

Let's talk about it!

How discussing the division of household and paid work affect traditionalization among ambitious couples transitioning into parenthood

Larisa Riedijk, Belle Derks, Ruth van Veelen, Pearl Dykstra & Pauline Kleingeld

Background

- The transition into parenthood involves many changes for women: their paid work hours decrease and hours spent on housework and childcare increase^{1,2}
- Men's time allocation changes much less³
- Parenthood tends to push heterosexual couples into traditional gender roles with negative consequences for women's labour market position²
- Traditionalization in the transition into parenthood: fathers work relatively more than mothers, mothers care and clean relatively more than fathers
- Few qualitative studies suggest that when couples actively discuss the division of work, household and childcare prior to childbirth, this could buffer against traditional gender roles later⁴

Research Questions & Set-up

1. Do women traditionalize their division of paid and unpaid work during the transition into parenthood (more so than men)?
2. Do women talk with their partner about their future division of paid and unpaid work during pregnancy?
3. Does talking about the future division during pregnancy buffer against traditionalization after childbirth?

Household tasks

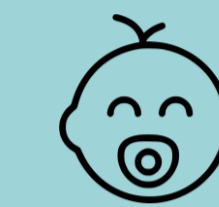
Paid work hours



Household tasks

Paid work hours

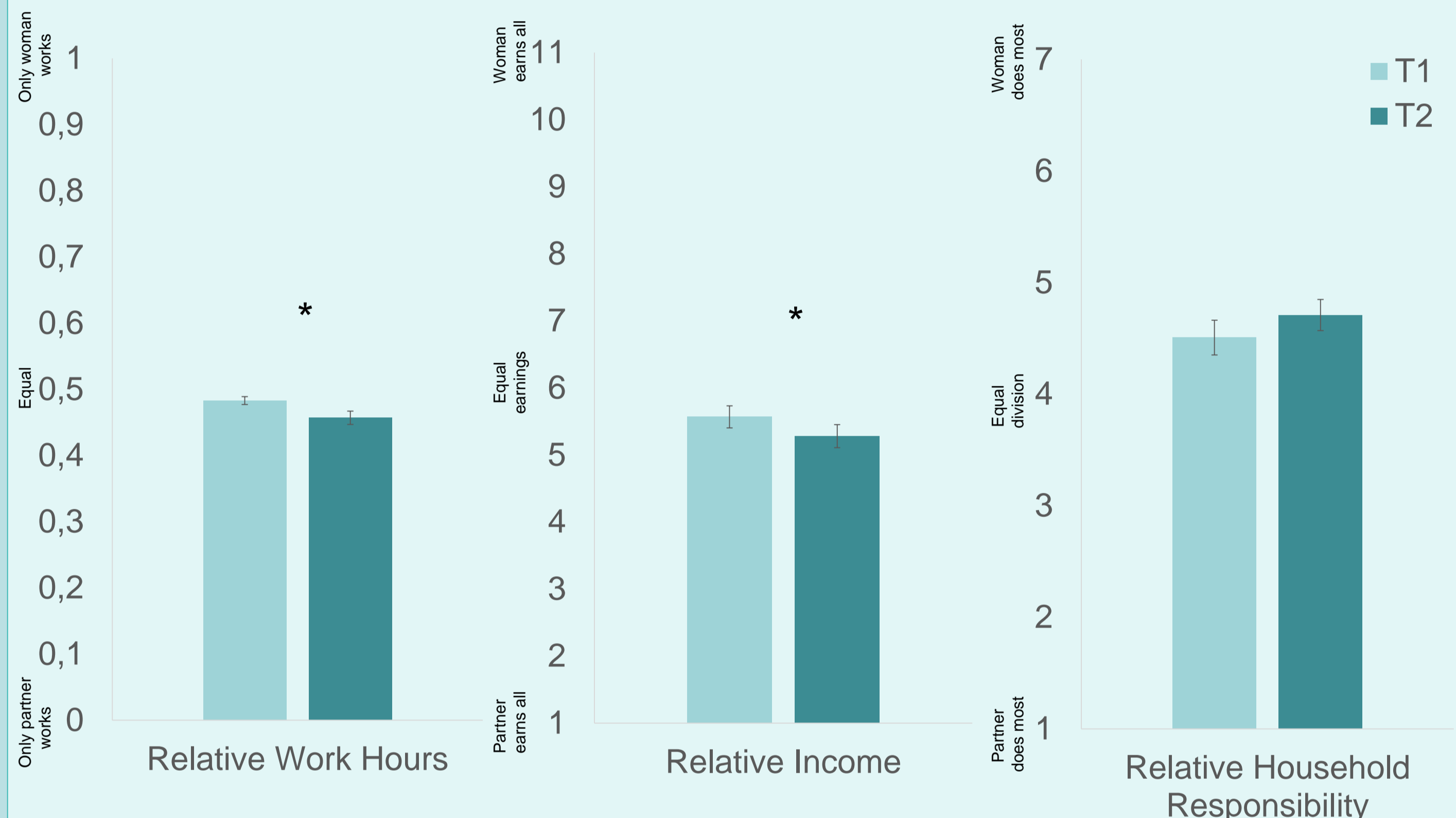
T1: 6 months pregnant
(N=109)



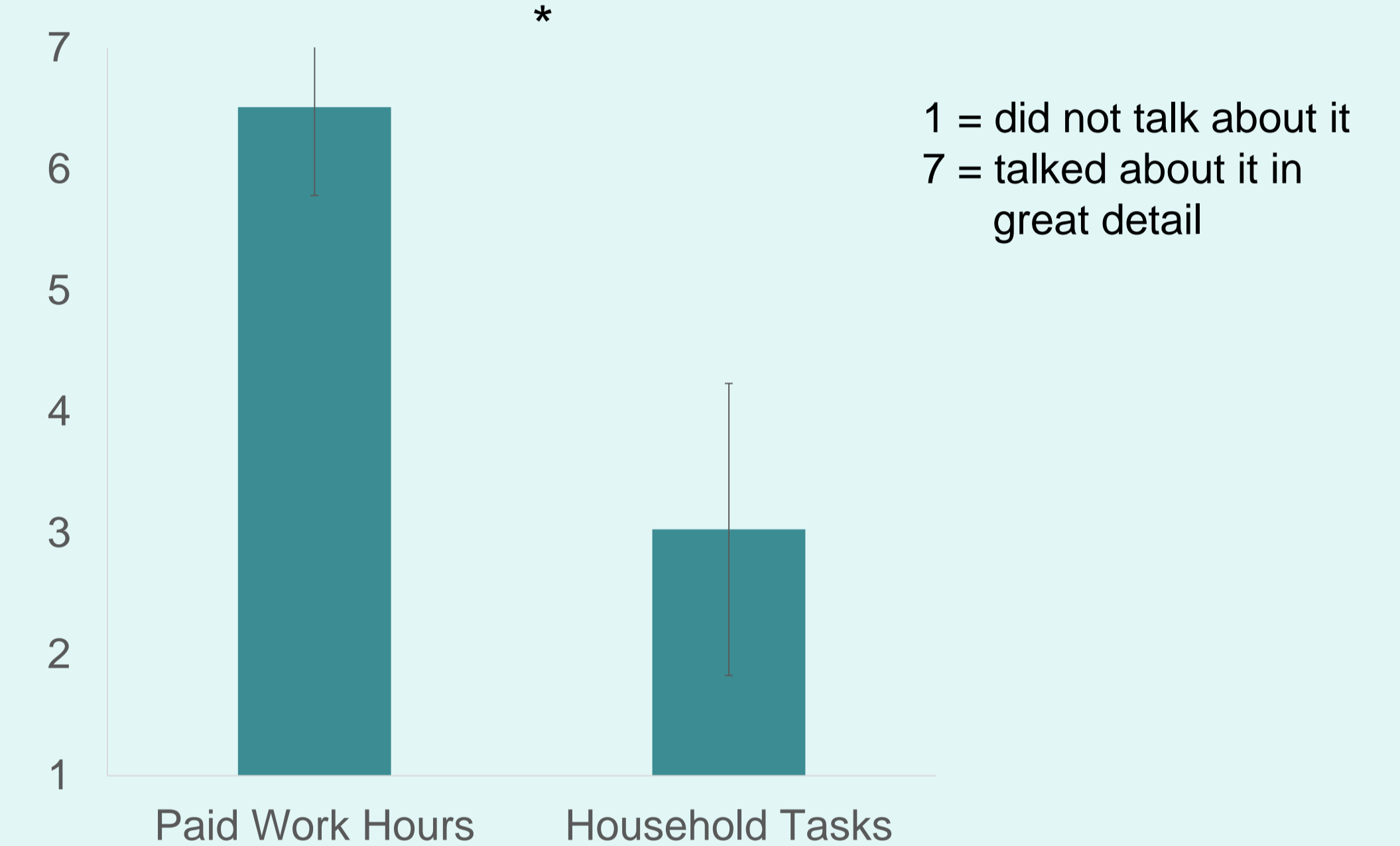
T2: Child 10 months old
(N=77)

Results

Traditionalization over time



During pregnancy women talked significantly more about the division of paid work hours than about the household division with their partner

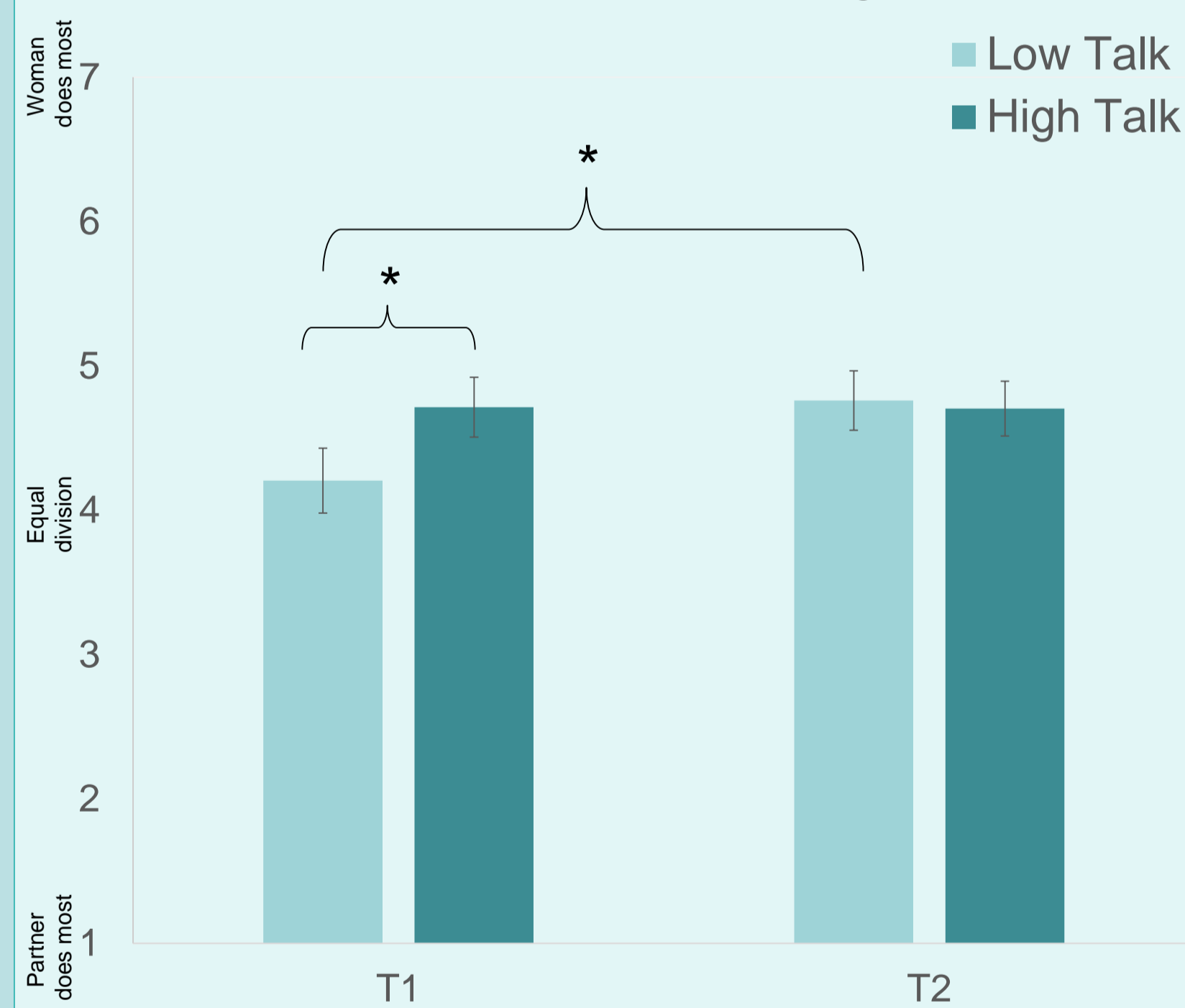


Relative Household Responsibility over time

1. Women became marginally more responsible for household tasks, Wilk's $\lambda = .958$, $F(1, 72) = 3.177$, $p = .079$, $\eta^2_p = .042$.

2. Women who did not talk about the household division increased their time spent on household, while women who did talk spent more time on household to begin with but did not increase it further, Wilk's $\lambda = .933$, $F(1, 70) = 5.137$, $p = .026$, $\eta^2_p = .067$.

Women who talk less about the household division lose their advantage

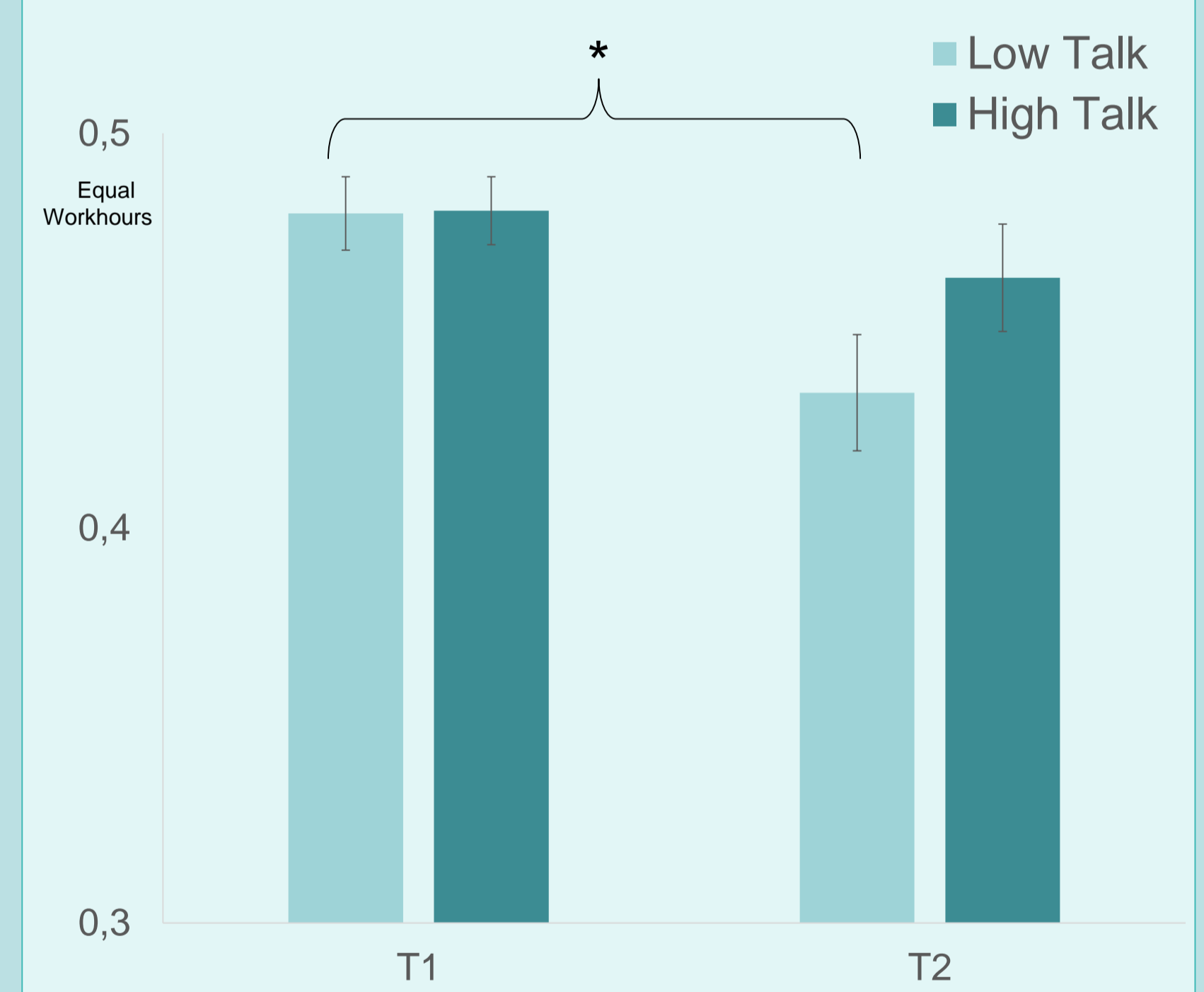


Relative Paid Work Hours

1. Women worked relatively less hours, Wilk's $\lambda = .742$, $F(1, 71) = 24.743$, $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .258$.

2. Women who did not talk about the division of paid work hours decreased their work hours more than women who did talk about the division of paid work hours, Wilk's $\lambda = .943$, $F(1, 71) = 4.264$, $p = .043$, $\eta^2_p = .057$.

Women who talk less about work hours decrease their work hours more



NB: Talking about the division did not affect change in relative income over time

Conclusion

- Women indicated to talk about the division of paid work hours significantly more than about the household division with their partner during pregnancy⁴
- Women who had a relatively egalitarian division of paid work and household and talked little about their future division during pregnancy ended up in a more traditional role division after childbirth
- Women who talked more about their future division during pregnancy remained stable over time in their division of paid work and household after childbirth

Implications

- The findings highlight the importance of examining cooperation and dynamics between partners in understanding traditionalization during the transition into parenthood
- Even though the statistical power was sufficient, future research is needed to replicate and generalize findings
- Women in relatively egalitarian task divisions should explicitly talk with their partner about their future division of paid and especially unpaid work before their first child is born to ensure their egalitarian task division after childbirth

References

- 1: Baxter, J., Hewitt, B., & Haynes, M. (2008). Life Course transitions and housework: Marriage, parenthood, and time on housework. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 70(2), 269-272.
- 2: Yavorsky, J. E., Kamp Dush, C. M., & Schoppe-Sullivan, S. J. (2015). The Production of Inequality: The Gender Division of Labor Across the Transition to Parenthood. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 77(3), 662-673.
- 3: Killewald, A., & Garcia-Mangano, J. (2016). Tethered lives: A couple-based perspective on the consequences of parenthood for time use, occupation, and wages. *Social Science Research*, 60, 266-282. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2016.03.007>
- 4: Wiersmann, S., Boeije, H., Van Doorn-Huisjes, A., & Den Dulk, L. (2008). "Not worth mentioning": The implicit and explicit nature of decision-making about the division of paid and domestic work. *Community, Work and Family*, 11(4), 341-363.



Contact:

L.Riedijk@uu.nl