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Housework Division: Comparing men and women in married, cohabiting and same-gender relationships in Japan

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Abstract

This paper presents the results of a preliminary analysis from a larger project exploring the everyday lives of men and women in different-gender (marital or cohabiting) and same-gender relationships in Japan and Hong Kong. This preliminary analysis focuses on housework division and its relation to gender, relationship type, and couple income difference in Japan. The results suggest that gender difference in housework share is prominent among married couples while both men and women in same-gender relationships tend to be similar in being relatively more even in their share of housework with their partners. Further, couple income difference is found to be associated with housework division across all relationship types. The preliminary results provide clues and direction for more thorough multivariate analyses on the data.

Keywords: same-sex partnership, gay couples, lesbian couples

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Introduction

Since Blood and Wolfe's *Husbands and wives: The dynamics of family living* was published in 1960, a lot of research has been conducted on housework division not only in the United States, but all over the world. Different-sex/gender² (heterosexual) couples have constituted the target of most of these studies. However, as same-sex/gender partnerships become more visible and legalized in an increasing number of countries, more attention is being paid to the "mundane everyday life" of these couples. Core to such "mundane every life" is the division of household tasks.

Many of the studies conducted so far on have found a more equal division of housework among same-gender couples, as compared to extant studies on different-gender couples. The early works are generally ethnographic studies, which frequently provide textured understanding not only of housework division but also the nature of housework and dynamics of the relationship between the same-gender couples (for example, Carrington, 1999; Dunne, 1998). However, the sample size is inevitably limited, and there is no direct comparison with different-gender couples in the same study. More recent studies tend to use bigger samples of same-gender couples and include other-gender couples as well.

To add to this current growing literature, we undertook what we believe is the first of its kind in the field in Japan: an analysis using quantitative data to compare men and women in different-gender (marital and cohabiting relationships) and same-gender relationships with respect to various aspects of "everyday living." In this paper, we will report on a preliminary analysis of the quantitative data on how cohabiting same-gender couples divide housework and whether income differences matter for the housework division.

Background to the current study

While we mentioned Blood and Wolfe's study as a classic in the introduction, it was Blumstein and Schwartz's *American couples* that laid the foundation for the current study. Blumstein and Schwartz (1983) conducted a study that included face-to-face interviews with 300 couples and

² We use "same-sex" and "same-gender" interchangeably in this paper. The word "sex" was more commonly used in earlier studies, but in recent years, there is a tendency to use "same-gender" and "different-gender" to represent couples previously referred to as same-sex couples and heterosexual couples, in recognition of one's gender identity rather than assigned sex at birth as the more appropriate criterion to categorize relationships.

a survey based on a paper-and-pencil 38-page questionnaire on a sample of close to 6000 couples that included gay men, lesbians, and heterosexuals in cohabiting and married relationships. They examined power dynamics in the relationships, and the comprehensive questionnaire included items related to housework division. The analysis led to the conclusion that relationships among same-sex/gender couples are more egalitarian than different-gender couples.

Other recent studies also compare the division of work between different-gender and same-gender couples, and we will review a selected few here. In a study of couple relationships, Solomon and collaborators compared same-sex couples in civil unions in Vermont, U.S.A., and those who were not in civil unions, as well as married heterosexual couples from among the same-sex couples' siblings on various aspects of their relationship that included housework division (Solomon et al., 2005). The analysis of 985 individuals revealed that sexual orientation was a stronger predictor of the division of housework than was income difference within couples, and that heterosexual couples showed a more traditional division of labor than same-sex couples.

Focusing on gay father families, Tornello and collaborators examined the effects of relative resources, time, and life course on the division of housework and childcare (Tornello et al., 2015). They found in a sample of 511 self-described gay fathers in the United States that while time constraint theory and an aspect of life course theory were supported, the gay fathers expressed a desire for and engaged in the practice of egalitarian division of labor in the family.

Using a US sample of same-sex couples, Civettini (2015) explored if gender performance, time availability and/or relative resources accounted for inequities in the division of housework. She found that "stereotypical femininity" was positively associated with more routine housework and that work hours were inversely related to share in housework. In a further analysis of the data using the concept of "non-normative gender display," Civettini (2016) found that among same-sex couples, women expressing higher levels of stereotypically masculine traits did a smaller share of housework while men with higher levels of stereotypically feminine traits showed an opposite pattern of taking on a greater share of housework. In a nationally representative survey experiment of over 1000 respondents in the US, however, Doan and Quadlin (2019) found that partners' gender expression only moderately affected the housework assignments, in contrast to their heterosexual counterparts, leading the authors to conclude that "gender" per se is the key factor determining housework division.

Paying attention to the macro-context of gender egalitarianism, van der Vleuten and collaborators compared male and female same-sex couples with respect to paid labor and the

division of housework using data compiled from national surveys conducted in six Western European countries and Australia with a sample size of 723. Their analysis revealed that female same-sex couples in all countries divided their housework more equally than male same-sex couples, but this gender difference was smaller in less egalitarian countries in their sample.

This brief review of recent studies shows that focusing on or including same-sex couples in the research of housework division makes it possible to isolate the place of gender in housework division. Reczek (2020) concluded from a review of all relevant articles published in the *Journal of Marriage and the Family* between 2010 and 2020 that research on same-gender couples raise questions about the “gendered assumption of men and women as opposites” in research on the division of housework of heterosexual couples to date, and noted also that same-gender couples are more likely to have an egalitarian division of housework than heterosexual couples.

Among studies of same-gender couples in Japan are qualitative studies of housework division, including Kamiya (2017)’s study of gay couples and Kamano (2009)’s study of lesbian couples. Kamiya (2017) focused on how housework serves to maintain intimacy between partners and found that gay couples in his sample did share housework equally. Likewise, Kamano (2009) found that lesbian couples in her sample tended to be more egalitarian in their share of housework compared to extant findings on heterosexual couples. There are almost no quantitative studies with a large sample of same-gender couples in Japan to date. There are three related studies focusing on having children, including the Nijiro Child-rearing Survey conducted by Nijiro Diversity, a non-profit organization, in 2019; the Kodomap Internet Survey conducted in 2021; and a JSPS funded survey conducted in 2020 on LGBTQ individuals’ circumstances, attitudes and family formation needs. Some studies on LGBT included questions on relationship status but none probed details about the relationships (for example, NHK, 2015). Our quantitative study on same-sex relationships aims to fill this gap in the field in Japan.

Methodology

Sample

We conducted an internet survey through a major survey company in Japan.³ Using a short screening questionnaire, we targeted those between 20 and 69 years of age who are living with

³ This study has been approved by the Ethics Advisory Committee, Faculty of Global and Interdisciplinary Studies, Hosei University, on March 14, 2022.

a partner at least 5 days a week. To compare the relationship dynamics of those in same-gender relationships with those in other types of relationships, we aimed to obtain 500 responses for each of the following six groups: (1) married men, (2) married women, (3) cohabitating men, (4) cohabitating women, (5) men in same-gender relationships, (6) women in same-gender relationships. Groups (1) to (4) are individuals in different-gender relationships, and we tried to collect equal numbers of responses for each of the following age groups: 20s, 30s, 40s, 50s, and 60s.

To identify the respondents by type of relationship, we used a few screening questions. We first asked if they have a spouse or a partner, followed by how many days they stay together in a week (from almost every day to none). We also asked their gender identity and their partner's gender as seen by the respondent (since one does not necessarily know the partner's gender identity). The classification is represented in Table 1.

Table 1: Classification of relationships from screening questions

Q1: Married, cohabiting or partnered	Q2: Respondent's gender identity	Q3: Partner's gender (as recognized by respondent)	Classified as:
Have a spouse (registered)	Man	Woman	Married man
	Woman	Man	Married woman
Cohabiting (not registered)	Man	Woman	Cohabiting Man
	Woman	Man	Cohabiting Woman
Have a partner	Man	Man	Man in same-gender relationships
	Woman	Woman	Woman in same-gender relationship

As a result, we obtained a total of 3092 respondents. The breakdown is as follows.

Table 2a: Number of respondents, by gender/relationship type and age group

Age	Married men	Married women	Cohabiting men	Cohabiting women	Men in same-gender relationships	Women in same-gender relationships	Total
20 – 29	103	103	19	103	36	60	424
30 – 39	103	103	117	103	138	143	707
40 – 49	103	103	175	103	135	127	746
50 – 59	103	103	103	103	126	116	654
60 – 69	103	103	103	103	80	69	561
Total	515	515	517	515	515	515	3092

Figure 1: Percentage distribution of respondents' age group, by relationship type



For married men and women, as well as cohabiting women, we managed to obtain responses from more than 100 respondents for each age group. There were few cohabiting men in their 20s, and in the analysis, we had to rely on cohabiting men in other age groups. We did not use the same criterion of distribution by age group for same-gender couples, and the somewhat skewed distribution by age group is shown in Table 2b. Table 2a: there are relatively fewer respondents in their 20s and 60s, and more in their 30s and 40s.

Table 2b: Average age of respondents, by gender and relationship type

Gender/Relationship type	Average age
Married men	45.37
Married women	44.93
Cohabiting men	47.99
Cohabiting women	44.59
Men in same-gender relationships	46.03
Women in same-gender relationships	44.68
Total	45.60

Survey instrument

In constructing our survey instrument, we adopted many items from Blumstein and Schwartz (1983)'s pioneering study. Despite that their study was conducted in the 1970s, the instrument they developed are not only relevant today, but they are also still adopted by other researchers studying couple relationships (see, for example, Rothblum et al., 2020). To these items, we added several questions that are specific to the Japanese context today.

Our instrument included items on housework division, finance division, communication, conflict, satisfaction, emotional work, ideas about having children, relationship with parents, siblings, and friends, work, leisure, infidelity, attitudes toward gender and family, thoughts about partnership recognition, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation and gender identity, and so on. In this paper, we report on the findings related to housework division. The question we used to tap housework division is shown as follows:

Who does each of these housework and childcare tasks more often, you or your <husband/wife/partner>?

1. Repairing the home and things around the house
2. Doing the dishes
3. Cooking the evening meal
4. Cleaning the house
5. Doing the laundry
6. Arranging for home repairs, contacting and negotiating with real estate agents
7. Cleaning the bathroom
8. Caring for pets
9. Sorting garbage and getting it ready for disposal
10. Doing grocery shopping
11. Serving drinks for guests
12. Keeping track of supplies of food and daily necessities

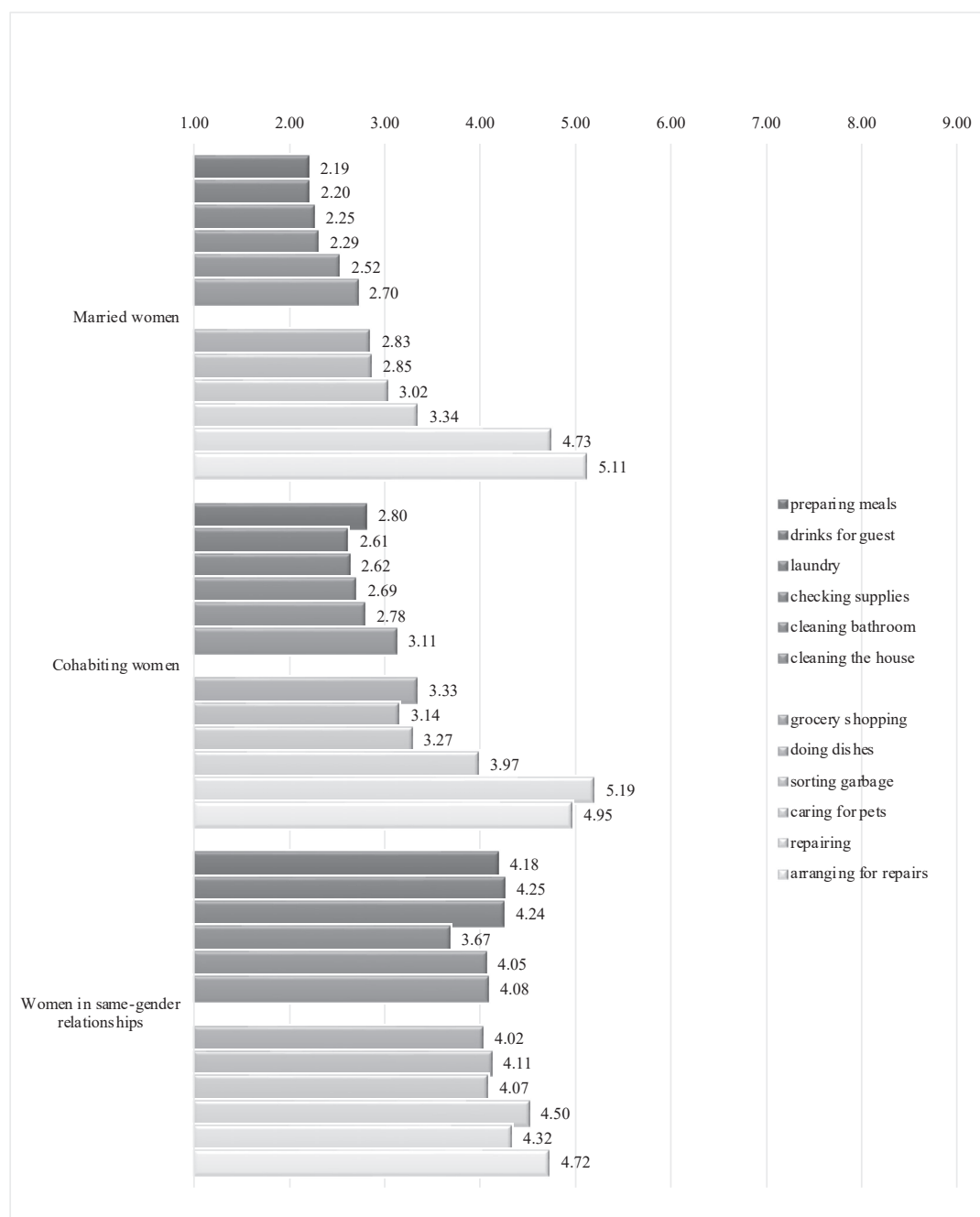
We asked about 12 household tasks, with a 9-point scale as a response option, from 1 (I do this all of the time) to 9 (partner does this all of the time), with 5 representing an equal division (we do this equally). These 12 household tasks included the tasks usually associated with housework, such as cooking and doing the dishes, as well as some of the more invisible tasks like being aware of the stocks of food and daily necessities. Almost all of these tasks are relevant

cross-nationally, but we also included items like “sorting garbage and getting it ready to be taken out” which are specific to and important in the Japanese context.

Findings

As noted earlier, we compare between men and women, and among relationship types. We calculated the average score for each group from the 9-point scale, and the lower the score, the more the respondents do a particular household task. The results for women respondents in different relationship types are shown in Figure 2.

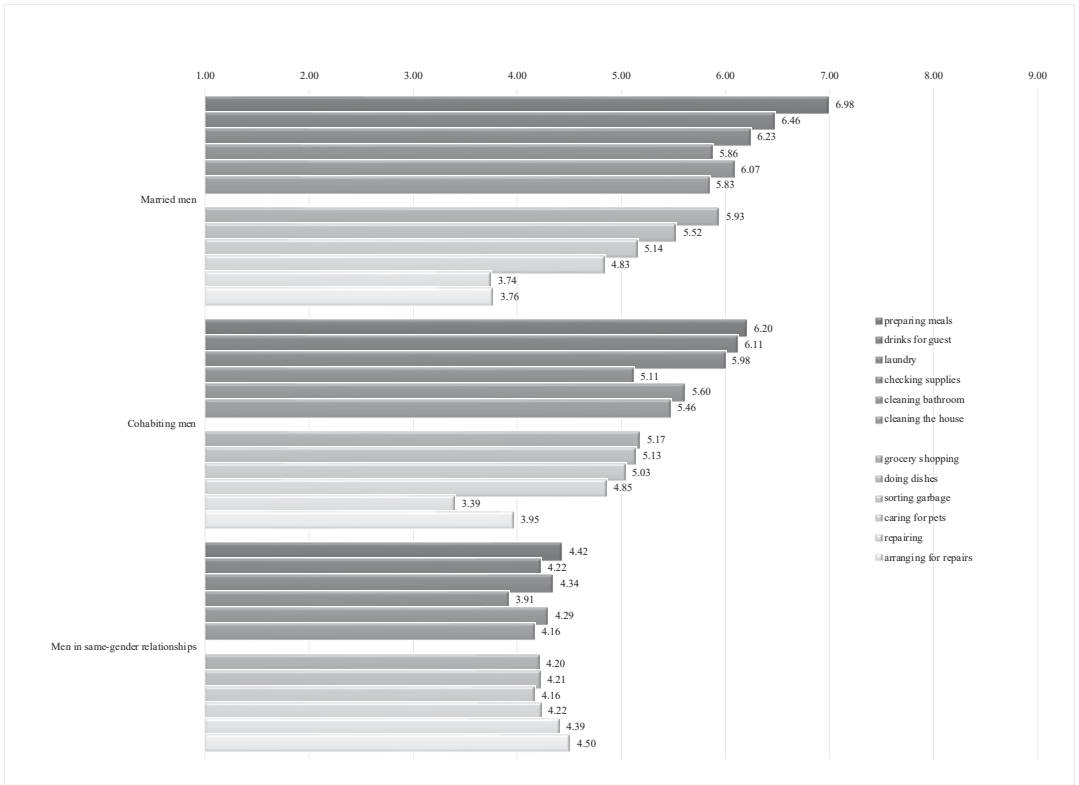
Figure 2: Housework division (mean scores): Women



Overall, the scores are lowest for married women, and highest (and closest to 5) for women in same-gender relationships, with scores of cohabiting women in different-gender relationships

in between these two groups. The overall pattern indicates that married women do more housework than their spouses while women in same-gender relationships tend to share housework equally with their partners. It can also be seen from Figure 1 that for both groups of women in different gender relationships, “repairing the home and things around the house” and “arranging for home repairs, contacting and negotiating with real estate agents” are tasks they share with their partners. This difference among tasks is not found among women in same-gender relationships.

Figure 3: Housework division (mean scores): Men



The pattern observed here for men is the reverse of that observed for women in different-gender relationships, while the scores for men in same-gender relationships are similar to those for their women counterparts. Married men and cohabiting men do less housework than their spouses/partners, except for the two tasks related to repairing the home and things around the house and arranging for home repairs and so on. The scores for men in same-gender

relationships range between 3.9 and 4.5, indicating a rather more even sharing of household tasks with their partners.

Among the 12 tasks, we will focus on three common tasks, namely, repairing the home and things around the house, cleaning the house, and cooking the evening meal, for a closer analysis. Figure 4 shows the results of “repairing the home and things around the house”.

Figure 4: Repairing the home and things around the house

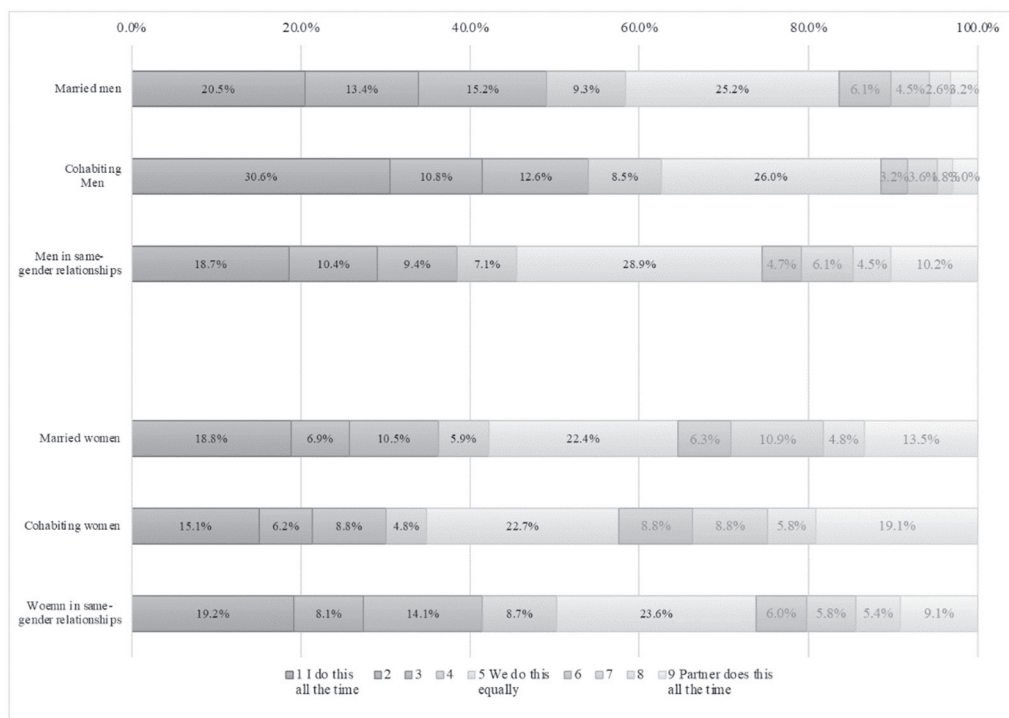
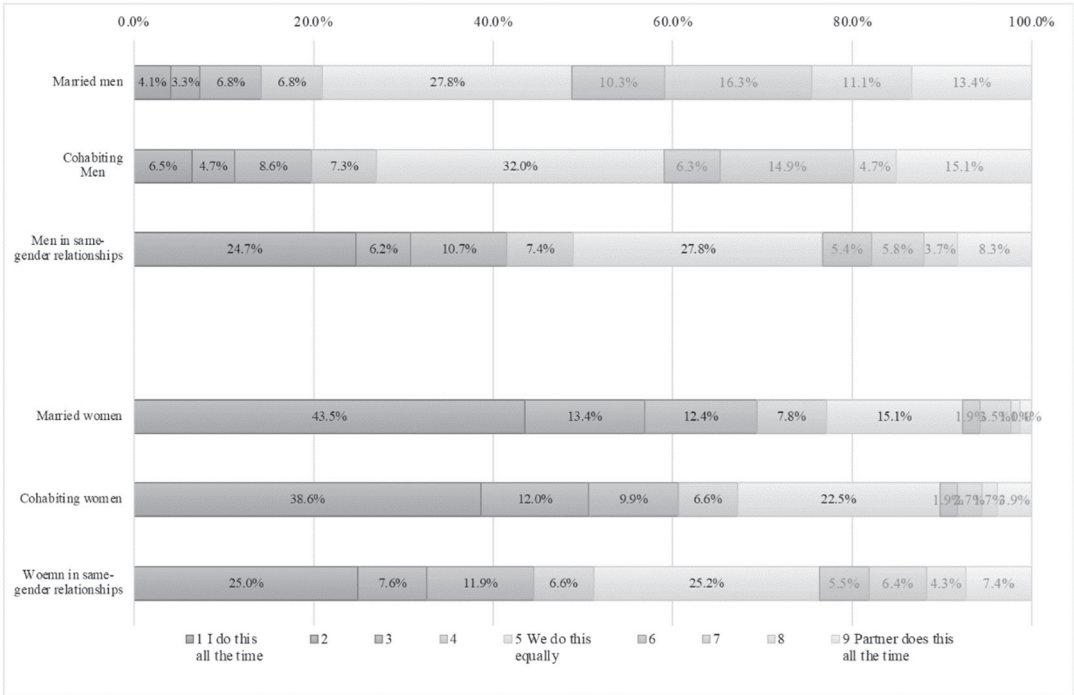
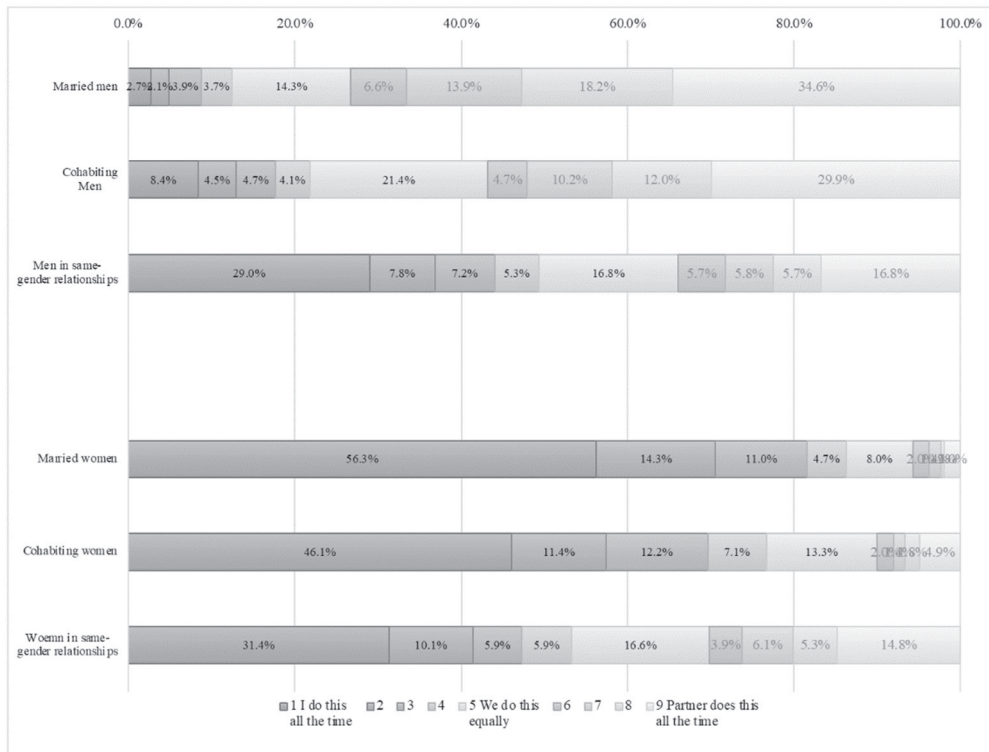


Figure 4 shows the actual breakdown of responses for each response from 1 to 9. The percentage shown is a sum of those who answered 1, 2, 3 and 4, which indicates that the respondent is doing more than the partner. Across all relationship types, about 20% to 30% of respondents reported that they and their partners did repair work at about the same rate. However, about 60% of married and cohabitating men said that they did repair work more than their spouses or partners. On the other hand, a similar pattern was found between men and women in same-gender relationships.

Figure 5: Cleaning the house



The difference among relationship types is more obvious with respect to the task of cleaning the house, as presented in Figure 5. For instance, for women, there is a 10-point difference between the married and the cohabiting in this task, showing that married women do cleaning more than cohabiting women at home compared to their partners. Similarly, the difference between men and women is also obvious: only 21% of married men reported taking up cleaning more than their spouses, while 77% of married women reported likewise. On the other hand, men and women in same-gender relationships showed a very similar pattern of response across the categories.

Figure 6: Cooking the evening meal

The last task we look into is the everyday task of cooking the evening meal. As shown in Figure 6, the difference between relationship types and that between men and women are most obvious with respect to this task, compared to the other two tasks examined earlier. Eighty-six percent of married women reported cooking the evening meal all the time while only 13% of married men said so. Even among cohabiting couples, 44% of women reported taking on this task all the time compared to 8.4% of cohabiting men who reported similarly. Again, men and women in same-gender relationships show a very similar pattern, with about 30% reporting cooking the evening meal all the time, about 15% reporting their partners cooking all the time, and 17% or so reporting sharing this task evenly with partners.

The above analysis of simple percentage distribution shows that both gender and relationship type are important in understanding the division of housework. A key theory explaining the division of housework argues that differences in resources determine the relative amount of housework one does. One indicator of the resources that one brings to a relationship

is income. We will begin with looking at the difference in income in couples. Figure 7a shows respondent's income and Figure 7b the partner's income, both by relationship type.

Figure 7a: Respondent's income

Respondent's income	Married men	Married women	Cohabiting men	Cohabiting women	Men in same-gender relationships	Women in same-gender relationships	Total
1 no income	1.7%	26.2%	5.2%	17.7%	15.5%	14.6%	13.5%
2 less than ¥1m	1.4%	30.5%	6.6%	18.4%	15.0%	15.9%	14.6%
3 ¥1m - 1.99m	2.9%	12.8%	7.9%	19.6%	10.5%	14.0%	11.3%
4 ¥2m - 2.99m	7.2%	11.5%	11.0%	15.5%	7.6%	11.8%	10.8%
5 ¥3m - 3.99m	14.4%	7.0%	14.1%	10.9%	9.3%	10.3%	11.0%
6 ¥4m - 4.99m	19.0%	3.5%	17.2%	5.2%	11.5%	8.9%	10.9%
7 ¥5m - 5.99m	15.3%	1.6%	8.9%	2.1%	5.6%	4.9%	6.4%
8 ¥6m - 6.99m	11.5%	1.0%	5.8%	1.0%	3.7%	4.9%	4.6%
9 ¥7m - 7.99m	4.5%	0.8%	5.0%	0.8%	4.5%	3.3%	3.1%
10 ¥8m - 8.99m	4.5%	0.2%	2.3%	0.2%	2.3%	1.6%	1.8%
11 ¥9m - 9.99m	3.5%	0.4%	2.7%		1.9%	1.6%	1.7%
12 ¥10m - 10.99m	1.9%		1.0%		1.2%	0.6%	0.8%
13 ¥11m - 11.99m	1.2%		0.6%		0.8%	0.2%	0.5%
14 ¥12m - 12.99m	1.7%				0.2%		0.3%
15 ¥13m - 13.99m	0.4%		0.4%			0.2%	0.2%
16 ¥14m - 14.99m	0.6%		0.4%		0.2%		0.2%
17 ¥15m - 15.99m			0.4%		0.4%		0.1%
19 ¥17m - 17.99m	0.6%		0.4%		1.0%	0.4%	0.4%
20 over ¥18m	0.4%						0.1%
21 do not want to answer	7.4%	4.7%	10.1%	8.5%	8.9%	7.0%	7.8%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 7b: Partner's income

Partner's income	Married men	Married women	Cohabiting men	Cohabiting women	Men in same-gender relationships	Women in same-gender relationships	Total
1 no income	18.6%	1.4%	12.6%	4.7%	11.8%	7.0%	9.3%
2 less than ¥1m	23.5%	2.9%	13.3%	5.0%	9.5%	11.1%	10.9%
3 ¥1m - 1.99m	17.7%	4.7%	18.0%	11.3%	12.6%	10.3%	12.4%
4 ¥2m - 2.99m	11.7%	10.5%	12.8%	14.2%	12.2%	10.7%	12.0%
5 ¥3m - 3.99m	9.1%	14.6%	13.5%	15.5%	10.7%	12.8%	12.7%
6 ¥4m - 4.99m	6.6%	19.8%	7.2%	11.1%	8.3%	12.6%	10.9%
7 ¥5m - 5.99m	2.1%	9.1%	4.4%	5.2%	6.6%	6.2%	5.6%
8 ¥6m - 6.99m	1.4%	9.7%	1.4%	5.8%	5.8%	5.0%	4.9%
9 ¥7m - 7.99m	0.6%	5.0%	1.0%	3.5%	3.7%	3.7%	2.9%
10 ¥8m - 8.99m	0.6%	3.3%	1.2%	0.8%	1.2%	2.5%	1.6%
11 ¥9m - 9.99m	0.4%	1.6%	0.4%	1.9%	0.8%	0.4%	0.9%
12 ¥10m - 10.99m		1.4%		0.6%	1.0%	1.0%	0.6%
13 ¥11m - 11.99m		0.8%	0.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.6%	0.5%
14 ¥12m - 12.99m		0.2%	0.4%	0.4%	0.2%	0.2%	0.2%
15 ¥13m - 13.99m		0.2%					0.0%
16 ¥14m - 14.99m	0.2%	0.6%	0.2%	0.4%		0.2%	0.3%
17 ¥15m - 15.99m		0.2%					0.0%
18 ¥16m - 16.99m		0.2%				0.6%	0.1%
19 ¥17m - 17.99m			0.4%		0.6%	0.2%	0.2%
20 over ¥18m				0.2%			0.0%
21 do not want to answer	7.6%	14.0%	13.0%	18.8%	14.6%	15.0%	13.8%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Figure 7a shows that among the married, there is a big difference in income between men and women. For those cohabiting, the difference is smaller but still noticeable. For those in same-gender relationships, there is almost no difference in income. When one pays attention to the level of income, however, one can see that men in same-gender relationships have lower income than those in different-gender relationships, whether married or cohabiting. In contrast, women in same-gender relationships have somewhat higher income than women married to or

cohabiting with a male partner. Figure 7b corroborates the data presented in Figure 7a in that for the married and the cohabiting, the pattern of the partner's income reverses that of the respondent's income reported in Figure 7a.

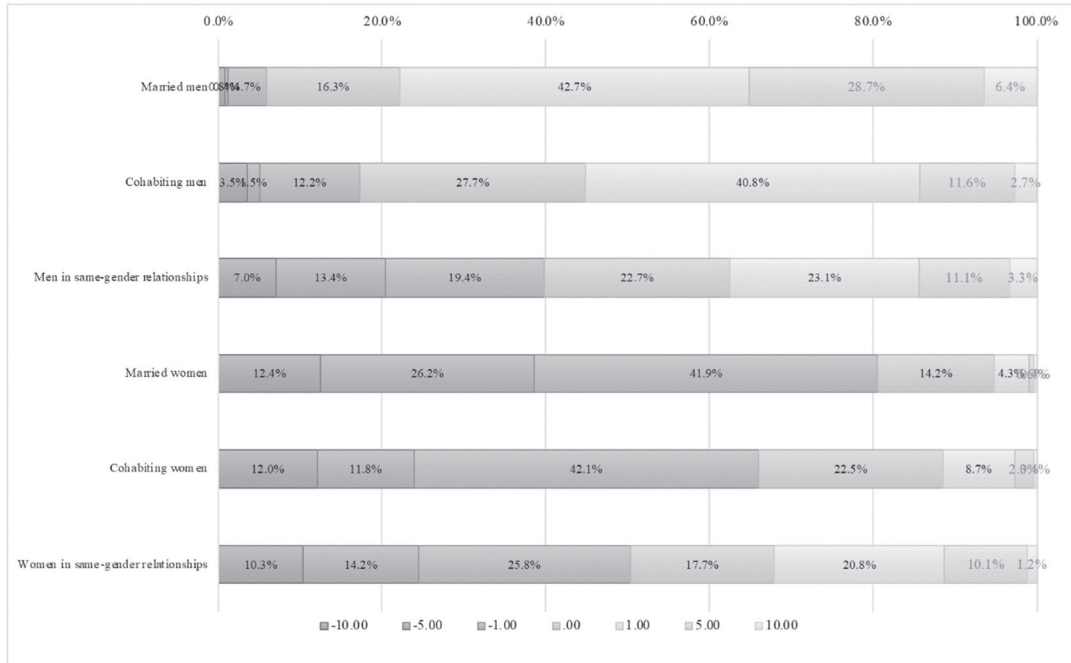
To explore how income connects to housework distribution, we calculated the difference in income between the respondent and that of the partner's, using the level of income as a proxy, and then recoded the difference as shown in Table 3. A negative number indicates that the respondent's income is lower than that of the partner's, a positive number indicates that the respondent's income is higher than that of the partner's, and 0 indicates parity. A bigger number indicates a bigger difference, and a smaller number, a smaller difference.

Table 3: Recoding of difference in income between respondent and partner

Respondent's income level minus partner's income level	Difference coded as	Number of cases
-20 to -10	-10	237
-9 to -5	-5	348
-4 to -1	-1	753
0	0	624
1 to 4	1	724
5 to 9	5	332
10 to 20	10	237

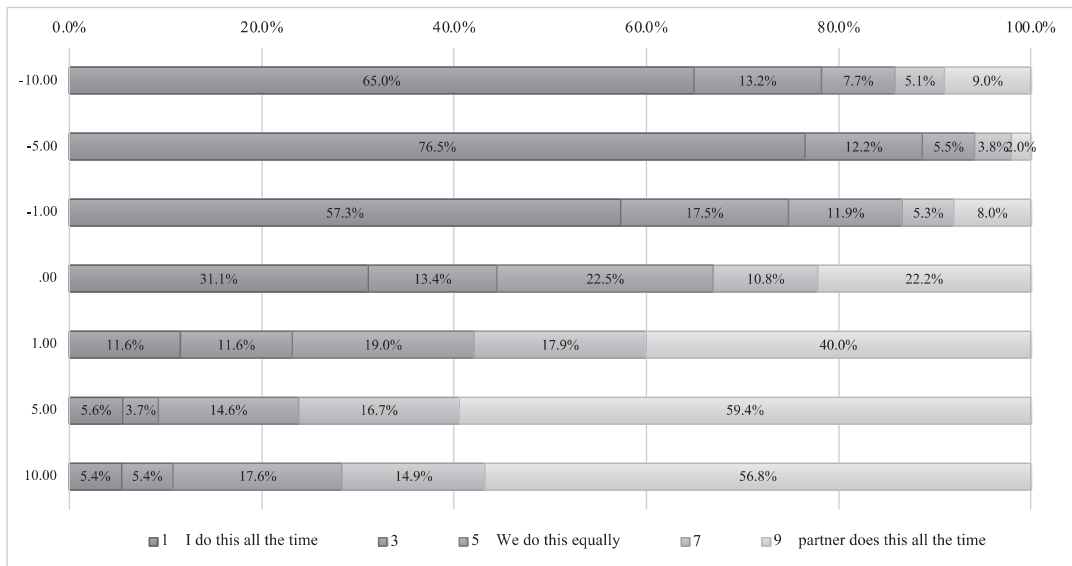
Figure 8 shows the recoded respondent-partner income difference by relationship type.

Figure 8: Level of income difference, by gender and relationship type



Married men and cohabiting men tend to have higher income than their spouses/partners, as indicated by higher percentage of these respondents with positive numbers of 1, 5 or 10 capturing the income gap. In contrast, married women and cohabiting women tend to have lower income than their spouses/partners. Such tendencies are not observed among men and women in same-gender relationships. According to relative resource theory, such income differences, indicating differences in resources, might impact the division of housework. Considering the clear difference by gender and relationship type observed with respect to the task of cooking the evening meal, we will use that task as a case to explore the connection between income difference and housework division.

Figure 9: Division of cooking the evening meal, by level of income difference for all relationship types



The graph here shows the division of cooking the evening meal for all respondents by difference in income. When the respondent's income is lower than that of the partner's, the respondent tends to cook all or most of the time. On the other hand, when the respondent's income level is higher than that of the partner's, the partner tends to do more. Considering the pattern by relationship type, we focus on married couples and those in same-gender relationships. Figures 10a and 10b show the pattern for married men and women.

Figure 10a: Division of cooking the evening meal, by level of income difference for married men and women

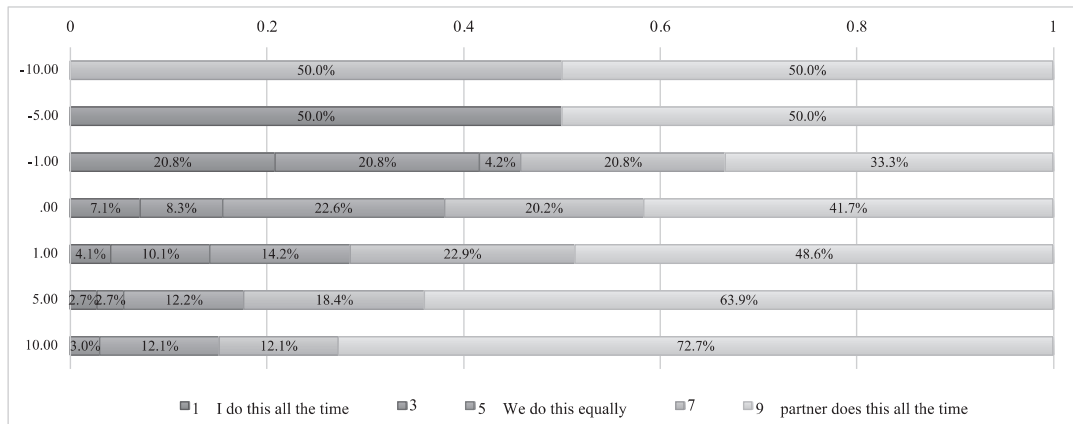


Figure 10b: Division of cooking the evening meal, by level of income difference for married women



The graphs show that for men whose partner's income is more than 9 levels higher, and for women whose partner's income is 9 levels lower, there is almost a perfect relationship between income difference and the division of cooking, but we should note that there are only a few cases in each of these two categories. Overall, the percentage of married men who reported that their partners cook all the time is higher for those with higher income vis-à-vis their spouses.

Figure 11a: Division of cooking the evening meal, by level of income difference for men in same-gender relationships

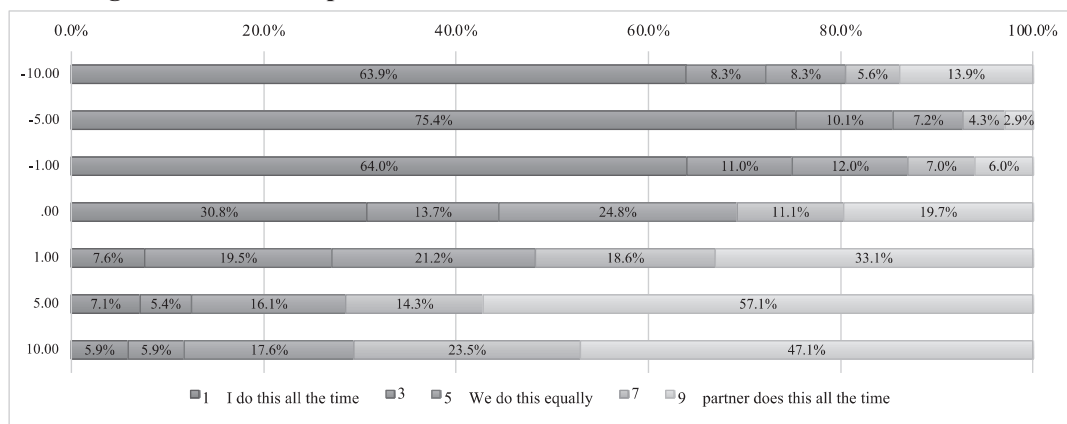
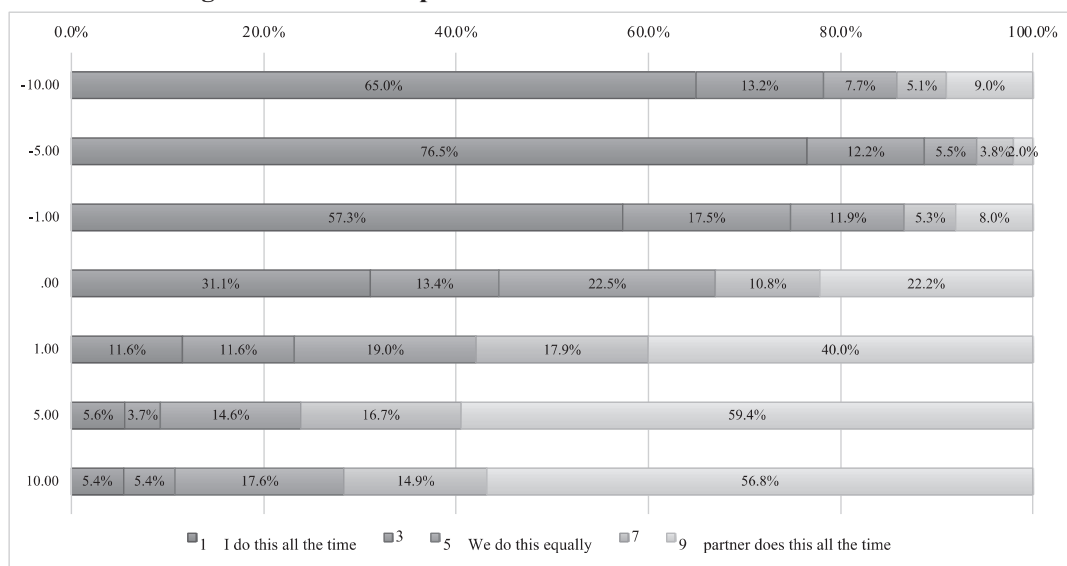


Figure 11b: Division of cooking the evening meal, by level of income difference for women in same-gender relationships



We see the same relationship between the level of income difference and division of cooking the evening meal (Figures 11a and 11b). A greater proportion for those with a higher relative income have their partners cook evening meals more often, compared to those with a lower relative income.

Discussion and Conclusion

In this preliminary analysis, we compared the housework division by gender and relationship type, and explored how income difference in the couples might be associated with housework division. We found that men and women in same-gender relationships shared housework more evenly than married or cohabiting men and women. The most uneven division was seen among the married, and it could also be seen to a lesser extent among the cohabiting as well. Further, we found a clear similarity in housework division between men and women in same-gender relationships. Focusing on the task of cooking the evening meal, we found an association between the level of income difference and division of the task, and that this association is found not only among married men and women, but also among men and women in same-gender relationships.

The preliminary analysis provides a glimpse of the significance of gender in housework division in different-gender relationships, especially in legally sanctioned relationships. This finding, together with the finding of a relatively even sharing of housework among men and women in same-gender relationships, lend some credence to the claim that the heteronormative marriage institution has at its foundation gendered expectations for men and women and the assumption of a gendered division of labor. This has wider implications for the arguments for and against same-gender marriage in how it might change or reinforce the marriage institution and gender equality. Obviously, a more thorough analysis beyond what we did in this preliminary report is necessary to help us make larger theoretical sense of the empirical patterns.

Similarly, while we managed to find some support for income difference and division of housework, we focused only on cooking the evening meal. Further, income difference can also be associated with time availability, which might be the factor accounting for the difference in housework division, rather than the “resource” of income per se.

Going beyond the preliminary analysis, we aim at a more thorough and comprehensive analysis that includes first, examining the relationship between housework division and various factors stipulated in theories explaining housework division and couple power dynamics, including time availability, work hours, employment status, level of education, attitudes towards gender issues, and so on. Second, despite the pioneering nature of this research in the context of Japan, the extant literature accumulated over a long period of time in the United States and other countries has provided a strong set of findings and theories from which to derive hypotheses that we can test and extend to comparing relationship types together with other

factors that have been found to influence housework division. We have presented only frequency distributions in this preliminary analysis, but we plan to undertake multivariate analysis to consider the effects of and the relationships among multiple factors. Last, we have looked only at a few of the 12 tasks in the question on housework division. In the fuller analysis, we will consider the overall housework division. In addition to these points related directly to the analysis, it would be instructive to probe the respondents' perception of the nature and fairness of the division of housework, including their thoughts on the current theories explaining housework division.

The current study on housework division is part of a larger project on couple relationships. Beyond a more thorough analysis of housework division, there is still much to do to understand how housework division relates to other aspects of couple relationships, and how this might differ among relationship types. That will be our larger goal ahead.

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