

Does housework make husbands happy?

Dalrock | 5 July, 2012 | by Dalrock

The papers have been awash in feminist triumph over a study which is said to prove that men who do housework are happier:

- MSN: [Forget sex, chores make men feel happy, too](#) Complete with ridiculous picture of a man delighted to be doing laundry.
- ABC: [Doing Chores Makes Many Men Happiest](#) (with another picture of a man doing laundry)
- The *Telegraph*: [Secret of a man's happiness: do the dishes for a quiet life](#) (with a picture of a man helping his wife do the dishes)
- The *Independent*: [Katy Guest: It's official – housework makes men happier](#)

There is only one problem. The kind of study they did can't prove what they are saying it proved. Multiple regression analysis is only as strong as the theoretical underpinning of the study. You can get all of the sampling and statistics just right and still get it all wrong if your theory isn't right. I haven't seen any links to the actual study, but from the description in the *Telegraph* they compared men's answers regarding how much housework they did with the same men's answers on questions regarding their own happiness. If you've even walked past a Statistics 101 course while the door was open you know that in this kind of study you can't point the causal arrow. It could just as likely be that when men are treated better by their wives they are happier and therefore more willing to do housework. It could also be that both happiness and housework correlated with something else which wasn't measured, like IQ/altruism. These problems exist with the best of studies, when real scientists and grownups are overseeing them. In this case we have results being released by a researcher who doesn't even pretend to be unbiased. Check out the incredible press release on the Cambridge site, titled [Charting gender's "incomplete revolution"](#):

A major investigation into gender equality across Europe expresses “deep concern” about the prospects for further closing the gender-pay gap, and finds evidence for the survival of “male breadwinner” ideals. At the same time, it also reveals that men are happier when doing their fair share of housework.

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The study, funded by the Economic and Social Research Council, was deliberately wide-ranging and complex. It covers attitudes and approaches towards gender equality over time, in different countries and at different levels – ranging from government policy to individual families. The researchers argue that this approach is important because we can only improve gender equality if we understand that it is the consequence of a network of multiple causes and effects.

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Researchers expected to find, for example, that both men and women will be more satisfied with their household income if they have earned the money themselves. In fact, a series of interviews with couples on low or moderate incomes revealed that both tend to prize the man's income more.

The authors suggest that this is really a modern version of the old idea that a man should eat well even when food for other family members is scarce, so that he has the strength to go out

and earn a living. The authors reflect that: “The saying, ‘the more things change, the more things stay the same’, springs to mind.”

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