children in the 11-14 and 15-17 age groups were observed performing bedroom and house cleaning tasks more frequently than their younger counterparts. In general, this is not surprising; older children are often expected to make greater contributions to household work than their younger siblings (Goodnow 1988; Whiting and Edwards 1988). That these age-related differences are not also evident among the 5-7 and the 8-10 year olds *is* perhaps surprising, although this may be attributable to our small sample.

Children's contributions to household work can also be considered in relation to the sum of activities that can be classified as household work, rather than the much wider range of activities that transpire in the home (e.g., leisure, schoolwork). That is, when we focus analysis only on the subset of observations where parents and children were engaged in household

chores, we find that children account for an average of 13 percent of all household work. The average contributions of mothers (60 percent) and fathers (27 percent), in contrast, were notably higher. These findings resonate with the results of other research – all of which is based on questionnaire methods and large samples – but that calculate children's assistance with household work only as a proportion of combined parents' and children's contributions. For example, in a national study of 600 families, U.S. parents reported children performing only 12 percent of all housework (Blair 1992a, 1992b). Similarly, in an Australian study, Gill (1998) found that children's contributions accounted for only 20 percent of total housework. Our 30-family sample is considerably smaller than those of the aforementioned studies, but the notable disparity between parents' and children's engagement with basic household chores is nonetheless profound.

Table 3. Number and Proportion of Children's Household Work Activities by Gender

Gender	Household work activities													
	Clean bedroom		Meal preparation		Clean house		Sibling care		Pet care		Outside chore		Total	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
Female (<i>n</i> = 30)	29	1.0	35	1.2	20	.7	4	.1	7	.2	7	.2	102	3.4
Male (<i>n</i> = 30)	17	.5	23	.7	24	.7	2	.1	0	.0	7	.2	73	2.3

^aPercentages reflect number of observations of particular household chores divided by number of all activities recorded for either female or male children. For example, only 1.0 percent of all activities recorded for female children are observations of girls cleaning their bedroom.

Table 4. Number and Proportion of Children’s Household Work Activities by Age

Age	Household work activities													
	Clean bedroom		Meal preparation		Clean house		Sibling care		Pet care		Outside chore		Total	
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%
5–7 (<i>n</i> = 13)	8	.6	15	1.1	7	.5	–	–	1	.1	1	.1	32	2.3
8–10 (<i>n</i> = 32)	23	.7	26	.8	12	.4	5	.2	4	.1	5	.2	75	2.3
11–14 (<i>n</i> = 12)	8	.7	15	1.2	20	1.6	1	.1	2	.2	8	.7	54	4.4
15–17 (<i>n</i> = 3)	7	2.5	2	.7	5	1.8	–	–	–	–	–	–	14	4.9

^aPercentages reflect number of observations of particular household chores divided by number of all activities recorded for children of particular age groups. For example, only .6 percent of all activities recorded for children in the 5–7 year age group are observations of children cleaning their bedroom.

It is important to note, however, that the 13 percent figure masks substantial variability in children’s contributions to household work across the 30 families. In some families, children were never observed attending to household chores, while in others, children were recorded performing as much as 28 percent of the household work. What accounts for the variation across families? In a related CELF study that addressed parent-child interactions centering on household work, we found that children in 22 of 30 families regularly attempted to negotiate, resist, or refuse to carry out tasks, while in 8 of the 30 families, children often complied with their parents’ requests (Klein et al. 2008). Our data suggest that children’s behavior is tied to a history of socialization practices within their particular families, which includes the ways parents interact with their children and try to recruit them into taking on tasks (Ochs 1986, 1988). Some families in the study appeared to frequently engage in extended debates, negotiations, and disputes about children accomplishing both self-care tasks (e.g., grooming) as well as general household work. Other families, however, had minimal exchanges devoid of conflict that revealed children’s awareness of their responsibilities and their willingness to help with household tasks.⁴

With respect to the scan sampling data, we did not find a statistically significant correlation between parent’s and children’s contributions to household work. That is, among families where parents performed numerous household chores, we did not consistently observe their children performing more chores than children in families where parents did few household tasks. Nevertheless, scan sampling data allow us to quantify children’s participation in household work and provide a window onto the tasks children perform according to age and gender. We turn now to our interviews with children, which we argue supplement this dataset by revealing children’s *understandings* of their responsibilities in the home.

Children’s Perspectives on Household Work

Anthropologists have only recently drawn attention to the importance of including children’s voices in anthropological research, especially when collecting data on children’s lives and activities (Stephens 1995; Helleiner 1999; Bluebond-Langer and Korbin 2007). Scholars in psychology and sociology have also lamented the lack of studies that document children’s perspectives on their everyday life experiences (Oakley 1994; Brannen and O’Brien 1996; Corsaro 1997). While Galinsky’s (2000) study was an important step toward including children’s views on family life, the topic of helping with housework was not broached in her study. As Corsaro notes in his discussion of studies on children’s household work:

Although psychologists often consider the effects of such labor on children’s cognitive, emotional, and social development (Goodnow 1988), sociologists focus primarily on adult members of the family and on implications for the reproduction of current gender inequalities. In neither case do we learn much about *children’s* perspectives on household chores or how domestic labor relates to other features of children’s daily lives. [Corsaro 1997:37]

Corsaro’s observations highlight the need for more detailed investigations of children’s understandings of household responsibilities and the social organization of the family.

CELF interviews were conducted with 52 of the children in 28 of the 30 participating families.⁵ Children’s responses to the question of whether they performed chores turned out to be more complex than anticipated. Children in 17 families reported that they were expected to do chores; however, children’s understandings of the notion of “chore” seemed to differ. Children in five families answered “no” to the question of whether they were expected to do chores,

yet enumerated a number of tasks they routinely performed around the house, such as cleaning their rooms or doing laundry. One child, for example, replied "No, not really" to the question, but then reported that he regularly makes his bed, helps with the laundry, vacuums, and helps his father wash the car. We attribute these initial negative replies to some children conceptualizing the word "chore" in a particular way that differed from their understanding of helping around the house. It is possible that the routine tasks they were expected to perform were not referred to as "chores" by family members or that their participation was spontaneous and periodic rather than habitual practice.

There was a wide spectrum of responses to the question of whether children had chores or what this work entails. A few children readily admitted that they do not contribute at all, such as Linda's (8 years old) quick response, "Nothing. I don't do anything around the house." Mark (9 years old), from another family, seemed surprised by the question: "I, never. Why do you think that? I never have to do chores. My mom – they clean the house, I relax (*laughter*)."

These responses are interesting in that they do not reveal any expectations on the part of their parents that children should or will help. These types of responses, however, were unusual. Even when children did not list any specific household tasks, most indicated that they engage in activities that contribute in some way to household well-being. Aurora (8 years old) explained that in her family, she doesn't have any specific chores but that, "It's our job to try to not make a mess, and if we do make a mess, we say sorry and mom forgives us and then we might help her clean up the mess." Her response displays her awareness that she and her younger brother are responsible for helping to keep the house in order. Some children stated that their primary responsibility was to attend school and complete their homework assignments. As Becky (6 years old) declared, "Well, the job is to go to school . . . that's my job," which was similar to responses by children in other families who cited "homework" as a chore. While schoolwork may not be considered a type of household chore, it was viewed as an important responsibility among some of the families in our study. For several of the parents in our study, monitoring children's homework was a routine task (Wingard and Forsberg 2009, in press). Those children who could manage school assignments by themselves saved their parents the daily trials of overseeing this activity.

While most children cited making their beds and keeping their rooms clean as chores, a few children revealed that they were expected to participate quite extensively in household-work activities. Michelle (10 years old) replied: "We have a lot of different chores. It's whatever our mom wants us to

do." Stephen (11 years old), the oldest child in this family, commented that "We all clean our rooms, we dust, we have Swiffers we dust with, and you know, when we're done with that we vacuum and we'll clean everything, the whole house on weekends cause it gets dusty and dirty." Not only does Stephen recognize that he and his siblings are responsible for all aspects of household cleaning, he even refers to cleaning tools such as the Swiffer, the vacuum, and in a later segment he discusses the disinfectant he uses in the bathroom. Leslie (10 years old), a child in another family in which children often participated in household work, indicated a gendered division of labor in regard to the tasks that she and her brother (8 years old) do around the house. While Leslie feeds her baby sister and helps with the laundry, she comments, "I don't have to scoop poop or (*laughs*) take out, or do the trash . . . raking the leaves doing the lawn, mostly outside kind of things," describing her brother's activities.

According to children's reports in interviews, their tasks ranged from cleaning their bedrooms to helping with other tasks, such as setting the table, taking out the trash, sweeping, and running errands outside the home (Table 5). In line with previous research (Whiting and Whiting 1975; White and Brinkerhoff 1987), we found that the number and types of tasks children reported increased with age. Responses from children between the ages of 5 and 7 years indicate that their participation in household work is mostly concerned with keeping their personal possessions and rooms in order. The responses from the 8 to 10 age group yields the most robust data; the number of participants that fell within this group was greater than the other age groups because this was the age range of the target child in the CELF study. In this group, girls collectively reported performing 28 various household tasks (ranging from cleaning to food preparation), about three times the number that boys reported. The types of tasks also differed. Girls indicated that they were much more likely to engage in cleaning tasks and that they took care of the family pets, whereas boys were more likely to do outside tasks such as yard work. In general, the number and range of tasks reported by both genders increased with age. In the 11–14 age group, however, girls reported fewer tasks than their younger counterparts. This is difficult to explain because scan sampling data indicate that this group (girls 11–14) actually performed more tasks than their younger siblings. The low number of tasks reported may be due to the fact that we only had interview responses from two of the four female participants in this age group.

Children in 18 of the 28 families reported receiving an allowance on a regular basis. In seven of these families, children indicated that their allowance was

Table 5. Number and Proportion of Tasks Reported in Children’s Interviews

Age/gender	Household work activities												All tasks <i>n</i>
	Clean bedroom		Meal preparation		Clean house		Sibling care		Pet care		Outside chore		
	<i>n</i>	% ^a	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	
5-7													
Female	8	80.0	-	-	2	20.0	-	-	-	-	-	-	10
Male	4	66.7	-	-	1	16.7	-	-	1	16.7	-	-	6
8-10													
Female	12	30.0	2	5.0	19	47.5	1	2.5	6	15.0	-	-	40
Male	11	55.0	1	5.0	5	25.0	-	-	-	-	3	15.0	20
11-14													
Female	-	-	-	-	1	50.0	-	-	1	50.0	-	-	2
Male	6	27.3	1	4.5	12	54.5	-	-	2	9.1	1	4.5	22
15-17													
Female	3	18.8	2	12.5	4	25.0	3	18.8	3	18.8	1	6.3	16

^aProportion of number of tasks reported by each age and gender group.

contingent upon doing chores. However, with respect to total contribution to household work (as measured with scan sampling), we found no difference between children who received an allowance and those that did not.⁶ That is, children who received an allowance were, on average, doing as much by way of household chores as children who were not allotted a monetary incentive.

Tying allowance to household chores is a topic of some controversy among parents (Furnham 2001) and parenting experts (Zelizer 2002). While some parenting experts advise against the commercialization of the home, others advocate for an allowance to teach children the value of money and recommend that this payment be kept separate from their duties in the home, which should be performed without pay (Zelizer 2002). The lack of a strong correlation between allowance and household work in our study is explained, in part, by the children, some of whom discussed their views on allowance as being contingent on household work. Stephanie (15 years old) indicated that she received an allowance in the past, but she admitted, “I don’t really do everything I’m supposed to. Because I don’t have time or just want to be lazy and not do it. So the allowance thing really didn’t work and my mom doesn’t keep up with it.” Reese (10 years old) reported that he receives six dollars every Saturday “if I do my chores, which I haven’t been doing so I haven’t been getting allowance, which sucks.” Although Reese is clearly unhappy about not receiving allowance, he does not indicate that he is planning to resume his chores. Money is not necessarily an incentive in these families.

Some children indicated that their motivation to help parents with household work was tied to issues of obligation, enjoyment, and reciprocity. Caroline (8 years old) views household work as “really fun . . . because you get to do stuff for your mom . . . and I get a break off from my homework.” In contrast, Dana (6 years old), does not enjoy taking on household tasks: “Well, I don’t really like doing it because I’m usually into something but I have to do it.” Her utterance, “but I have to do it,” reveals a sense of obligation and responsibility. Among some of the older children in our study, the notion of obligation surfaces with even more clarity. For example, Celia (16 years old), regularly takes care of her 2-year old sister (which includes changing diapers, feeding her, and dropping her off at daycare in the morning), helps out in the kitchen, and periodically runs errands. When asked how she feels about these tasks, she replies, “Sometimes it’s an inconvenience in the morning because, of course, I’d rather sleep but you know it helps me keep going in the morning and stuff like that . . . It’s not a big deal really for me to help out my family because they do, I think, ten million more things for me than I do for them.” Celia indicates that being a member of her family requires reciprocity in the caring for and helping of others, and her comments reveal her sense of indebtedness and gratitude, which was not expressed among the younger participants in the study.

Discussion: Convergences and Discrepancies between Datasets

Using multiple methodologies to study a single phenomenon is not a common approach in the field of sociocultural anthropology. In this study, the analyses

of scan sampling and interview data offer a multifaceted view of children's participation in household work. While each method on its own has its weaknesses, the other offers a complementary analysis (Weisner 2005). Interviews capture participant perspectives, yet their responses may be influenced by the specific questions asked as well as by issues of self-presentation. Scan sampling eliminates these potential problems and offers an objective snapshot of participants' activities; however, participants' perceptions and feelings are left unaddressed.

When we compared our interview data with scan sampling observations, we found several data convergences and divergences with respect to children's contributions to household work. Both datasets, for example, reflect that older children contribute more to housework than their younger siblings. Similarly, scan sampling and interview data both suggest that the number and range of tasks performed by children increase with age. The datasets diverge, however, in regard to the issue of gender differences in the types of tasks carried out. While some of the children interviewed indicated that the chores they performed differed from those of their siblings according to stereotypically gendered roles (girls clean and prepare food while boys perform yard work), this distinction was not substantiated by the scan sampling data. Gendered ideologies of household work may persist in some families but may not always be reflected in the actual tasks children perform.

Comparative analysis also revealed that younger children were apt to report higher numbers of tasks per child (compared with the next two older age groups) while contributing proportionally the least to household work.⁷ For the three youngest age groups, we found that while these children report many responsibilities, they seldom contribute to household work. In contrast, the oldest children (15–17 years) report the highest contributions to household work and, in fact, were observed engaged in household work more frequently than younger children. These data suggest that older children (or teenagers) were most aware of their expected and actual contributions to household work. It is important to note that these data do not measure the accuracy of children's reports in absolute terms, but instead provide insights into differences in how children belonging to different age groups discuss their contributions to household work relative to their actual contributions as measured (as a proportion of total household activities) with scan sampling methods. Further analysis is needed in order to determine the extent to which individual children either over- or under-reported household chores in our sample, although we expect the coupling of data that derive from these

methods – interviews and scan sampling – to be instrumental to this exploration.

As discussed above, our mixed-methods approach also revealed that children who received an allowance were, on average, participating in household work as much as children who did not receive a monetary incentive. Although some children's interview responses reflect a sense of obligation and responsibility to their families, our data suggest that allowances do not play a strong role the development of these attitudes. In fact, while beyond the scope of this article, we suggest that the presence of paid domestic work in middle-class households may have a greater affect on how children are socialized into household work than allowance. Twenty-four of the 30 families in our study employed outside help for the purpose of housekeeping and/or childcare. The type and frequency of this help varied from family to family; some housekeepers and/or nannies visited daily, while others came only two to four times each month. Interestingly, regardless of the frequency of these visits, the presence of paid domestic help seemingly influenced children's contributions to household work. That is, when we calculate children's contributions in terms of their total observed activities, children in families with paid help ($n = 24$) tend to do fewer chores than children in families without paid help ($n = 6$).⁸ Clearly, our sample is small, but the relationship between socialization practices concerning children's participation in domestic tasks and the constellation of circumstances surrounding paid domestic help is intriguing and merits further investigation.

Conclusion

This study of children's involvement in household work uses mixed methods to calculate the actual tasks they routinely take on in the home, and to examine children's perceptions of their contributions. Our findings show that children's participation, in general, is minimal, accounting for only 13 percent of all housework performed by members of 30 households, and accounting for fewer than 3 percent of all children's activities at home. However, there is notable interfamily variability in levels of participation, indicating no clear model of children's household responsibilities in working families. Children's responses to questions about their assigned tasks reveal younger children's over-reporting their contributions and point to differing parental expectations across families. Our findings confirm those of previous studies that indicate that older children as well as female children in the household tend to take on more tasks (Blair 1992b).

The datasets examined in this inquiry offer different methodological and analytical routes through which to investigate children's contributions to house-

hold work. Further studies that focus on the role of parent's routines and expectations in the socialization of children into domestic tasks will yield a deeper understanding of how parents and children articulate, negotiate, and carryout household responsibilities.

Notes

- 1 CELF research was generously funded by the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. The CELF study included 32 families, 30 of which featured parents of the opposite sex and two of which were cofathered. This study is concerned with data gathered among the 30 families that featured a mother and a father.
- 2 In 33 percent of the participating families, at least one member reported an ethnic background as something other than European (Campos et al. 2009). Owing to the high degree of ethnic variability among the families, ethnicity could not be considered a significant factor in determining degrees of children's participation in household work (with one exception being the two Asian Indian immigrant families mentioned later in the paper).
- 3 Elsewhere, behavioral and social scientists have classified this method as *instantaneous sampling* and *instantaneous scan sampling* (Altmann 1974; Hawkes et al. 1987). Ochs et al. (2006) use the term *ethnoarchaeological tracking* as a synonym for *scan sampling*, and they provide a summary of pertinent literature and discuss important differences in how the method has been applied.
- 4 In the two Asian Indian families in the CELF study, there was little conversation about household tasks; parental expectations centered on children's homework assignments.
- 5 Because the Children's Interview Instrument was not complete when we collected data with the first two families in our study, the five children in these two families were not interviewed. In two additional families – each of which contained three children – we interviewed two of the three children; one between 8 and 10 years old and one sibling. In another family, the 5-year old was not available to be interviewed.
- 6 Cohen's $d = .25$.
- 7 Other studies of family members, estimations of their household work also discuss the issue of over-reporting. For example, Weisner et al. (1982) noted that children over-reported the time they spent in child-caretaking roles. Lee (2005) found that both husbands and wives over-reported the amount of household work they performed.
- 8 Independent samples t -test ($t = 2.095$; $p = .045$); Cohen's $d = .7$.

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DOI:10.1111/j.1548-1417.2009.01030.x

BOOK REVIEWS

***Globalization in Rural Mexico: Three Decades of Change*. Frances Rothstein. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007.**

Avram Bornstein, John Jay College

Globalization in Rural Mexico is a well-written study of uneven changes in the working lives of Mexicans in San Cosme, Tlaxcala. The book is based on Rothstein's fieldwork in and around that town over 30 years, during which tremendous transformations occurred. At the macroeconomic level, state policies of "import substitution industrialization" between the 1940s and 1970s shifted to policies favoring international corporate trade in the 1980s and 1990s. When Rothstein began fieldwork in the 1970s, the state "supported industrial growth over agriculture and favored large-scale commercial agriculture over small-scale subsistence cultivation. Consequently, small-scale cultivators, or peasants like those in San Cosme, received little support from the government, and state policies often hurt them" (24). Showing a solid grounding in "peasant studies," Rothstein describes how generations of *campesinos* were pulled into wage work to supplement their subsistence pro-

duction, and how this proletarianization transformed gender and kinship relations.

With this experiential background from the 1970s, Rothstein then witnessed the massive impact brought on by the panic of Mexico's threatened debt default in 1982. Subsequently, the United States, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank demanded the implementation of structural adjustment policies that included cuts in public spending, privatization of public assets, liberalization of trade, and a focus on export-oriented industrial production (30). Work became more "flexible," a euphemism for temporary and insecure. Rothstein describes how men lost their jobs with the closure of national industries, while there was an increase in women's employment in regional factories (36–37). This period also was marked by the increasing arrival and consumption of new commodities, from prepared foods and electronics to styles of home construction and life-cycle celebration.

The richest ethnographic data in the book describes the garment industry. Rothstein documents the proliferation of *talleres*, or home clothing workshops, often started by former factory workers (63), which helped make the garment industry Mexico's most