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THE SUNDAY TIMES

Go 50/50 on the chores, lads, it's good for you

A new book claims there is a 'bonus' for men who do their fair share of the housework

Georgia Graham Published: 1 September 2013



Rosie French and Rafael Chesterman, with Alfred, three, chose the '50/50' time split (Jeremy Young)

housekeepers and an army of nannies.

But the 44-year-old mother of two wants to ensure that her husband does his fair share of the child-rearing and domestic duties — on the basis that it is good for him.

WITH an estimated fortune of \$400m, Sheryl Sandberg, the chief operating officer of Facebook, could afford a battalion of

In the foreword to a new book, *Getting to 50/50: How Working Parents Can Have It All*, Sandberg argues that convincing men to share the chores not only provides women with more choices but that the “bonus . . . extends to the men themselves and their children as well”.

“In many cases, getting to 50/50 is not just the fair thing to do, but the better thing to do for a family,” Sandberg says, before admitting that she and husband David Goldberg struggle to attain “perfect equality”.

“We have two children and we aim for a 50/50 split in childcare and household duties. Even though my husband Dave and I are lucky and can afford exceptional childcare, there are still difficult decisions about how much time our jobs require us to be away from our family and who will pick up the slack when the other can't be there. We are rarely at 50/50 at any given moment — perfect equality is hard to define, or sustain — but that remains the goal as the pendulum swings between us.”

The book, written by Sharon Meers, a former executive at Goldman Sachs, the investment bank, and Joanna Strober, who works in private equity, has proved a hit with American working women and their partners. It is published in the UK this month.

Meers and Strober argue that the only way for a working family to thrive is for the husband to pitch in, not by changing the odd nappy or organising a family day out, but by taking on 50% of all childcare and housework.

According to *Great Expectations*, a report released in March by the Institute for Public Policy Research, eight out of 10 married women still do more housework than their husbands. Just 10% of men do an equal amount of housework as their wives, while just over 13% of women say their husbands do more housework than them.

However, as more women enter the workplace, a trend towards more equality in the home is slowly beginning to emerge. According to the report, 85% of women born in 1958 said they did more “laundry and ironing” than their partner, compared with 75% of women born in 1970.

This has been accompanied by an increase in the contribution made by men in the home, the report says. Between 1975 and 1997, the length of time that fathers on average spent caring for their children rose from 15 minutes to two hours a day.

“Women were leaving the workforce in droves because they couldn't figure out how to make it all work,” Strober said. “They were taking total ownership in the home while juggling their jobs. So we are saying to women that there is no need to be a CEO at home, particularly if you want to be a CEO at work, because no one wants to come home to a CEO — man or woman.

“Instead you have to open up, create more space for men to do things in the home and they are happier to do it. Men want to be with their kids more when they are not being told they are doing everything wrong. Maybe it was the uncertainty of the recession but men don't find the idea of being the full-time breadwinner as appealing as they used to and having a wife that can help you with that takes a huge part of that burden of responsibility off you.”

Far from resenting the prospect of bottle-feeding or ironing, some men are taking up the gauntlet of 50/50 living and reaping the rewards.

Rafael Chesterman, 34, a furniture restorer, and his partner Rosie French, 30, co-owner of French & Grace, a restaurant in Brixton, south London, live with their three-year-old son Alfred in nearby Herne Hill.

“Often in the early days, when your child is really young and you feel very protective, you do come home and say to your partner, ‘No! don’t change his nappy like that or don’t feed him like that’,”

French said. “But



Sheryl Sandberg, the Facebook executive, says parents who split housework fairly are happier (Bloomberg)

relinquishing that control is freeing and when I let go Raf took to it so naturally.”

Chesterman loves spending more time with his son. “He’s amazing and it is just really easy to hang out with him,” he said. “We chose this way out of necessity. I have two good friends, a car mechanic and a guy who works for the education board, who have exactly the same time split. It wasn’t really planned for any of us but we’re all happy that it has worked out this way.”

It is not only working parents who have realised the potential value of sharing the domestic experience.

Jonathan Goodman, an IT support assistant, and his partner Jeanette Morris, a stay-at-home mother, live in Petham near Canterbury, Kent. They have two daughters, Isabella, 2, and Roseanna, who was born last week, and share childcare duties 50/50 with Morris doing more during the week and Goodman taking on extra responsibilities at weekends.

“It’s a responsibility you and your partner should accept when you have a child,” he said. “I like to spend time with my daughters. If I didn’t do those things I don’t think we would be as close.”

Additional reporting: Kate McKerchar

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8 comments



Getting to 50/50

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**Philip Smith**

September 01, 2013 06:02

I think tape fact is as a couple you work it out. You determine what each of you wants to do with your careers and work out the rest of it around it. I don't do too much in the house but work long hours and make sure our extensive gardens are well maintained.

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**EnglishRose**

September 01, 2013 03:19

It makes a lot of sense. My father did the hoovering in the 60s and lots of childcare. He also did 100% of the night feeds of babies despite working as a doctor (once my breastfeeding stopped) and of the other babies. If you are from a culture of fairness rather than sexism and misogyny then you ensure there is no sexism in your own marriage. We certainly did 50/50 ourselves and I am sure my children will too. Of course if you earn a lot more as a woman than your spouse it makes it easier to ensure there is fairness. Inequality often stems from lack of economic power on the part of women. Good careers for women can be the core of this.

The main thing if you both work full time as many couples do is not to have one of you just "helping" when asked. Instead just divide things up fairness eg I did our tax returns for 20 years and he took the children to the dentist for 17 years,. I did the night waking to breastfeed the twins for one year and he got up with them in the night for the 3 years after that - which ended up pretty equal. There was a period when he did 100% of the washing including cloth nappies and I did not know how to work the machine and I got stuff ready for school. I waited at home until the nanny arrived at 8am and he got home for 6 when she left. We both interviewed her.

I never understand women who marry sexist men or even tolerate them for one day. Why do they? Do they think they are so useless all they deserve is some lazy sexist so and so? Do they earn so little they have to kow tow to keep their meal ticket?

[1 Recommend](#) [Reply](#)
**Alan Thorpe**

September 01, 2013 04:48

[@EnglishRose](#) I hardly saw my father do anything in the house, other than wash the dishes now and again. I wonder whether you would consider him to be a "lazy sexist so and so"? He did however do 100% of the working to support the family which was working underground in a coal mine for 50 years.

1 Recommend Reply



EnglishRose

September 01, 2013 05:04

@Alan Thorpe @EnglishRose Well poor you and what a bad role model. Plenty of men did help in those days and share domestic burdens. Hopefully you can't get these unbalanced changes in the next generation. I had to ask my minor relatives too. Not all were sexist and plenty did a lot at home and many had wives who worked full time by the way.

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1 Recommend Reply



Alan Thorpe

September 01, 2013 05:30

@EnglishRose What a typically feminist insulting remark. My father was an excellent role model for hard work and supporting his family!

1 Recommend Reply



Philip Smith

September 01, 2013 06:00

Englishrose you've got that one way wrong and really I think you should apologise to Alan. It's really not possible to work 10 hours a day underground and the come home to do a bit of hoovering.

2 Recommend Reply



EnglishRose

September 01, 2013 08:07

@Philip Smith Well hang on... plenty of work work 12 hour days and come back to housework. The fitter your day job is the more likey,I you have the strength to wield a hoover. There was nothing special about my male ancestors - they were just in equal fair marriages and pulled their weight at home. Thankfully that kind of sexist stereotype is dying out and women won't marry men who expect them to do more than half at home.

1 Recommend Reply



Philip Smith

September 01, 2013 10:25

You clearly don't understand the exertion required to be a miner particularly at the time it was mainly a manual occupation.

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