

# Who is making that holiday magic?

---

Do you love the movie Home Alone? Who doesn't? It's holiday merriment wrapped up in a fun "family-conquers-all" gift bow. But did you ever wonder why it is the mother's fault that they left Kevin at home? Or why only the mom is concerned about him? The rest of the family (including the father) moans and groans and waits a whole day before even attempting to fly home. Even a [recent article](#) posing the question that in real-life Kevin's parents would have been reported to the authorities focused more on how the mother failed her son, not the father. What is up with that? Welcome to the time of year we call the holiday season, but in many families could be more accurately called "the season for gender stereotypes on steroids."

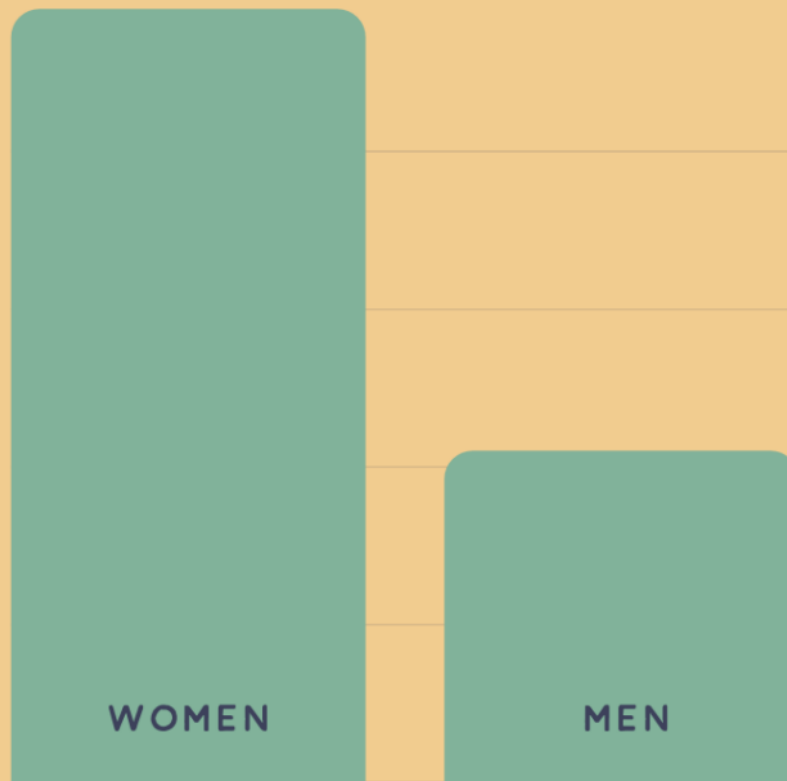
## Gender Roles In The Home

---

As a culture, we've made significant progress in equalizing gender roles within families. Most American women are not expected to do only domestic work or have children. Many men share household duties with their spouses. That's not to say we don't still have work to do. Women in heterosexual relationships still do most of the work around the house.

The [American Time Use Survey](#) (ATUS) measures the amount of time Americans spend doing activities of daily life like work, household chores, childcare, volunteering, and socializing. In 2021, about 49% of women and 21% of men spent time during an average day doing household chores like cleaning or laundry. Women spent an average of 2.7 hours on these activities, while men spent 2.2 hours. In contrast, 23% of men participated in sports, exercise, or recreation on any given day, compared with 20% of women. Men spent 1.7 hours per day, and women spent an average of 1.2 hours.

## TIME SPENT DURING AN AVERAGE DAY DOING HOUSEHOLD CHORES LIKE CLEANING OR LAUNDRY IN 2021



AMERICAN TIME USE SURVEY (ATUS)

Another poll, this one from [Gallup in 2019](#), shows a more detailed view of the distribution of household chores. More than 50% of the women in heterosexual relationships polled were primarily responsible for laundry, cleaning the house, and preparing meals for their families. Women in 62% of the households were also the primary decision-makers regarding home decor, and 37% were in charge of planning family activities. In contrast, 69% of the men in these households were responsible for car maintenance and 59% for yard work.

### Gender Roles Around The Holidays

---

These statistics show that traditional gender roles have not entirely gone away. What we have traditionally defined as “women’s work” in our culture still exists in many families. And the tasks associated with these roles are amplified dramatically during the holiday season. When

was the last time you heard a man say, “I am so stressed about our holiday dinner,” or “How am I going to find time to wrap all of these gifts?”

A 1990 study analyzed how men and women perceive holiday shopping. Women in the study felt “compelled to do the ‘work,’” which also involved maintaining social ties. Women were the primary gift-givers in the family and traditionally spent more time shopping than men. According to the study, “women appear to be socialized to take it quite seriously as real and important work.” Can you relate?

That study may have occurred 30 years ago, but our perception of the holidays as “serious work” remains. And with Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok always available on our phones, the holidays have become a competitive sport. Comparing our holiday decorations, wrapping skills, or meals to strangers on social media is a compulsion we all fall into from time to time. Be real. Is the stress of cooking 20 different side dishes worth it to post an extravagant tablescape reel on Instagram? Is it really necessary to be the best-decorated house on the block?

The American Psychological Association ran a study in 2006 to measure the effects of stress during the holidays. Not surprisingly, the researchers uncovered that women experienced a more significant spike in stress levels over Thanksgiving, Hanukkah, and Christmas than men. When asked if their stress levels were higher than normal over the holidays, 44% of women said yes, while only 31% of men said yes.

## WHEN ASKED IF THEIR STRESS LEVELS WERE HIGHER THAN NORMAL OVER THE HOLIDAYS



The researchers concluded, “Though there are no attitudinal differences between men and women in their sense of obligation towards family, there are strong behavioral differences between men and women. Women are much more likely to shoulder the work burden during family celebrations. During Thanksgiving, women are nearly twice as likely to report that they will cook (66% of women versus 35% of men). Conversely, men are nearly twice as likely as women to report that they will watch football (26% of women versus 46% of men).”

### Gender Roles at Work

---

Let’s not forget that women tend to take on the holiday party planning/gift giving role at work as well as at home. There is a theory that Kevin’s mom was so frazzled in Home Alone because she was a fashion designer and was burning the candle at both ends during the

holidays (as we all tend to do). This, of course, does not give her a pass when it comes to feeding the family and keeping track of the kids. I mean, who pays for the pizza at the beginning of the movie? She does!

Work/life balance becomes even harder to achieve during the holidays for women determined to make the holidays bright for both work and home families. Social conditioning in the workplace compels us to fall into the traditional gender roles that stress us out. As Elsa sings, “Let it go!” It’s not your job to be the office Santa Mom.

## **Making a Change This Year**

---

The pressure to make holiday magic could be especially intense if you or your spouse had a mom who always made the holidays magical. That’s a lot to live up to. However, it’s helpful to remember that your life, family, and relationship are probably very different from your parents, and you should never compare yourself to others (including random people on Instagram), even those you love.

Instead, I suggest that we as women take this opportunity to change our family dynamics so that the burden of the holidays falls more equally among our loved ones. It’s time to recognize when we take too much of the household chores, childcare, shopping, holiday party planning, or gift wrapping and ask for help. Men are capable of wrapping gifts and grocery shopping, no matter what they may say. We must also stop comparing our families and homes to others and strive to have authentic and genuine family holidays. When we actively work to change how we view our roles within our families and what makes the holidays memorable, our loved ones will hopefully change along with us.

When women change their roles within their families, positive changes happen in other areas of their lives. Experts say that women considered equal partners at home are more successful at work because they can focus more fully on work. Men who are equal domestic partners are equity role models for their children, breaking the cycle of traditional gender stereotypes at home and work. Also, men who equally share household responsibilities are less afraid to ask for and talk about why they need flexibility in their work schedule, normalizing the need for flexible work policies. Everyone wins when men lean into equal partnership at home, starting with the holidays and extending throughout the year.

The big secret our parents didn’t tell us as kids is that Mommy was caught kissing Santa (Dad) because she was ecstatic that he had gotten off his ass to help her. The magic so many kids experience during the holidays is due to the labor of moms.

The holidays should be a time of peace, love, and joy. But for many women, the holidays are stressful and exhausting because traditional gender roles have long been ingrained into our hearts and minds. Join RECRUITER as we pledge to change that this year by letting go of

past expectations and asking for help from our loved ones. The perfect family holiday only exists when everyone in the family enjoys them, including you.

So, here's a to-do list for you:

1. Push back on that holiday task at work you don't have time to do
2. Plan a smaller-than-usual holiday party for just your closest neighbors and friends
3. Say no to that holiday party you don't have time or don't want to attend
4. Set aside some time to do something you love...without guilt

We guarantee that if you check these four items (or at least a couple, no pressure!) off THIS list, you'll have the happiest of holidays. If you need support or guidance, RECRUITER is here for you. [Sign up](#) for our newsletter to receive our work/life balance tips and recommendations, and for opportunities to connect with women making holiday magic just like you.