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# Young adults' gendered trajectories of routine housework time when leaving home

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## Abstract

**Objective:** To examine young adult women's and men's time use for routine housework when moving out of the parental household.

**Background:** From a life-course perspective, establishing an own household is one of the key markers of the transition to adulthood. Leaving home is associated with new responsibilities concerning the organization of everyday life, including routine housework, and provides a new context for gendered behavior.

**Methods:** Hours for routine housework were estimated with longitudinal fixed effects regression models, using data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (1991–2020) on 911 women and 721 men, aged 18–32, who moved to an own couple or non-couple household.

**Results:** During the transition to an own household, young adult women increased their time for routine housework by 18 min per day. Young adult men's increase was larger with 21 min per day. The gender gap in routine housework hours widened when young adults moved into couple households but showed a converging pattern when they moved into non-couple households.

**Conclusion:** Women continue to do more routine housework than men in early adulthood, although moving into non-couple settings tends to decrease gender inequality on average.

## KEYWORDS

family dynamics, family formation, gender, inequalities, longitudinal research, young adulthood

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## INTRODUCTION

It remains a persistent pattern in modern societies that women still perform more housework than men, despite a significant narrowing of the gender gap over the past decades and across cohorts on average (Bianchi et al., 2000; Leopold et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2018). Although there is clear evidence of a “gender revolution”, this socially desired process of gender convergence in unpaid work time is far from being completed (Sullivan et al., 2018), and task segregation is still high (García Roman & Ophir, 2024). Over the life course, there is considerable heterogeneity in patterns of domestic time use for routine housework, that is, cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry: women and men develop different housework behavior in early life, are maximally apart in mid-life, and get closer in later phases of the life course (Leopold et al., 2018). This kind of “disproportionate responsibility” (Craig et al., 2016, p. 773) for unpaid labor has been subject to sociopolitical critique, not least because it still narrows women’s opportunities in other domains of life, most notably on the labor market (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010), even though women’s educational and labor market resources have dramatically increased over the last decades (Goldscheider et al., 2015; Sullivan et al., 2018).

In general, housework time has been one of the most fruitful applications in family research to assess changes in traditional roles and gender construction for decades (Davis & Greenstein, 2020). Women’s and men’s time use for housework has long been recognized as a dynamic process that evolves over the life course, shaped by status transitions and between changing normative settings, resources, and time availabilities (Bianchi et al., 2000; Cunningham, 2001; Gupta, 1999). Comprehensively studied for adults and virtually all of their major family transitions, such as parenthood (Baxter et al., 2008), re-partnering (Ophir, 2022), or the empty nest (Schulz & Raab, 2023), the phase of early adulthood has received much less attention to date (Craig et al., 2016; Ophir, 2023; Schulz, 2021). However, the early phases of the life course up to young women’s and men’s early thirties are fundamental for our understanding of the development of traditional gender inequalities that seem to persist despite apparent signs of gender convergence in Western societies. This is because housework trajectories are path-dependent on socialization, learning experiences, investments, and decisions while growing up in the context of the family (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Cunningham, 2001).

For young adults in their 20s and early 30s, the issue of housework arguably culminates when they start preparing for independent living and put independent living into practice by moving out of their parents’ home and establish an own household. This transition and the corresponding housework trajectories of young adult women and men contribute to our understanding of gender inequality over the life course and the family cycle, not least for two reasons. First, in a very practical way, leaving home is associated with new responsibilities concerning the organization of everyday life. This includes taking on chores, such as cooking, cleaning, and doing the laundry, which may have previously been handled by the parents (Craig et al., 2015; Schulz, 2021). Second, young adult women and men start exploring their gender identities with a much stronger focus on the future (Norona et al., 2014). Based on their experiences from childhood and adolescence, they continue cutting the cord from their family of origin, having the chance to explore different approaches to gender roles (Arnett, 2000), which involves developing their own preferences concerning the gendered division of labor in society.

So far, the empirical literature has not addressed young adults’ changes in routine housework time when they move out of their parental household. Analyzing parents’ time for routine housework around the transition to the empty nest, Schulz and Raab (2023), en passant, mentioned that German young adults’ routine housework time increased over the years before moving into their own household, but did not follow their behavior after this transition. Other studies, including several countries, consensually indicated that young adults’ housework time increased with age (Anxo et al., 2011; Craig et al., 2015, 2016; Dotti Sani, 2016; García

Roman & Gracia, 2022; Hilbrecht et al., 2008). Not least, Craig et al. (2016) found for Australian women and men aged 20–34 years that both genders spend more time on routine housework when living out of their parents' household: more in a shared house with other non-family members, again more when living alone, and most when living in a couple household. However, neither of these studies was able to assess the impact of status transitions on housework hours due to their cross-sectional designs, which led to issues of unobserved heterogeneity when interpreting group differences among young adults in different living arrangements.

## THE PRESENT STUDY

Although previous studies clearly supported the view of persistent gender inequalities among young adults living independently in the early stages of the life course (Anxo et al., 2011; Craig et al., 2016), they were unable to quantify the dynamics surrounding the actual event of leaving home, especially not in a longitudinal context. In the present study, we addressed this knowledge gap by providing a rigorous longitudinal analysis of how young women and men adjust their routine housework time after leaving the parental home. We analyzed never-married German women and men aged 18–32 who were leaving the parental home for the first time and inspected their time use for routine housework before and after the transition to their own household.

We chose to focus on routine housework time because these tasks were found to be more gendered, with women historically taking on a disproportionately larger share, making them a clearer indicator of persistent gender inequality in domestic labor (Bianchi et al., 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Furthermore, routine housework usually is more time-consuming and has stricter time demands, as it often needs to be completed on a daily basis. In contrast, other activities like repairs or errands tend to be more sporadic and less time-sensitive (Berk, 1985; García Roman & Ophir, 2024). Insofar, routine housework is more closely tied to everyday work-life balance issues, particularly for women, and analyzing routine housework over time may reveal whether progress towards more egalitarian divisions of labor has been made or if traditional gender roles persist.

Based on large-scale data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (Goebel et al., 2019), 1991–2020, we addressed our process of interest, that is, the change in routine housework hours when leaving home, with fixed-effects regression models (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015), estimating hours for routine housework in the years before and after the transition to an own household. In doing so, we tested hypotheses about our process of interest based on data from 911 young adult women and 721 young adult men, separately for each gender, and discerning if the destination household is a couple or a non-couple household. In [our online supplement](#), we provide additional sub-group analyses to assess the heterogeneity, potential issues of selectivity, and the robustness of these processes, albeit without further hypotheses.

Taken together, our study first, extends the existing cross-sectional literature by incorporating a longitudinal perspective, revealing the development of young adults' routine housework behavior in the context of leaving the parental home. Second, in addition to empirically describing housework trajectories, our study sheds light on the evolution of the gender gap in routine housework time during young adulthood, enhancing our understanding of the path-dependency of housework behavior over the life course, as well as potential signs of gender convergence and a more egalitarian division of labor in both couples and society. Third, our study complements the existing longitudinal literature on housework by focusing on a previously under-studied event—young adults leaving the parental home—further demonstrating the value of a gender perspective in explaining gendered housework behavior.

## BACKGROUND

### The gender division of labor in Germany

Studying Germany fits well with the existing literature on housework behavior of young adults in other Western societies, such as Australia (Craig et al., 2016) or the United States (Ophir, 2023). Scoring near the European average on the Gender Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023), Germany is at least considered a moderate male breadwinner society with prevailing traditional gender ideologies and gendered behavior in the family (Schulz, 2020). Over the last decades, Germany has experienced considerable changes in gendered time use patterns (Leopold et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2018) and gender role attitudes (Ebner et al., 2020; Scott & Braun, 2009) towards a more gender egalitarian societal climate. However, women still take the lion's share of unpaid work in all phases of the life course, are basically regarded as responsible for this kind of labor, and domestic task segregation is high (Leopold et al., 2018; Schulz, 2021; Skopek & Leopold, 2018). Growing up in such a gender regime exposes children and young adults to a pattern of "verbal openmindedness and rigid behaviour" (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995, p. 20) concerning the gendered division of labor. This translates to a reproduction of traditional arrangements in housework sharing on the micro and macro level (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Schulz, 2020), even though recent cohort studies have clearly documented a trend of gender convergence in unpaid work times in Germany (Leopold et al., 2018; Skopek & Leopold, 2018; Sullivan et al., 2018).

### Moving out in Germany

From a life-course perspective, the transition to an own household is arguably a major family transition for young women and men on their way to adulthood (Furstenberg, 2000). Leaving the parental household has undergone profound changes in terms of timing, pathways, and motives over the last decades (Mulder, 2009; Seiffge-Krenke, 2014). Until the 1970s, at the latest, the age of young adults leaving home declined in Germany and in other Western European countries, and the transition to an own household has more and more become the result of individual choices than of prescribed marriage patterns. Starting with birth cohorts of the 1980s, the age at the transition has been relatively stable, albeit with a slight indication of an increase (Tatjes, 2016). More specifically, young women as well as young adults from East Germany were found to be leaving home earlier than young men and young adults from West Germany, respectively (Konietzka & Tatjes, 2012). A slim empirical literature further suggests that moving directly together with a partner decreased over cohorts for women and men, which, in turn, means that the prevalence of non-couple households increased as the first destination after leaving the parental home; this pattern basically holds for both West and East Germany (Tatjes, 2016). On average, home leavers in Germany tend to stay rather close to their parental home when moving out "with a median value of less than 10 km" (Leopold et al., 2012, p. 991) distance.

### Daily obligations when moving out

Moving out of the family household—no matter when, how, and why—"usually coincides with taking up major adult roles", of which "the start of the independent household career" (Mulder, 2009, p. 203) arguably has the biggest impact on young adults' daily living. This is because home leavers then need to run their own independent households and take care of chores that previously have been done by their parents. Still living in the family household, the

majority of routine housework is covered by the mothers, and young adults were found to do housework rather for themselves than for the household (Craig et al., 2015; Schulz, 2021). Yet, research found that time use for routine housework increases with age, especially in the early phase of the life course (García Roman & Gracia, 2022; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Leopold et al., 2018). Presumably, this is because children gain housework skills and, as a result, are more frequently tasked by their parents to contribute to a responsible and reciprocal family dynamic (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018). Come adolescence and young adulthood, this could further be in anticipation of the forthcoming event of home leaving, for which children might consider own domestic competencies beneficial (Schulz & Raab, 2023).

In an own household, notwithstanding if, for example, young adults live alone or with a partner, are employed or enrolled in further education, routine housework is added to the time budget of daily obligations, and, initially, this applies for women and men alike. However, the extent of this addition is hardly quantifiable, ranging somewhere between a complete takeover and a necessary minimum, certainly depending on how much young adults can still make use of, for example, washing or cooking from their parents (Leopold et al., 2012; Schulz & Raab, 2023). Based on this pragmatic approach—even though the extent of the expected change remains an empirical question—we hypothesize:

When they move out of the parental household, young adult women and men increase their time for routine housework (H1).

## Gender inequality in housework

Time use for housework is deeply gendered (Berk, 1985; Bianchi et al., 2000; Davis & Greenstein, 2020). On average as well as in couples and families, women usually handle most of the housework in contemporary societies (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010), and the gender gap over the life course is strikingly large, especially in early and midlife (Leopold et al., 2018).

To explain these differences, housework research has applied various approaches, most commonly framing women's and men's housework time in terms of economic exchange, time availability, and gender norms. Although there is consensus in the literature that all of the standard arguments contribute to the explanation of the division of labor (Bianchi et al., 2000; Davis & Greenstein, 2020; Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010), the gender perspective seems to be the most comprehensive and flexible approach, and therefore will take “analytical precedence” (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022, p. 80) in our study. This is, not least, because the mechanism of gender may even shape economic exchange and time availabilities (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022). Further, studies have shown that the influence of relative economic resource and time availability on the division of housework are basically identical in union types with different degrees of institutionalization (Davis et al., 2007). Moreover, gender refers to “ideological processes, meanings given to bodies, and the norms for social interaction and widely shared ideologies”, as Risman (2018, p. 31) put it, which are all part of the following three arguments applied to the process of young adults' home leaving.

## Time use for housework before moving out

First, gendered housework has been found to be transmitted from parents to their children through socialization (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Cunningham, 2001; Schulz, 2020). The main argument is that parents influence their offspring by either strategically guiding them or by acting as role models which children and young adults observe and imitate. Through routine housework, which is still a crucial reference of gendered behavior in modern

societies, parents transmit gendered beliefs, identities, and behavior to their children (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Schulz, 2020), which results in higher participation and time use for routine domestic work of young adult women (Gager et al., 1999; Hilbrecht et al., 2008). This holds to a lesser extent for other types of unpaid household labor, because tasks such as grocery shopping are much less gendered than routine housework (Berk, 1985; García Roman & Ophir, 2024). The gendered dimension of these arrangements should be more pronounced, the more the composition of the household and the everyday practices resemble the pure model of separate spheres. In contemporary Germany, a rather traditional division of labor is still on display to children and young adults who are highly receptive to this kind of learning experience (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Cunningham, 2001), even despite a clear trend towards a societal climate of gender equality over recent decades (Ebner et al., 2020; Scott & Braun, 2009). Based on the socialization mechanism in the still rather traditional gender regime of Germany, we hypothesize:

In the years before moving out of the parental household, young adult women's time for routine housework is higher than young adult men's (H2).

### Time use for housework after moving out

Second, when eventually moving out, the context for young adults' gender development changes substantially: released from the role(s) of the child and parental supervision, young women and men are much freer to question their learning experiences, and explore gender roles and gendered behavior (Arnett, 2000). At the same, young adults stand facing the societal normative climate of still prevailing ideas of separate spheres and traditional gender ideology—if not verbally, then at least in practice, and the more in rather conservative welfare regimes such as Germany (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995).

Generally, the gender perspective emphasizes the importance of symbolic exchange for the different behaviors of women and men concerning the time spent on routine housework. It focuses on the myriad influences of gender on individual identities and interpersonal interactions that are fundamentally built around gendered expectations and beliefs, and cultural models of masculinity and femininity (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Risman, 2018; West & Zimmerman, 1987). Already girls and boys have gained a sense of gendered behavior early on and developed gender identities while growing up (Martin & Ruble, 2010). Growing older, women and men “do gender” by allocating time to gender-stereotyped activities, reproducing their gender identities through their behavior in the spheres of work and family (Bielby & Bielby, 1989). The role of routine housework is most important for our study. Following this view, housework, and routine housework in particular, is still an important means of doing gender; that is, women do housework to do gender, and men try to avoid doing housework, both to comply with the perception that housework is considered women's work in gendered societies (Berk, 1985; Bielby & Bielby, 1989; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This becomes increasingly applicable the more young adult women's and men's gender identities align with the traditional family model, meaning a stronger commitment to conventional family roles (Bielby & Bielby, 1989). Similarly, Akerlof and Kranton (2000) argued from an economical point of view that deviating from the predominant patterns of gender in society can lead to disutility because it would result in individual dissonance regarding the process of gendered identity formation. Consequently, this implies a reproduction of traditional housework behavior, with young adult women doing more routine housework than young adult men.

Above all, these mechanisms operate rather independently from other factors shaping housework behavior, such as relative productivities, resources, or time binds on the labor market (Davis et al., 2007). The latter factors have been successfully applied to explain housework

time and the division of labor in couples and society based on gender-neutral economic models. However, whereas the basic models treat each gender alike, the necessary assumptions to apply these models to contemporary societies are not neutral in terms of gender (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022). This is, first, because labor market participation, time availabilities, wages, and other economically relevant resources are not equally distributed in society, and because this distribution is stratified by gender (England, 2010, 2011). Second, the impact of economic resources and time availabilities is moderated by gender, for example, because “women’s time seems to be more elastic than men’s: when they get some time off, women use it more to do domestic work” (Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022, p. 85), or because of gendered power relations or other marital dependencies (Davis & Greenstein, 2020).

When moving out of the parental household, young adult women and men face the task of finding their place in a gendered society without being able to perform in a prescribed household setting based on their experiences from the past and their perceptions about gendered interactions. Taken all this together, we, therefore, hypothesize:

After moving out of the parental household, young adult women’s time for routine housework is higher than young adult men’s (H3).

According to the gender perspective and given the still rather traditionally operating society of Germany as the context of our investigation, women’s gender identity is much more attached to housework (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Berk, 1985; Bielby & Bielby, 1989), and this should influence the change in housework time when moving out. Therefore, we hypothesize:

When moving out of the parental household, young adult women increase their time for routine housework to a larger extent than young adult men (H4).

## Different destinations when moving out

Third, the gender perspective suggests differences in gendered housework trajectories depending on the type of the new living arrangement. This is, because gender always relates to a specific context and is “actively constructed through everyday social interactions” (Craig et al., 2016, p. 774). Different household types, which vary in their degree of institutionalization regarding the traditional notion of the family as the “gender factory” (Berk, 1985), therefore set the frame of gendered behavior for women and men (Craig et al., 2016; Gupta, 1999). Insofar, doing gender in the sense of the traditional separate spheres model should be more salient in couple households than in non-couple households, which, in turn, offer more normative opportunities to “not do” or even “un-do” gender (Craig et al., 2016). Therefore, the link between gender identities and housework in non-couple households is less direct than in couple households. Still, young adult women and men navigate conventional expectations, with women typically doing more housework than men, or at least feeling more pressure to be seen as having control over their household.

When living without a partner in an own household, housework duties result in new responsibilities, presumably with only minor or no relevant support from the parents. The context of the couple household, however, additionally shapes housework decisions through the normative power of the traditional division of labor in society and the need to negotiate the division of housework with a partner (Craig et al., 2016; Gupta, 1999). In the latter case, this is, because men may transfer some of the responsibilities of independent housekeeping to their partners of the opposite gender, who, in turn, are keener not to violate traditional gender expectations (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Bielby & Bielby, 1989). Therefore, we hypothesize:

After moving out of the parental household, young adult women's time for routine housework is higher in couple than in non-couple households (H5).

Conversely, after moving out of the parental household, young adult men's time for routine housework is higher in non-couple than couple households (H6).

## METHOD

### Data and sample

We used data from the German Socio-Economic Panel Study (SOEP, version 37, <https://doi.org/10.5684/soep.core.v37eu>; Goebel et al., 2019). The SOEP is one of the world's largest and longest-running surveys of households and individuals. Since 1984, the SOEP has been aiming to represent the resident population of Germany, applying face-to-face interviews as the preferred mode of data collection, and using enlargement and refreshment samples based on random probability procedures over the years to account for population influx and panel attrition (for details about sample sizes, response rates, attrition, etc., cf. Siegers et al., 2022). The resulting data were ideally suited to study changes in housework time around young adults' transition to an own household, because it includes enough cases of young adults as well as yearly data on household compositions and housework time of respondents for the period between 1991 and 2020.

Our starting sample consisted of 19,180 respondents with valid interviews, aged 16–35 years, and who were interviewed at least once in the parental household before turning 21. We dropped respondents with no valid information about parents and the parent–child relationship ( $n = 3080$ ). The parent–child relationship was established through a variable indicating each household member's relationship to the household head and information from biography data edited by the SOEP research data center. To further ensure accurate parent–child linkage, we excluded complex households (e.g., with grandparents or other adult persons;  $n = 1212$ ). We then dropped respondents with gaps during the process of home leaving, short leave spells, who were second-time home leavers, returned to their parental home after having moved out, or were already married or cohabiting while still living with their parents ( $n = 2012$ ). Eventually, we dropped cases with only one observation, gaps before the event of home leaving, and who left the parental home before 1991 ( $n = 4611$ ). In doing so, we arrived at a sample of 8265 young adult women and men, who we considered at risk of leaving the parental home for the first, and only the first time.

To arrive at our final analytic sample including only first-time home leaving events, we dropped the control sample of those at risk but without a transition ( $n = 6351$ ; these cases were still used for sensitivity checks, though, as reported in [our online supplement](#)), respondents who experienced the transition to marriage and/or parenthood during the transition process ( $n = 204$ ), and respondents who moved to other households than couple or non-couple households ( $n = 78$ ; see operationalization below). This returned 911 never-married women and 721 never-married men, aged 18–32, who were observed before and after their first transition out of the parental home, remained never married and transitioned into non-couple or couple households—the possible heterogeneity within these two destination states is discussed below in more detail.

To account for possible age effects in our longitudinal analysis, we re-estimated our basic models including all young adults who were at risk of home leaving but did not make the transition during the observation period as a control group (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015). Because the models were robust concerning our main research questions (Tables S2–S5 in our online

supplement), we did not keep the control group and relied on the much more straightforward event sample in all further analyses.

## Measures

*Time for routine housework (outcome).* We used a stylized measure of time use for routine housework as our outcome variable. In the SOEP, this information is routinely collected with the annual survey question: “What is a typical day like for you? How many hours do you spend on the following activities on a typical weekday?” One response category is “routine housework” (washing, cooking, and cleaning), and the respondents are asked to reply in full hours. This variable was available for respondents in each survey year between 1991 and 2020. To avoid estimation bias due to outliers, we top-coded routine housework at 4 h/day.

Compared to diary-based estimates of housework time, the stylized measures used in this study may lead to inflated absolute assessments of time use, but should adequately reflect relative gender gaps and individual change in time use, because the coefficient bias was found to be negligible and non-systematic (Kan & Pudney, 2008). Furthermore, Gough and Killewald (2011, p. 1090) noted that fixed effects longitudinal models tend to “absorb” classical measurement error and couples’ reporting bias in housework time, creating confidence that the within estimates capture actual changes.

*Transition to an own household.* We identified the transition process by utilizing annual information on household composition. We recorded a transition if the household composition of a young adult changed between two observations from living together with at least one parent ( $t_{-1}$ ) to living without any parents in an own household ( $t_0$ ). We captured the transition process with binary variables for the years preceding and succeeding the event.

*Age.* We regressed all changes in housework hours net of age by considering respondents’ age in years as a set of dummy variables in all models. If age was not controlled in the fixed effects models, the coefficient of home leaving might pick up a possible age effect and, thus, would be distorted (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015).

*Relationship status.* We included a time-varying dummy variable measuring if the respondent is in a stable relationship with a partner of the opposite gender, accounting for possible confounding of home leaving.

*Employment hours.* We included young adults’ actual employment hours in our models as a continuous and time-varying variable, ranging between 0 and 80 h/week, to account for the fact that employment hours have been known to be associated with time availability for housework and may possibly confound home leaving.

*Destinations.* We used the generated household typology in the SOEP data to discern couple and non-couple households after young adult women and men have moved out of their parental home ( $t_0$ ). Slightly more young adult men than women moved to non-couple households (66% compared to 56%), and, conversely, slightly more young adult women than men moved to couple households (44% compared to 34%) as their first destination after the parental home (Table 1). Note, that the group of non-couple households is probably heterogeneous; we detail this issue in our online supplement (pp. 4–5, 12–14), and discuss possible implications in the concluding section.

*Enrollment in university education.* We included young adults’ enrollment in university education as a time-varying dummy variable in all our models. While studying may influence time availability for housework or be a driver of home leaving, just as employment, (the pursuit of) higher education may further be associated with a more liberal approach to gender roles by young adult women and men (Pampel, 2011).

**TABLE 1** Descriptives of the sample of first-time home leavers.

	Women					Men				
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Min</i>	<i>Max</i>	<i>N</i>
Gross sample size					911					721
Hours for routine housework <sup>a</sup>										
1 year before home leaving	1.06	0.83	0	4	908	0.65	0.65	0	4	718
1st year after	1.38	0.73	0	4	911	1.03	0.66	0	4	721
Destination <sup>b</sup>										
Non-couple household	0.56				911	0.66				721
Couple household	0.44				911	0.34				721
Age										
1 year before home leaving	21.61	2.77	17	31	911	23.03	3.21	17	31	721
1st year after	22.61	2.77	18	32	911	24.03	3.21	18	32	721
In relationship <sup>b</sup>										
1 year before home leaving	0.62				863	0.50				696
1st year after	0.72				869	0.59				698
Actual employment hours										
1 year before home leaving	21.95	20.11	0	68	891	24.96	20.95	0	80	705
1st year after	27.17	18.67	0	60	886	29.78	20.01	0	77	708
University education <sup>b</sup>										
1 year before home leaving	0.17				911	0.20				720
1st year after	0.25				911	0.24				721

Note: German Socio-economic Panel Study, v37, 1991–2020; own calculations.

<sup>a</sup>Top-coded at 4 h/day.

<sup>b</sup>Relative frequency.

After constructing the final estimation sample, the small set of variables used in the analyses contained only few missing values (Table 1). Therefore, we estimated all models with listwise deletion of incomplete observations.

## Fixed-effects modeling

We used fixed effects panel regression models (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015) to examine how the transition to an own household affected young adult women's and men's time for routine housework. These models focused exclusively on within-person change over time, relating temporal variation in the outcome only to temporal variation in the input. All time-constant variables were eliminated from the equation and, therefore, time-constant heterogeneity (observed and unobserved) was rendered inconsequential (Brüderl & Ludwig, 2015). We tackled possible time-varying confounding by including young adults' age, relationship status, actual working hours and if the respondent was enrolled in university education in all our models (Table 2). We estimated separate models by gender and destination to directly address our hypotheses. Our main analyses are backed up by several sensitivity analyses to assess the robustness of our results for different sub-groups; these analyses are detailed in our online supplement.

**TABLE 2** Fixed effects regression models of young adult women’s and men’s routine housework hours when moving out of the parental household, into a couple, or a non-couple household.

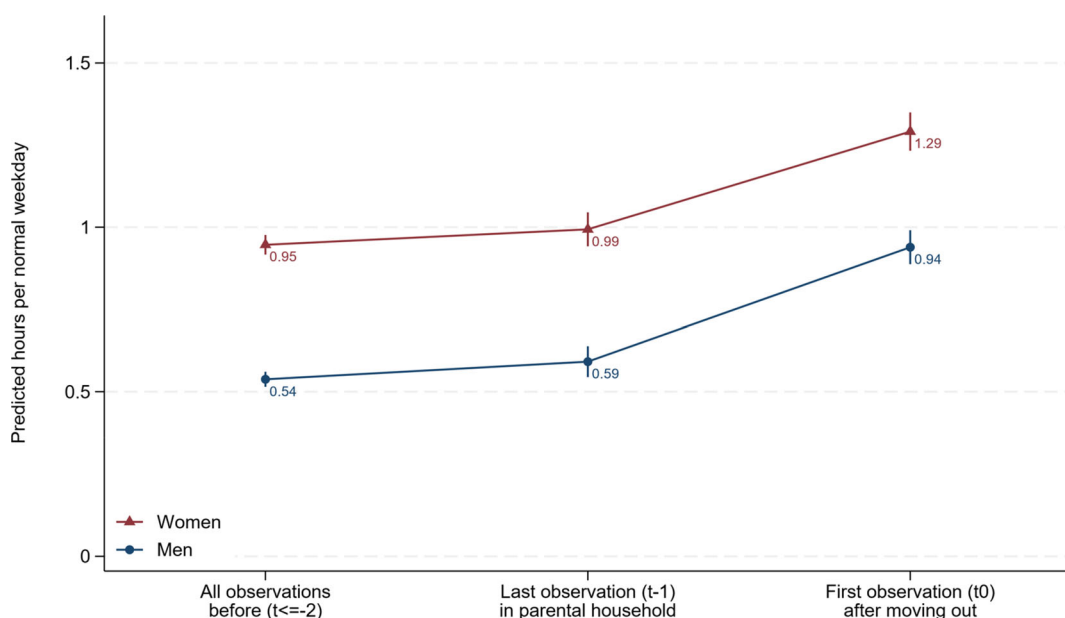
	All		Non-couple households		Couple households	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Time around moving out						
Min./ <i>t</i> 2: All observations before	0.05 (0.03)	0.05 <sup>+</sup> (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)	0.07* (0.03)	0.05 (0.05)	0.01 (0.05)
<i>t</i> 1: Last observation in parental household	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.	Ref.
<i>t</i> 0: First observation after moving out	0.30*** (0.03)	0.35*** (0.03)	0.24*** (0.04)	0.38*** (0.04)	0.38*** (0.05)	0.27*** (0.05)
Age						
18	0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.02 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)	0.06 (0.05)	0.04 (0.04)
19	0.15*** (0.05)	0.11* (0.04)	0.14** (0.05)	0.11** (0.04)	0.15** (0.05)	0.09 <sup>+</sup> (0.04)
20	0.26*** (0.05)	0.17*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.18*** (0.04)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.14** (0.05)
21	0.34*** (0.05)	0.19*** (0.04)	0.33*** (0.06)	0.18*** (0.05)	0.37*** (0.06)	0.17*** (0.05)
22	0.41*** (0.06)	0.26*** (0.05)	0.41*** (0.06)	0.25*** (0.05)	0.44*** (0.06)	0.19*** (0.05)
23	0.40*** (0.07)	0.23*** (0.05)	0.35*** (0.07)	0.23*** (0.05)	0.42*** (0.07)	0.22*** (0.05)
24	0.43*** (0.07)	0.20*** (0.05)	0.41*** (0.08)	0.22*** (0.06)	0.52*** (0.08)	0.18** (0.06)
25	0.45*** (0.08)	0.26*** (0.06)	0.38*** (0.08)	0.25*** (0.06)	0.50*** (0.09)	0.28*** (0.06)
26	0.29** (0.09)	0.32*** (0.06)	0.28** (0.10)	0.33*** (0.06)	0.35*** (0.10)	0.29*** (0.07)
27	0.33*** (0.10)	0.32*** (0.07)	0.41*** (0.12)	0.34*** (0.07)	0.28* (0.11)	0.34*** (0.08)
28	0.31** (0.12)	0.33*** (0.08)	0.38** (0.13)	0.33*** (0.08)	0.38** (0.14)	0.35*** (0.09)
29	0.75*** (0.15)	0.34*** (0.09)	0.90*** (0.17)	0.25* (0.10)	0.59** (0.21)	0.42*** (0.11)
30	0.44* (0.19)	0.54*** (0.11)	0.31 (0.22)	0.61*** (0.13)	0.79** (0.28)	0.46** (0.16)
31	0.68* (0.30)	0.57*** (0.14)	1.18** (0.42)	0.61*** (0.16)	0.24 (0.42)	0.46 <sup>+</sup> (0.26)
32	0.22 (0.37)	0.45 <sup>+</sup> (0.24)	0.03 (0.50)	0.36 (0.25)	0.47 (0.51)	0.68 (0.69)
In relationship	0.06* (0.03)	0.04 <sup>+</sup> (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)	0.06* (0.03)	0.06 <sup>+</sup> (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)
Actual working hours	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00** (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)
Enrolled in university education	0.04 (0.04)	0.06* (0.03)	0.02 (0.04)	0.06 <sup>+</sup> (0.03)	0.07 (0.05)	0.10* (0.04)

(Continues)

TABLE 2 (Continued)

	All		Non-couple households		Couple households	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Constant	0.86*** (0.05)	0.42*** (0.05)	0.84*** (0.06)	0.43*** (0.05)	0.87*** (0.06)	0.38*** (0.06)
Number of observations	4641	4377	3918	3915	3671	3477
Number of cases	873	700	836	680	811	661

Note: Predicted hours from these models are plotted in Figures 1 and 2. Unstandardized *B*-coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, and levels of significance: \*\*\**p* < .001, \*\**p* < .01, \**p* < .05, +*p* < .1 (two-tailed). German Socio-economic Panel Study, v37, 1991–2020; own calculations.



**FIGURE 1** Time use for routine housework of young adult women and men before and after moving out of the parental household. Predicted hours of routine housework per weekday (Monday–Friday) and 95%-confidence intervals. Hours were calculated from the regression models in Table 2 as margins at the means, which were adjusted by setting all covariates to the sample means. German Socio-economic Panel Study, v37, 1991–2020; own calculations. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

## RESULTS

### The average process of routine housework around home leaving

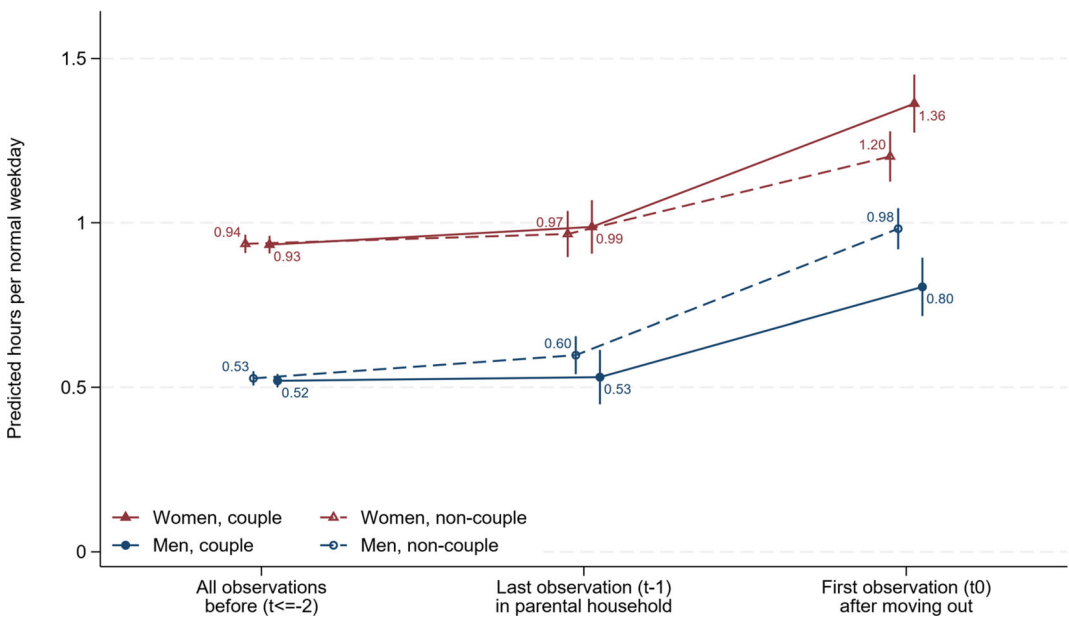
Figure 1 (as derived from models 1, 2 in Table 2) shows young adult women's (red markers) and men's (blue markers) hours for routine housework around the transition to an own household. In the observation window, spanning measurements before and after the transition to an own household, young adult women increased their time for routine housework from 0.99 to 1.29 h (18 min) on average. Young adult men increased their time for routine chores from 0.59 to 0.94 h (21 min) on average when leaving the parental household. This finding confirmed H1.

Figure 1 further displays the expected gender gap in routine housework time, that is, young adult women's time budget was considerably higher than young adult men's, before and after the observed transition. Gender differences in routine housework hours remained statistically significant at all observation points. This observation confirmed H2 and H3 for routine housework. Because young adult men's increase in routine housework hours exceeded that of young adult women's by 3 min on average, this resulted in a slight gender convergence in housework time at this life-course transition on average, rejecting H4.

## Differences in destination

Figure 2 (as derived from models 3–6 in Table 2) shows the different time use trajectories of young adult women and men depending on the type of household that follows the family household of origin. The illustration indicates that there were only minor differences among young adult women or men depending on the type of own household in the year before the transition. However, the trajectories divided when leaving home: while young adult women increased their routine housework time by 0.23 h (14 min) when moving into a non-couple household, the increase of 0.37 h (22 min) was higher when moving into a couple household, confirming H5.

Young adult men's increase was markedly higher when moving into a non-couple household (0.38 h / 23 min) compared to moving into a couple household (0.27 h / 16 min), confirming H6. Comparing the gendered trajectories confirmed H4 for transitions to couple households, as young adult women's increase in routine housework time was higher than men's, but, at the same time, contradicts H4 for transitions to non-couple households, as young adult men's increase was higher than women's in those cases.



**FIGURE 2** Time use for routine housework of young adult women and men when moving into a couple or a non-couple household. Predicted hours of routine housework per weekday (Monday–Friday) and 95%-confidence intervals. Hours were calculated from the regression models in Table 2 as margins at the means, which were adjusted by setting all covariates to the sample means. German Socio-economic Panel Study, v37, 1991–2020; own calculations. [Color figure can be viewed at [wileyonlinelibrary.com](http://wileyonlinelibrary.com)]

## CONCLUSIONS

The division of housework time is still a centerpiece of gendered inequality in modern societies. Although gendered behavior has converged over time, cohorts, and the life course, traditional patterns of doing gender continue to reproduce an at least moderate separate spheres model of family living in Germany (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995; Bianchi et al., 2000; Leopold et al., 2018; Sullivan et al., 2018). In this study, we investigated the changes and the heterogeneity of young adult women's and men's time use for routine housework during their transitions to an own household using data from the German Socio-economic Panel Study (Goebel et al., 2019), 1991–2020, adding the first quantification of the changes that stem from the actual transition into one's own household to the currently flourishing life-course literature on unpaid work times.

Two findings stood out in our analysis. First, both young adult women and young adult men sizably increased their time for routine housework when transitioning to their own household. Generally, routine housework time gradually increased with age and approaching the possible event while young adults were still living together with their parents. The changes during the transition to an own household amounted to further 18- and 21-min increases for routine domestic activities for women and men, respectively, on regular weekdays on average. Because young adult men's increase when moving out was larger in absolute terms, the gender gap at the aggregate level decreased slightly through this transition.

In the most straightforward reasoning, the increase in housework time when moving out could simply be the pragmatic result of an increasing demand in a new context of everyday organization, away from the family of origin and with own responsibilities to running an own household. Having said that, the second major finding of our study clearly accentuated the gender dimension of this process. It was not only that young adult women did more housework from the beginning but also further increased their time when moving out. As expected, the gender gap in housework time was much larger in couples than in non-couple households. Rather irrespective of other processes—we checked for higher education, labor market participation, and relationship status in all our models and controlled for several other possible moderators in our extensive supplementary analyses—the mere fact of moving into a couple household seemed to foster traditional patterns of housework sharing. This is because women increased their time for routine housework to a larger extent, and men increased it to a lower extent when moving together with a partner of the opposite gender compared to moving into single-person households.

In light of the gender perspective, this supports the notion of routine housework as 'women's work': *ceteris paribus*, young adult women take over additional work that comes along with a new joint household with a partner of the opposite gender, whereas young adult men seem to systematically refrain from supplying additional time for routine housework, at least in couple contexts. We interpret this as evidence for a continuity of traditional gender roles.

In the case of non-couple settings, however, our findings seemed to indicate a reduction of the gender gap in housework times between young adult women and men. On the one hand, this may be the result of self-organization given the new demands of independent living, supporting the offered "pragmatic" approach. On the other hand, this hints towards a less direct influence of traditional gender roles in less institutionalized living arrangements (Davis et al., 2007; Gupta, 1999). However, it is questionable and should be studied in future research if this convergence will hold for long as soon as the new households are established, or as young adults move together with a partner after an initial phase of living in a non-couple household.

These patterns add to our understanding that changing contexts influence life courses through the normative power of traditional gender structures (Cunningham, 2001; Dominguez-Folgueras, 2022; Gupta, 1999; Risman, 2018; Schulz, 2021) that still seem to dominate in

contemporary societies, even though normative climates have considerably changed towards a larger consent of gender equality over recent decades (Ebner et al., 2020; Pampel, 2011; Scott & Braun, 2009). Thus, this finding is in line with the notion of some kind of stalled and uneven, but slow and ongoing gender revolution (England, 2010, 2011; Sullivan et al., 2018). Furthermore, it reminds us that the diffusion of new gender patterns and gender identities in modern societies will take a long time because work and family identity formation processes are recurrently shaped by structural and cultural contexts that only accommodate slowly (Bielby & Bielby, 1989).

Our main analyses were backed by several sensitivity checks in [our online supplement](#) that revealed only minor variations in the gendered housework trajectories of young adult home leavers. If anything, these additional analyses hinted towards the importance of family characteristics that may have an influence on the initial level of young adult women's and men's housework time before moving out. For one thing, this highlights the impact of parental transmission on children's behavior, as more traditional settings in the parental household, that is, represented through traditional relative resources, seemed to be associated with larger gender gaps in young adult women's and men's life courses (Cordero-Coma & Esping-Andersen, 2018; Cunningham, 2001). Then again, it hints towards the idea that the inertia of gender inequality could be disrupted by parents who are able and willing to "un-do" gender in various areas of family living and everyday interaction.

Taken together, our study confirmed but also questioned the relevance of the gender perspective in explaining young adult women's and men's housework patterns during the transition to their own households. In line with previous research, this transition fostered a continuing gender gap in routine housework time in young adulthood, that is, the early phase of the life course (Craig et al., 2016; Hilbrecht et al., 2008; Leopold et al., 2018). This is most visible in the case of early cohabitation and less true for young adult women and men in non-couple households, for which we observed a small gender convergence.

At times, when young adult women and men face many different developmental tasks, they obviously follow the paths of their parents to a notable extent. On the one hand, this results in still rather traditional gender inequality in housework time, at least in early- and mid-life, that is expected to be peaking at a possible transition to parenthood (Leopold et al., 2018; Skopek & Leopold, 2018). On the other hand, more recent developments of gender equality and un-doing gender will concurrently support a decline in the gender gap over cohorts and over time (Davis & Greenstein, 2020). Therefore, further research should tackle the differences between young adult women and men who directly move into a couple household and those who move together with a partner after having lived in a non-couple situation before.

Going beyond the scope of our study, several limitations shed light on possible further investigations. To begin with, addressing commonly expectable "weak points" may include expanding the scope to other countries and longer observation windows, or to different settings of possible moderators or mediators, concerning the young adult respondents as well as the families and households of origin. Concerning the latter, it is especially unfortunate that gender role attitudes are not included in the SOEP data. Yet, knowing more about parents' and their children's processes of identity formation would certainly amplify our understanding of the interplay of causes and consequences of housework time as well as parental transmission of gendered behavior.

Furthermore, a life-course event that arguably reshapes young adults' organization of everyday life not only alters time budgets but may also impact the rhythms of time use. These rhythms can only be captured using time diaries, as opposed to the "stylized estimates" commonly available in large-scale datasets such as the SOEP. Focusing solely on weekdays may obscure differences in the weekly rhythm, particularly because some routine housework may be shifted from weekdays to weekends (Gupta et al., 2021), especially among women with longer working hours during the week (Schulz, 2023). In our data, time use on weekends was included

only every second year, preventing us from directly linking changes to the event of leaving home. However, based on previous studies (Gupta et al., 2021; Schulz, 2023), we expect the gender gap in young adulthood to be somewhat larger when weekend data are considered, as women—particularly those with longer working hours—may catch up on routine housework during the weekend, whereas men do not seem to do so. Additionally, expanding the analysis to include other housework tasks, such as errands, could provide a broader understanding of young adults' unpaid work, which is relevant for a more comprehensive assessment of gender inequality. In our online supplement, we documented that time spent on errands developed similarly for both young adult women and men, with no significant gender differences observed in the year after moving out.

Last but not least, our analysis concentrated on the development of housework time in two different household types only, couple vs. non-couple households. In our data from the SOEP, it was not possible to identify “shared living arrangements”, that is, households, in which two or more persons live together without being connected by family or romantic ties. We presented several sensitivity checks in our online supplement to assess this issue; most notably, we estimated different models for young adult women and men who commenced studying at a university after moving out or for different dwelling sizes of the new household. None of these results changed our basic conclusions, though. The group of new students could have been interesting in this respect; however, the case numbers were too low to tame the confidence intervals to a level that allowed serious interpretations. In this context, Craig et al.'s (2016) study showed that Australian women and men spent a little less time for routine housework in shared houses compared to living alone, and Ophir (2023) added a similar finding for the United States. In this respect, our sensitivity analyses suggested that our data may imply the same patterns, even though we could not provide incontrovertible inferential evidence. Therefore, further research should aim to identify or collect data with enough cases on shared living to assess the role of this household type for gender inequality in more detail.

In closing, life-course research seems to have reached a point where probably only few transitions are left unobserved concerning their relevance for housework time. Besides filling these gaps, one by one, connecting the knowledge of already examined transitions as well as the time-dependence of time use within different forms of family living in future research will lead to a better understanding of the production, reproduction, or reduction of gender inequality in unpaid work times. Understanding pathways of housework behavior between practical necessities and symbolic exchange will be the next step to further decode some of the mysteries of prevailing doing gender as well as the opportunities to undoing gender.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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## SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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