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Household responsibilities in the family of origin: Relations with self-efficacy in young adulthood

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ABSTRACT

Undergraduate students ($N = 280$, M age = 20.6 years) completed self-report measures of general and work self-efficacy, quality of relationships with parents, and household responsibilities while growing up. Results indicate positive correlations between household responsibilities (housework chores, running errands) and general and work self-efficacy; and between quality of relationships with parents and self-efficacy. Age at beginning self-care and housework tasks are predictive of general self-efficacy for women, and housework and age at beginning chores are predictive of women's work self-efficacy; for men, running errands predicts greater general and work self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is predicted by household responsibilities even when relationships with parents are considered. Potential processes underlying relations between household responsibilities and self-efficacy development are discussed.

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1. Introduction

Much research shows that self-efficacy – beliefs about one's competence, capabilities, and effectiveness – affects motivation and persistence in performance (Bandura, 1997), and is positively associated with psychological health (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranelli, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003). Although theorists have argued that experiences within the family of origin, including relationships with parents, are meaningful for self-efficacy development (Brown, 1998; Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Jackson & Tein, 1998; Schneewind, 1995), very little research has examined family processes in relation to self-efficacy in young adulthood (Riggio & Desrochers, 2006). Because they represent the first types of “work” behavior most people engage in, household responsibilities (including chores and caring for others) may be particularly important sources of enactive mastery experiences within the family (Weisner, 2001). This study examines young adults' reports of general and work self-efficacy in relation to their perceptions of quality of relationships with parents and household responsibilities in the family of origin.

1.1. Self-efficacy development

Theorists view self-efficacy as evolving over the life span, with normative social events involved in familial and other roles influ-

ential for development of agency (Bandura, 1997). Direct experiences are the most important information source concerning one's competence for performance of particular tasks and broader domain self-efficacy, which theorists argue is based on a large sampling of life events and composed of information from various related experiences (Woodruff & Cashman, 1993). Bandura (1997) argues that initial efficacy experiences are centered in the family, with parents having overall influence on whether and how children approach new tasks, and research indicates that warm, encouraging family environments (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Webb & Baer, 1995; Werner, 1992) and supportive relationships with parents (Coleman & Karraker, 1997; Kerpelman, Eryigit, & Stephens, 2008) are associated with greater perceptions of self-efficacy in various domains. However, few studies examine experiences within the family and self-efficacy outcomes in young adulthood (Riggio & Desrochers, 2006; Scott & Mallinckrodt, 2005), and relations between perceptions of household responsibilities while growing up and young adults' self-efficacy have not been examined.

1.2. Youth household responsibilities

Theorists describe children's successful performance of household management and self-care tasks as fundamental experiences in building feelings of competence (Weisner, 2001). Family features, including socioeconomic status, affect the number and level of efficacy-promoting influences within the home environment, including by affecting children's roles in household responsibilities

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(Gager, Cooney, & Call, 1999). Bandura (1997) asserts that children's increased household responsibilities in impoverished families play a role in resiliency, with such children actively experiencing success in exerting control over their environment (Werner, 1992). National surveys indicate that children average about 7 h of housework per week (Blair, 1992), contributing about 15% of household work in the United States (Goldscheider & Waite, 1991), including meal preparation, cleaning tasks, running errands, and sibling care (Capizzano, Tout, & Adams, 2000; Weisner & Gallimore, 1977). Most children begin making household contributions on a regular basis by about age 9 years (Munroe, Munroe, & Shimmin, 1984; White & Brinkerhoff, 1981); and girls have more household work than boys (Crouter, Head, Bumpus, & McHale, 2001). Youth in poorer homes, with single mothers, and with employed mothers engage in more chores than youth in wealthier and two-parent families (Blair, 1992; Crouter et al., 2001). While some research suggests that household responsibilities for children and adolescents are associated with somewhat negative outcomes, including less parent–child interaction (Blair, 1992) and “parentification” of children (Jurkovic, 1997), most research indicates positive outcomes for youth, including higher achievement motivation (Smith, 1969); more responsible behavior and stronger nurturance qualities (Munroe et al., 1984); and more concern for others (Grusec, Goodnow, & Cohen, 1996). Outcomes of household work for youth appear to be related to parents' reasons for assigning chores (Goodnow & Lawrence, 2001); youths' beliefs about choosing or being “pushed” into household work (Fuligni, Tseng, & Lam, 1999); and quality of relationships with parents (Romich, 2007).

Self-care (looking after oneself without direct supervision) is another responsibility experience in the family of origin. Kerrebrock and Lewit (1999) found that about 31% of 11- and 12-year olds regularly engage in self-care, with older children and children with single, employed parents engaging in more self-care. Romich (2007) argues that self-care is “worklike” because it requires independence and responsibility for ensuring positive outcomes. Self-care requires self-regulation, including directing and monitoring accomplishment of homework, chores, or sibling care. Romich found that adolescents with supportive relationships with mothers were more responsible in accomplishing self-care and household duties than youth with difficult relationships with mothers.

If a child regularly performs household tasks or self-care while growing up, it seems those experiences would meaningfully affect self-efficacy development by offering opportunities to experience mastery and success, requiring responsible and independent action, and emphasizing self-control and assistance to others (Bandura, 1997). Successful accomplishment of regular chores requires effortful task-engagement and persistence. Because youth receive feedback on household task accomplishment from parents, and concrete rewards like allowance (Blair, 1992), reinforcement of positive behaviors is increased. Even without positive parental feedback, youth with regular household chores learn how to work; they learn to push themselves to accomplish assigned duties in pursuit of some goal (including punishment avoidance). Such experiences likely affect beliefs about one's work competence, as well as broader feelings of self-efficacy, even perhaps when relationships with parents are not entirely positive.

1.3. The current study

This study examines relations between household responsibilities while growing up (housework tasks, meal preparation, running errands, self-care, sibling care), quality of relationships with parents, and young adults' general and work self-efficacy. Because assignment of specific household chores is often based on sex-typing (Crouter et al., 2001), sex differences are also examined, including how different types of household work are related to

self-efficacy differently for men and women. Although this study is exploratory, based on the importance of direct mastery experiences to self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), we make several hypotheses:

H1. Greater household responsibilities will be related to greater general self-efficacy.

H2. Greater household responsibilities will be related to greater work self-efficacy.

H3. Higher quality relationships with mothers and fathers will be related to greater self-efficacy.

H4. Greater household responsibilities will be related to greater self-efficacy, including when quality of relationships with parents is considered.

2. Method

2.1. Participants

Undergraduate students ($N = 280$, 34% men, 66% women) (M age = 20.6 years, range = 17–34 years) (45% Hispanic, 24% Asian, 13% Euro-American, 6% African American, 10% mixed heritage or other heritage) at a community college or a large state university in Southern California participated for required or extra credit. Ninety-four percent of participants were unmarried; 76% indicated they lived with parents. Of participants reporting having “regular, daily chores” while growing up ($n = 176$), mean age at beginning chores was 8.9 ($SD = 2.7$). Results are based on $N = 248$ –280.¹

2.2. Measures

Participants completed the *General Self-efficacy Scale* (Sherer et al., 1982), 17 items assessing general self-efficacy in terms of willingness to initiate action, expend effort, and persist (e.g., “When I make plans, I am certain I can make them work”), to which respondents indicate degree of agreement (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neither agree/disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items were summed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .87$). Participants completed a measure of *work self-efficacy* with ten items adapted from Sherer et al. (1982) (e.g., “I would feel insecure about my ability to do a job”), and eight items adapted from Stern, Stone, Hopkins, and McMillion (1990) (e.g., “A person should feel a sense of pride in his/her work”). Respondents indicated agreement with each item (1 = *strongly disagree*, 3 = *neither*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Items were summed ($\alpha = .80$).

Participants completed 15 items assessing household responsibilities (with 1 = *never*, 2 = *rarely*, 3 = *about once a week*, 4 = *a few times a week*, 5 = *almost everyday*), with eight items assessing frequency with which participants engaged in a variety of household tasks while growing up (e.g., washing dishes, laundry, dusting furniture, sweeping/vacuuming floors, cleaning bathrooms, taking out trash (items were summed, $\alpha = .86$); and two items assessing frequency of meal preparation for themselves and others (summed, $\alpha = .76$). Participants were asked how frequently they ran errands for the family and how frequently they looked after themselves, after a sibling, and helped a sibling with homework (two sibling items summed as sibling care, $\alpha = .88$). Participants indicated if they had “regular, daily chores while growing up” (yes or no); and age at beginning regular chores and self-care.

¹ Three cases were excluded because they were missing all general self-efficacy items.

Participants completed a 48-item version of the *Parental Attachment Questionnaire* (PAQ; Kenny, 1987) to assess affective quality of relationships with parents (27 items) (e.g., “My dad has no idea what I am feeling or thinking”); emotional support from parents (7 items) (e.g., “My mom gives me attention when I want it”); and independence facilitated by parents (14 items) (e.g., “My mom respects my privacy”). Respondents indicate the degree to which each item describes their relationship with each parent (1 = *not at all*; 3 = *a moderate amount*; 5 = *very much*) ($\alpha = .66-.94$, $M = .82$). Finally, participants provided demographic information, including parent education, estimated annual income, and employment during three age periods (respondent ages 0–5, 6–12, and 13–18 years). We summed responses for parent education (1 = *no high school*; 2 = *high school*; 3 = *some college*; 4 = *college graduate*; 5 = *graduate school*) and income (1 = *under \$20,000*; 2 = *\$20–29,999*; 3 = *\$30–39,999*; 4 = *\$40–49,999*; 5 = *\$50–59,999*; 6 = *\$60,000 or more*) to indicate socioeconomic status ($\alpha = .75$).

2.3. Procedures

Participants completed measures (in order) in classroom sessions lasting about one hour. Participants were debriefed upon completion.

3. Results

Because lower SES is associated with more household chores for children (Crouter et al., 2001); because coresidence with parents influences parental relationship qualities (White, 1994); and because age may influence recollections of family of origin features, all three are covariates in all analyses. Men and women did not differ in frequency reporting having regular chores (62.4% and 63.6%, respectively). In support of H1 and H2, partial correlations indicate significant positive correlations between housework, regular chores, meal preparation, and general and work self-efficacy, and negative correlations between self-efficacy and age at beginning self-care (see Table 1). Running errands is positively related to general self-efficacy and age at beginning chores is negatively correlated with work self-efficacy. Also in support of H1 and H2, a two by two (participant sex by regular chores, yes or no) multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) on general and work self-efficacy indicates a significant multivariate statistic for regular chores [$F_m(2, 235) = 3.81$, $p < .05$, $\eta^2 = .03$]; univariate tests indicate individuals with regular chores report greater general [$M = 66$, $SD = 8.4$; $F(1, 236) = 6.98$, $p < .01$], and work self-efficacy [$M = 71.9$, $SD = 7.5$; $F(1, 236) = 5.85$, $p < .05$] compared to those without chores (means = 62.7 and 69.4, $SDs = 9.5$ and 8.3 , respectively). Results for sex and the interaction are not significant. In support of H3, all features of relationships with parents are positively associated with general self-efficacy, while affective quality of relationships with mothers and emotional support from mothers are positively correlated with work self-efficacy.

3.1. Sex differences

Household responsibilities and positive relationships with parents are related to greater self-efficacy, but differently for men and women. For men, running errands is positively associated with general and work self-efficacy, and housework and regular chores are positively related to work self-efficacy. Perceived quality of father relationships is related to general and work self-efficacy. For women, housework, meal preparation, and age at self-care are related to general and work self-efficacy, and age at beginning chores is negatively related to work self-efficacy. While features of both parent relationships are related to women's general

self-efficacy, only relationships with mothers are related to their work self-efficacy. Although results of MANOVA on total PAQ scores (three subscale scores for each parent summed) indicate that men and women did not differ on perceived quality of parental relationships [$F_m(2, 206) < 1$], MANOVA indicates that men and women differed in frequency of household tasks [$F_m(8, 209) = 5.53$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2 = .18$]. Univariate tests indicate that women reported greater housework ($M = 23.1$, $SD = 6.1$), [$F(4, 216) = 4.81$, $p < .001$], and younger age at beginning self-care ($M = 12.7$, $SD = 3.5$), [$F(4, 216) = 3.71$, $p < .001$], than men (means = 21.6 and 14.2, $SDs = 6.1$ and 3.3 , respectively); and that men reported greater frequency of running errands ($M = 3.2$, $SD = 1.1$) than women ($M = 2.5$, $SD = 1.2$), [$F(4, 216) = 6.73$, $p < .001$].

We used hierarchical regressions (separately for men and women) to test H4, with covariates entered at Step 1, PAQ scores at Step 2, and household variables last. We only used PAQ scores and household variables significantly correlated with self-efficacy; because age at beginning chores and self-care are negatively related to self-efficacy, these were examined in separate models. For men's general self-efficacy, running errands for the family is significantly predictive after entry of PAQ scores (see Table 2). A sum of housework and meal preparation items² significantly predicted greater self-efficacy among women after entry of PAQ scores; younger age at beginning self-care was predictive of greater self-efficacy in a separate regression. Men's work self-efficacy is also predicted by running errands after entry of PAQ scores; women's work self-efficacy is predicted by the housework/meals composite and by age at beginning chores in a separate model (see Table 3). These results support H4.

4. Discussion

The current results support that perceptions of greater household responsibilities while growing up, including housework duties, running errands, meal preparation, and the experience of regular, daily chores, are associated with greater general and work self-efficacy among young adults. Women who grew up with greater responsibility for housework tasks, meal preparation, and caring for themselves at younger ages report greater feelings of competence, task-orientation, and self-direction compared to other women, both generally and concerning work behavior. Men who grew up having greater responsibility for running errands report greater feelings of competence and effectiveness in general and as workers. These results support a developmental view of self-efficacy, with responsibilities and relationships within the family of origin meaningfully influencing self beliefs in young adulthood (Brown, 1998). Importantly, this study suggests that specific behaviors involving self-regulation, task mastery, and accountability to others influence self beliefs that are strongly linked to performance in a variety of domains, outcomes that impact the happiness and life success of individuals.

The sex-typed nature of housework and running errands seems important in links with self-efficacy, with mastery and competence feelings perhaps more strongly related to successful experiences in tasks that are traditionally sex-typed. Accomplishing housecleaning tasks for one's family is an important experience for girls growing up (Crouter et al., 2001); as they are required to accomplish duties that are meaningful for the well-being and effective functioning of any family, and as they are required by parents to engage in self-regulation through self-care, their sense of personal accomplishment and efficacy is increased. Running errands can also be

² Of the household variables, meal preparation and housework are most highly correlated ($r = .51$, $p < .001$), hence their sum was used in regressions for women.

Table 1
Correlations

	Housework	Regular chores	Errands	Meals	Self-care	Sibling care	Age at self-care	Age at chores
<i>All participants</i>								
General self-efficacy	.19**	.16*	.14*	.14*	.03	.03	-.22**	-.05
Work self-efficacy	.26***	.16*	.08	.15*	.04	.09	-.17*	-.15*
<i>Men</i>								
General self-efficacy	.14	.19	.34**	.05	-.04	.01	-.16	.14
Work self-efficacy	.27*	.24*	.25*	-.01	.12	.03	-.08	-.05
<i>Women</i>								
General self-efficacy	.21*	.15	.07	.18*	.08	.05	-.23**	-.15
Work Self-efficacy	.23**	.09	.02	.22**	.01	.14	-.19*	-.21*
	Mother affect	Mother support	Mother independence	Father affect	Father support	Father independence		
<i>All participants</i>								
General self-efficacy	.21**	.20**	.23***		.24***	.20**	.18*	
Work self-efficacy	.14*	.20**	.10		.13	.11	.09	
<i>Men</i>								
General self-efficacy	.06	-.06	.15		.46***	.14	.37**	
Work self-efficacy	.00	.01	-.15		.36**	.17	.23	
<i>Women</i>								
General self-efficacy	.25**	.27***	.28***		.16	.21*	.13	
Work self-efficacy	.18*	.25**	.23**		.04	.09	.05	

Note: N = 225–280; men, n = 73–94; women, n = 149–186 (n for age at beginning chores = 176). For regular chores, 0 = no, 1 = yes. Correlations are partialled for SES, participant age, and currently living with parents (0 = no, 1 = yes).

Note: N = 225–280; men, n = 73–94; women, n = 149–186. Correlations are partialled for SES, age, and living with parents.

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

Table 2
Prediction of general self-efficacy from parental relationships and household responsibilities.

	β_1	t	β_2	R ²	Adj. R ²	R ² change	F
<i>Men</i>							
Dad affect	.31	1.91	.26				
Dad independence	.15	<1	.16	.21**	.15	.175	6.99**
Errands	.23	2.01*		.26	.19	.048	4.04*
<i>Women</i>							
Dad support	.14	1.56	.12				
Mom total	.20	2.21*	.22*	.10*	.07	.079	6.11**
Housework + meals	.23	2.65**		.14**	.10	.044	7.01**
Dad support	.12	1.39	.14				
Mom total	.23	2.49*	.21*	.10*	.07	.087	6.67**
Age at self-care	-.19	-2.31*		.13**	.10	.034	5.35*

Note: Men (n = 64–73); women (n = 143–148). Models include covariates (Step 1, results not shown); PAQ scores entered at Step 2; household variables entered last. β_1 = at entry; β_2 = full model; t = t-value at entry; F for change in R².

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

Table 3
Prediction of work self-efficacy from parental relationships and household responsibilities.

	β_1	t	β_2	R ²	Adj. R ²	R ² change	F
<i>Men</i>							
Dad affect	.36	3.05**	.32**	.15*	.09	.126	9.31**
Errands	.25	2.07*		.20*	.14	.055	4.29*
<i>Women</i>							
Mom total	.22	2.79**	.24**	.10**	.08	.048	7.76**
Housework + meals	.26	3.18**		.16***	.13	.059	10.10**
Mom total	.24	2.96**	.23**	.11**	.09	.058	8.74**
Age at chores	-.23	-2.91**		.17***	.13	.053	8.47**

Note: Men (n = 64–73); women (n = 143–148). Models include covariates (Step 1, results not shown); PAQ scores entered at Step 2; household variables entered last. β_1 = at entry; β_2 = full model; t = t-value at entry; F for change in R².

* p < .05.

** p < .01.

*** p < .001.

viewed as sex-typed, with boys perhaps viewed as safer outside the home. Regular responsibilities for running errands for parents is most strongly linked to young men's general and work self-efficacy, suggesting that effective accomplishment of errands leads to greater feelings of competence. If young men view housework as "women's work," success in such tasks may be less likely to engender feelings of competence (Matsui, Ikeda, & Ohnishi, 1989). Conversely, young women may be less likely to view running errands as requiring competence than men, or they may view household work as a more important contribution to the family than running errands. Younger age at beginning chores is also predictive of greater work self-efficacy among women, but not men, suggesting that accomplishment of housework tasks for the family is more strongly related to feelings of competence among women. Links between type of household work and self-efficacy outcomes are also likely influenced by individual beliefs about choosing certain household responsibilities (versus being forced to engage in such tasks) (Fuligni et al., 1999). If young adults believe they chose to accomplish specific household tasks for their families (and those choices happen to be sex-typed), it is these beliefs that seem most likely to engender feelings of competence and mastery of one's work.

The experience of self-care while growing up is related to beliefs about competence in dealing with the world in general, but only for young women. Successful self-care requires a great deal of responsibility, both in terms of protecting oneself from danger, and effectively accomplishing various tasks, from getting home on time to finishing homework to completing chores. Youth who are trusted by parents to look after themselves, and who successfully do so, gain the knowledge within themselves that they are capable of engaging in responsible and successful behaviors without direct instruction or supervision. The lack of relation between self-care and self-efficacy among young men suggests that perhaps engaging in self-care is more normatively expected from boys during childhood, and thus the experience is seen as less indicative of individual competence. Recollections of self-care are thus not related to young men's self-reports of self-efficacy. However, results also indicate that young women reported engaging in self-care at a younger age than men; perhaps engaging in self-care at a comparatively younger age (middle school) is more meaningful for self-efficacy development than self-care that begins during high school years (as men recalled here).

Relations between household responsibilities while growing up and self-efficacy is further strengthened by results indicating that such responsibilities predict self-efficacy even when quality of relationships with parents is considered. Relationships with parents are important for self-efficacy development (Coleman & Karraker, 1997); these results suggest that perceptions of affectively positive and emotionally supportive parental relationships are associated with greater feelings of self-efficacy among young adults. Parents provide essential support and feedback to young people regarding their abilities; parents who are affectively warm, provide support, and facilitate independence of their children provide a foundation for beliefs about self-competence and effectiveness. Young people with loving, supportive relationships with parents view themselves as more competent and effective workers. Interestingly, these results suggest that positive relationships with fathers are particularly important for young men's self-efficacy, while relationships with mothers are most important for women's self-efficacy. Again, it seems that sex roles within the family come into play in self-efficacy development, with mothers as crucial role models for young women, and fathers playing a central role for men.

This study makes two unique contributions to understanding self-efficacy among young adults. First, relationships with parents are meaningfully related to young adults' general feelings of com-

petence, and feelings of competence as workers. Although family relationships are viewed theoretically as crucial for self-efficacy development (Bandura, 1997), little research has empirically demonstrated the importance of relationships with parents for self-efficacy of young adults. Second, this study suggests that household responsibilities while growing up are related to positive feelings of competence and ability in young adulthood. Successful accomplishment of household responsibilities on a regular basis requires hard work, task mastery, self-regulation, and self-discipline, and greater experience with such duties (including relatively simple tasks like running errands) engenders feelings of effectiveness. Teaching youth to rely on their abilities to self-regulate and successfully accomplish work appears to be an essential part of developing positive views of the self as capable and competent.

4.1. Limitations and future research

Reliance on self-report methodology is a limitation, as is asking participants for recollections regarding household duties while growing up. Although subject to memory biases and current attitudes, recollective reports have been used in investigations of family of origin features (Amato & Booth, 1991). Having participants complete measures of self-efficacy before completion of recalled household work may be problematic, leading to conflated responses, however it seems that recollections of household chores would be fairly accurate. Perceptions of parental relationships are also based on current relationships, which may not completely reflect quality of relationships while participants were growing up.

Future research may take many directions, given the paucity of research on household responsibilities while growing up. Studies of young adults may include reports from parents as additional support for recollections of household duties. The most effective investigations would involve longitudinal designs, tying direct observations of childhood household duties to adulthood self-efficacy. Research may investigate how parental assignment and enforcement of household duties, and youth choice of tasks, relate to self-efficacy outcomes in childhood and adulthood, including youth "ownership" of certain tasks within the family. Research should more thoroughly examine self-care in childhood, including family qualities that may enhance or detract from relations with self-efficacy and other well-being outcomes.

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