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What Explains the Gender Gap in Schlepping? Testing Various Explanations for Gender Differences in Household-Serving Travel

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What Explains the Gender Gap in Schlepping? Testing Various Explanations for Gender Differences in Household-Serving Travel

Brian D. Taylor, Kelcie Ralph, Michael Smart (2015)

RESEARCH TOPIC

Trips that support the wellbeing of a household, like dropping off a child at school or going to the grocery store, represent a growing proportion of travel in metropolitan areas. Previous research has found that women are more likely to make these types of trips than men. But as women have increasingly entered the labor force, expanding their economic opportunities and, often, supporting dual-earner households, has household-serving travel become more equitably distributed between men and women?

Using data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS), researchers at UCLA and Rutgers find the gender gap in household-serving travel still exists — women are indeed more likely to take these trips than men. To explain this persistent division in household-serving travel, researchers explore the ATUS data using three perspectives: (1) time availability, (2) microeconomic, and (3) gender socialization. Their findings can help transportation planners and researchers better understand travel patterns within households.

MAIN FINDINGS

- **The gender division of household-serving travel remains strong.** Even in households where women earn more, are better educated, or work more hours than their partners, women still make more child-serving and grocery-shopping trips than their male partners.
- **Women and men exhibit gendered patterns of household maintenance and travel even as single adults,** suggesting a powerful socialization of gender roles at play even without the formation of partnerships or the presence of children (see Figure 1).
- **The gender gap for child-serving trips is widest for the youngest respondents.** Women in their 20s make 2.5 times as many child-serving trips as their male partners, while older women enjoy slightly more parity with their partners (see Figure 2).

Figure 1: Female-to-male ratio of household-serving trips by household type

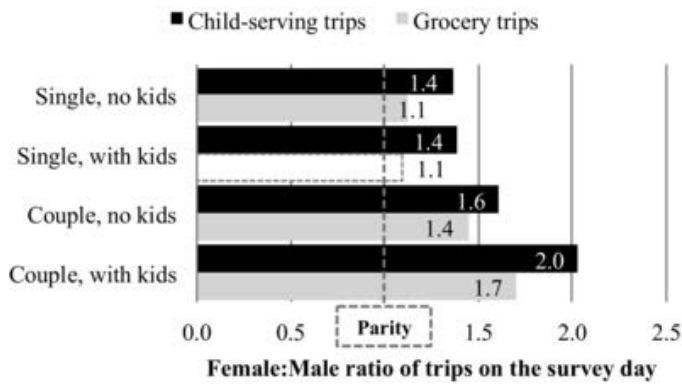
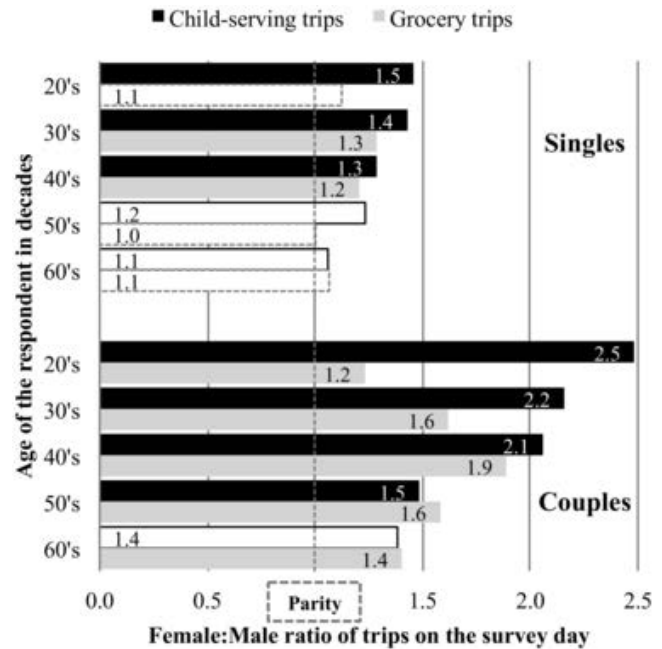


Figure 2: Female-to-male ratio of household-serving trips by respondent age



STUDY APPROACH

Researchers calculated the female-to-male ratio of household-serving trips in several types of households using ATUS data from 2003 to 2012. They tested the **time availability** perspective by comparing the employment status of each partner and the number of hours worked within households. To test the **microeconomic** perspective, they compared households with varying income and educational backgrounds between partners. And they tested **gender socialization** by comparing travel in single-adult households with other types of households.

CONCLUSIONS

- Researchers and planners should **acknowledge the powerful influence of gender socialization** in household travel. Women bear much greater household-serving responsibilities and travel on average, regardless of their earnings relative to men in the household.
- As the share of household-serving travel grows in metropolitan areas, **planners and policymakers should consider the needs of women** when designing transportation systems and programs. For example, other UCLA research recommends incorporating universal design elements and hosting neighborhood safety audits to better incorporate the needs of women into the transportation system.

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