

Winning the Bread and Baking it Too: Women's Excess Home Production Time and Household Inefficiency

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Abstract

We document that female breadwinners do more home production than their male partners, even when restricting to "housework" like cooking and cleaning instead of childcare. By comparing to gay male and female couples, we highlight that specialization within heterosexual households does not appear to be "gender neutral" even after accounting for earnings differences. This could be explained by either a large comparative advantage (in "housework," not childcare) by women or some gendered inefficiency in the division of home production within the household. Using a model, we show that if either of these two elements are present, unions involving women who outearn their male partner will produce lower surplus: A gendered friction in the reallocation of home production means that relative earning status affects real economic returns to marriage. This provides a micro-founded reason for substantial literature showing that lower relative earning by men decreases marriage rates. We test our mechanism---that allocation of housework plays a role, rather than only norms about earning---by exploiting variation in home production by men based on country of origin. We show that being in an environment where women are more likely to out-earn their partners is predictive of ethnic out-marriage and delayed marriage when one's country of origin has a strong gender-bias in household production.