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[Andrea Estrada](#)

A Balance of Power

When it comes to dividing work and family responsibilities, the majority of young men and women today say they would prefer egalitarian relationships in which they and their partners assume equal roles, if that possibility were available to them.

So finds a new study conducted by [Sarah Thébaud, an assistant professor of sociology at UC Santa Barbara](#), and David S. Pedulla, an assistant professor of sociology at the University of Texas at Austin. Their research will appear Jan. 29 in the online edition of the *American Sociological Review*. The print version of the article will be published in the journal's February issue.

In a survey experiment conducted with a nationally representative sample of unmarried, childless men and women between the ages of 18 and 32 in the U.S., the researchers asked respondents how they would ideally like to structure their relationships with future spouses or partners in terms of balancing work and family life.

The study found that when the option was made available to them, the majority of respondents — regardless of gender or education level — opted for a relationship in which they would share earning and household/caregiving responsibilities equally with their partners. Additionally, the study found that if workplace policies that support work-family balance, such as subsidized child care, are in place, women are even more likely to prefer an egalitarian relationship and much less likely to want to be the primary homemaker or caregiver.

“This research highlights an important disjuncture between the ideals and preferences of young men and women and the workplace policies and practices that are currently standard in the United States,” said Thébaud, also a faculty research associate at [UCSB’s Broom Center for Demography](#).

The researchers’ findings also shed light on the factors contributing to persistent gender inequality and the ways in which government and organizational policies could be redesigned to improve the lives of young men and women.

“These findings offer new insights that may be useful in guiding policymakers and organizations that are interested in reducing gender inequality and improving the work and family lives of young men and women,” said Pedulla, also a faculty research associate in the Population Research Center at UT-Austin.

According to the researchers, the study’s findings also contribute new insights in the context of recent public debates about whether women should “lean in” and whether they can “have it all.”

“A key implication of this research is that men’s and women’s current work-family arrangements are often suboptimal and result from a particular set of unsupportive workplace policies and practices,” Thébaud said. “What our study helps to show is that if we were to change the workplace policy environment, we would likely see changes in how people express their ideal preferences for balancing work and family life.”

About UC Santa Barbara

The University of California, Santa Barbara is a leading research institution that also provides a comprehensive liberal arts learning experience. Our academic community of faculty, students, and staff is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration that is responsive to the needs of our multicultural and global society. All of this takes place within a living and learning environment like no other, as we draw inspiration from the beauty and resources of our extraordinary location at the edge of the Pacific Ocean.