

SECULARISM WON'T SAVE US FROM SEXISM: ATHEISTS IN ROMANTIC DYADS DEMONSTRATE NON-EGALITARIAN CHORE DIVISION

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Abstract

Introduction: Major religions often have scriptures or teachings emphasizing the role of women in performing labour within the home. In contrast, secularism is often argued as promoting egalitarianism in relationships, which should produce less pronounced gender roles. If secularism promotes egalitarianism at an individual level, we would expect atheists in heterosexual, romantic dyads to report greater equality in the performance of unpaid labour.

Purpose: Our intent was to explore how atheists divided household labour relative to Roman Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Baptists, Christians, Lutherans, Gospel/Pentecostals, Free Church/Presbyterians, United Church, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Agnostics, and the generically nonreligious.

Method: The present study used data from the 2017 Canadian General Social Survey ($N_{\text{weighted}} > 14,000,000$) to investigate if there was a relationship between atheism and chore division. We retained only individuals who were in a romantic, heterosexual relationship in which they lived with their partner. Our housework variables were: meal preparation, laundry, generic housework, and washing dishes. Respondents could indicate that the chore was performed 'By themselves', 'By their partner', or 'Split evenly'. Notably, we controlled for age, marital status, education of respondent, education of partner, employment status of respondent, employment status of partner, and whether children were in the home.

Results: We found that the main effects of religious affiliation, religious attendance, prayer, and religiosity had little predictive power. Functionally, religious variables (unadjusted for sex) were not associated with more or less egalitarianism. When sex was added to the model, we found that women were more likely to prepare meals ($RRR = 0.21, p < .001$), wash laundry ($RRR = 0.13, p < .001$), perform generic housework ($RRR = 0.19, p < .001$), and wash the dishes ($RRR = 0.47, p < .001$). When examining our central research question—whether the relationship between sex and chore performance varied across religious affiliations—we found little evidence to support secularism promoting egalitarianism. Sexism was found to exist within romantic dyads irrespective of religious affiliation, and the burden of chores fell disproportionately on women.

Discussion: While sexism is often portrayed as a latent or manifest product of religion, there is little evidence that secular groups (e.g., atheists) demonstrate a greater degree of egalitarianism with respect to the division of unpaid labour in the home. This may suggest that the uneven division of household labour is due to a broader structural sexism as opposed to a narrower religious sexism.

Keywords: *Atheism, religion, Canada, chores, General Social Survey.*

1. Introduction

The regular completion of household chores is a time-consuming but vital component of maintaining a home. Chores can include a variety of domestic tasks, such as cooking, washing dishes, cleaning, laundry, yard work, home repairs, and taking out the garbage (Bartley et al., 2005; Frisco & Williams, 2003; Horne et al., 2018; Mencarini & Sironi, 2012). Among the most prevalent theories to explain household chore division are: *relative resource theory*, which argues that the individual with the highest earning potential will have the most power over resources and can avoid housework (Aassve et al., 2014; Horne et al., 2018; Singha, 2015); *economic dependency theory*, which suggests that the individual who brings in less income will compensate by completing a larger portion of the housework (Aassve et al., 2014; Sullivan, 2011); *time availability theory*, which suggests that the

individual who spends the least amount of time engaged in paid labour will complete more housework (Aassve et al., 2014; Horne et al., 2018; Singha, 2015); and *gender ideology perspective*, which argues that couples will divide housework based on their views of appropriate gender roles (Aassve et al., 2014; Davis & Wills, 2014; Horne et al., 2018). Although these theoretical perspectives vary in definition, they share a commonality: gender roles. Given the pivotal role of such roles in understanding the division of labour, it is important to understand the factors influencing gender roles and egalitarianism.

1.1. Egalitarianism and religion

Egalitarianism is the notion that people, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, or other differences, should be treated as equals (Arneson, 2013). Egalitarianism in relationships relates to equality between partners, including things such as a fair division of household labour. Egalitarianism, or lack thereof, can have impacts on both individuals and relationships. Women who feel they complete more household labour than their partners perceive their marriages as more unfair, are less happy, and are twice as likely to become divorced (Bartley et al., 2005; Frisco & Williams, 2003).

Most of the major religions (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism) have been associated with some degree of sexism and sexual prejudice (Etengoff & Lefevor, 2021). Greater religious values have been associated with greater levels of ambivalent sexism (Maltby et al., 2010) and, more specifically, benevolent sexism (Haggard, Kaelen et al., 2019); this relationship is, unsurprisingly, stronger in religious men than women (Maltby et al., 2010). Greater intrinsic religiosity, extrinsic religiosity, doctrinal orthodoxy, general interest in religion, and frequency of participation in religious ceremonies have been negatively related with egalitarianism (Glenwright & Fowler, 2013). In contrast, Atheists report greater egalitarianism than Christians and Muslims (Glenwright & Fowler, 2013). Scriptural literalism (Burn & Busso, 2005), religious involvement, and religious devoutness (Huntington et al., 2001) are all associated with adherence to traditional gender roles and greater employment gaps. Atheists, on the other hand, report greater egalitarianism, which is associated with a fairer share of housework (Glenwright & Fowler, 2013; Ruppanner et al., 2017). Currently, there is an unclear relationship between *nonreligious* identities and the division of household labour. Specifically, it is unclear if people who are atheist, agnostic, or nonreligious, display a similar pattern of responsibilities for household labour as religious individuals.

2. Objectives

Our primary goal was to determine if atheists differed from Roman Catholics, Protestants, Anglicans, Baptists, Christians, Lutherans, Gospel/Pentecostals, Free Church/Presbyterians, United Church, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, Agnostics, and the generically nonreligious with respect to how household labour was divided. Specifically, we were interested in determining if the more secular group (i.e., atheists) were *more* likely to report an egalitarian structure in the division of household labour. If secularism promotes egalitarianism, we would expect atheists to be significantly different from other groups in regard to their division of chores. From an analytical perspective, we would expect the sex-based interaction terms for atheist females to indicate a greater reporting of egalitarianism relative to non-atheist females.

3. Method

3.1. Data

Data were obtained from the results of the 2017 (cycle 31) Canadian General Social Survey (CGSS), a cross-sectional survey designed to monitor changes in the living conditions and well-being of Canadians (Statistics Canada, 2020). The focus of the 2017 CGSS was on understanding the changing trajectories of family dynamics in Canada. Cycle 31 was conducted via telephone from February 2, 2017, to November 30, 2017. The sampling frame was created by combining telephone numbers with property addresses made available by service providers and census data. Individuals were stratified geographically, and then a random sample was produced to select respondents (response rate of 52.4%). The target population included individuals aged 15 years or older in the 10 provinces. However, the current study applied inclusion criteria for our analyses: 2017 CGSS respondents must have been 18 years of age or older and must have indicated that they were either married or in a common-law partnership.

3.2. Measures

The current study controlled age, marital status (0 = common-law, 1 = married), education (1 = < high school, 2 = post-secondary, 3 = graduate school), household income, region (1 = Atlantic,

2 = Quebec, 3 = Ontario, 4 = Prairies, 5 = British Colombia), living with child(ren) under 15 years old (0 = none, 1 = 1 child, 2 = 2 children, 3 = 3 or more children), population centre indicator (0 = non-large city, 1 = large city), main activity of spouse/partner in past 12 months (0 = partner not employed, 1 = partner employed), personal employment status in the past week (0 = not employed, 1 = employed), and average number of hours worked in a week.

Given there were numerous religious elements of interest, we included several predictor variables: religious affiliation (with atheists as the base group), religious service attendance, prayer, and importance of religious/spiritual beliefs (all continuous). We used sex (0 = female, 1 = male) as a moderator for religious affiliation. For outcomes we looked at: who was responsible for cooking meals, doing the dishes, doing the housework, and doing the laundry (0 = equal between respondent and partner, 1 = respondent’s responsibility, 2 = partner’s responsibility).

3.3. Analytic approach

We used statistical moderation to examine sex differences, which acknowledges that a third variable can modify the association between a predictor and an outcome (Baron & Kenny, 1986). Multinomial hierarchical logistic regression analyses were carried out with weighted variables. The CGSS master file contained both person-level weights, allowing for corrected point estimates, and bootstrap weights, allowing for corrected variance estimates. All analyses were evaluated using an $\alpha = .05$.

For all analyses, we regressed the outcome onto covariates in Block 1, we added religious attendance, prayer, and religiosity in Block 2, we added religious affiliation in Block 3, we entered sex in Block 4, and we explored interactions in Block 5.

We have several hypotheses related to the addition of sex as a predictor in Block 4.

Hypothesis 1: Males will be less likely to indicate personal responsibility for a chore.

Hypothesis 2: Females will be more likely to indicate personal responsibility for a chore.

We have several hypotheses related to the addition of these interaction terms in Block 4.

Hypothesis 3: Non-atheist males will report less personal responsibility for a chore relative to atheist males.

Hypothesis 4: Non-atheist females will report a greater degree of personal responsibility for a chore relative to atheist females.

Table 1.

Predicting Responsibility for Chores in the Home.

	Block 1	Block 2	Block 3	Block 4	Block 5
	<i>F</i> (34, 500)	<i>F</i> (6, 500)	<i>F</i> (28, 500)	<i>F</i> (2, 500)	<i>F</i> (28, 500)
Meal Preparation	23.31 ***	4.99 ***	1.85 **	619.64 ***	2.35 ***
Dishes	10.56 ***	2.74 *	1.86 **	86.14 ***	1.74 **
Housework	18.16 ***	8.20 ***	1.12	508.08 ***	1.67 *
Laundry	19.80 ***	10.88 ***	1.73 **	811.34 ***	1.65 **

Note. Block 1 was covariates; Block 2 was religious attendance, prayer, and religiosity; Block 3 was religious affiliation; Block 4 was sex; Block 5 was sex * religious affiliation interaction terms.

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

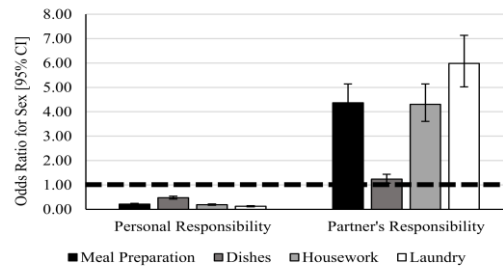
4. Analysis and discussion

In Table 1 we can see that the covariates contributed substantial amounts to the overall models. In Block 2, neither religious attendance nor religiosity were significant predictors of housework; however, higher levels of prayer were associated with a greater likelihood of indicating that the respondent was personally responsible for a given chore. Religious affiliation (Block 3) contributed little to the models. Atheists did not tend to be different from the religious groups, running antithetical to our expectation that atheists would be more likely to endorse an egalitarian perspective on the performance of household labour. In Block 4, sex was a substantial predictor of chore performance in all cases. Females were much more likely to report being responsible for meal preparation, washing dishes, general housework, and laundry, relative to males. Additionally, males were much more likely to indicate that their female counterparts were responsible for those chores. Both H1 and H2 were supported across models (see Figure 1). When we explored the interaction terms in Block 5, there were few significant effects. As can be seen in Table 2, the interaction terms were overwhelmingly nonsignificant, suggesting that the linear effect that sex has on the prediction of chore performance was similar across all religious affiliations. Rather than being more inclined to egalitarianism, atheists and other secular groups tended to demonstrate a *similar* pattern of sex-based labour performance.

5. Conclusions

While there is a tendency to view secularism as promoting egalitarianism and as being progressive, this may be an optimistic assessment. With respect to chore performance in the current study, the same-sex-based division of labour existed even within nonreligious individuals. While religion may contribute to sexism in some form, we would tentatively conclude that the sex-based discrepancies in labour performance are more likely to be the product of a broader structural sexism and not a narrower religious sexism.

Figure 1. Sex Predicting Personal Responsibility for Chores.



Note. All models controlled for age, marital status, education, income, region, minority status, children, employment status of partner, employment status of respondent, education of partner, immigration status, language, religious attendance, prayer, religiosity, and religious affiliation.
 Note. Odds ratios less than 1.00 indicate that females were more likely to be in that category. Odds ratios greater than 1.00 indicate that males were more likely to be in that category.

Table 2.

Sex * Religion Interaction Terms Predicting Responsibility for Chores.

	Relative Risk Ratios [95% Confidence Intervals]			
	Meal Preparation	Washing Dishes	General Housework	Laundry
Egalitarian (Base)				
Respondent				
Constant	0.85 [0.44, 1.65]	1.23 [0.65, 2.33]	0.58 [0.30, 1.12]	1.28 [0.64, 2.56]
Sex	0.57 [0.30, 1.10]	0.48 [0.26, 0.90] *	0.27 [0.14, 0.53] ***	0.11 [0.05, 0.24] ***
RomanCath * Sex	0.30 [0.15, 0.60] **	0.92 [0.48, 1.77]	0.65 [0.32, 1.30]	0.96 [0.42, 2.22]
Protestant * Sex	0.28 [0.12, 0.67] **	1.13 [0.52, 2.47]	0.54 [0.22, 1.29]	0.98 [0.36, 2.67]
Anglican * Sex	0.48 [0.20, 1.16]	1.15 [0.51, 2.61]	0.84 [0.33, 2.09]	1.19 [0.43, 3.29]
Baptist * Sex	0.21 [0.06, 0.76] *	1.72 [0.58, 5.09]	0.97 [0.32, 2.91]	2.06 [0.49, 8.63]
Christian * Sex	0.34 [0.15, 0.79] *	1.20 [0.57, 2.53]	0.80 [0.36, 1.79]	1.18 [0.45, 3.10]
Lutheran * Sex	0.31 [0.08, 1.24]	0.40 [0.12, 1.32]	0.58 [0.14, 2.38]	1.39 [0.30, 6.57]
GospPen * Sex	0.13 [0.03, 0.57] **	1.84 [0.45, 7.54]	0.14 [0.03, 0.77] *	2.06 [0.34, 12.49]
FreeChuPres * Sex	0.25 [0.06, 1.08]	0.71 [0.21, 2.39]	0.52 [0.12, 2.24]	0.84 [0.16, 4.35]
United * Sex	0.44 [0.19, 1.02]	0.56 [0.25, 1.26]	0.38 [0.16, 0.91] *	0.64 [0.21, 1.96]
Jewish * Sex	0.27 [0.06, 1.22]	0.73 [0.21, 2.54]	1.23 [0.31, 4.93]	1.67 [0.38, 7.30]
Hindu * Sex	0.07 [0.01, 0.41] **	1.07 [0.34, 3.41]	1.04 [0.32, 3.33]	1.73 [0.46, 6.60]
Muslim * Sex	0.06 [0.01, 0.27] ***	0.30 [0.10, 0.89] *	0.47 [0.16, 1.39]	1.79 [0.54, 5.96]
Agnostic * Sex	0.94 [0.30, 2.90]	2.37 [0.74, 7.58]	0.81 [0.22, 2.93]	1.35 [0.30, 6.02]
Nones * Sex	0.59 [0.29, 1.23]	1.19 [0.59, 2.37]	0.83 [0.40, 1.73]	1.63 [0.68, 3.90]
Respondent's Partner				
Constant	0.09 [0.04, 0.20] ***	0.52 [0.24, 1.13]	0.11 [0.04, 0.28] ***	0.15 [0.06, 0.38] ***
Sex	4.89 [2.29, 10.41] ***	0.96 [0.46, 2.00]	2.41 [1.02, 5.67] *	5.57 [2.34, 13.26] ***
RomanCath * Sex	0.89 [0.40, 1.97]	1.27 [0.59, 2.72]	2.20 [0.90, 5.39]	1.41 [0.57, 3.48]
Protestant * Sex	1.17 [0.44, 3.12]	2.64 [1.01, 6.89] *	3.41 [0.94, 12.45]	1.33 [0.43, 4.14]
Anglican * Sex	0.86 [0.33, 2.26]	1.14 [0.45, 2.90]	1.88 [0.62, 5.76]	1.38 [0.45, 4.22]
Baptist * Sex	0.81 [0.21, 3.11]	3.45 [1.08, 10.97] *	1.50 [0.39, 5.82]	1.01 [0.27, 3.78]
Christian * Sex	1.25 [0.50, 3.13]	1.29 [0.54, 3.07]	1.83 [0.66, 5.12]	0.89 [0.32, 2.48]
Lutheran * Sex	1.36 [0.29, 6.31]	2.48 [0.68, 9.09]	3.39 [0.63, 18.28]	2.19 [0.32, 14.97]
GospPen * Sex	0.22 [0.03, 1.74]	1.91 [0.39, 9.46]	3.49 [0.43, 28.11]	2.62 [0.34, 20.12]
FreeChuPres * Sex	0.71 [0.16, 3.16]	2.66 [0.63, 11.22]	5.94 [0.88, 40.04]	1.93 [0.35, 10.50]
United * Sex	0.48 [0.18, 1.22]	1.02 [0.41, 2.54]	1.83 [0.58, 5.81]	0.93 [0.31, 2.78]
Jewish * Sex	0.44 [0.10, 1.93]	0.77 [0.18, 3.38]	2.02 [0.34, 11.95]	0.48 [0.10, 2.28]
Hindu * Sex	1.64 [0.27, 9.97]	2.50 [0.68, 9.24]	0.39 [0.10, 1.57]	0.34 [0.09, 1.35]
Muslim * Sex	1.91 [0.41, 8.90]	1.34 [0.42, 4.22]	0.66 [0.18, 2.38]	0.53 [0.14, 1.95]
Agnostic * Sex	1.11 [0.21, 5.93]	0.60 [0.16, 2.21]	0.74 [0.15, 3.58]	2.71 [0.41, 18.02]
Nones * Sex	0.71 [0.31, 1.65]	0.99 [0.44, 2.22]	1.32 [0.51, 3.40]	0.69 [0.27, 1.77]

Note. All models controlled for age, marital status, education, income, region, minority status, children, employment status of partner, employment status of respondent, education of partner, immigration status, language, religious attendance, prayer, religiosity, and religious affiliation.

* p < .05, ** p < .01, *** p < .001

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