

Measuring the Relative Productivity of Sole-Tasking to Multitasking in Household Production: New Experimental Evidence

Charlene Kalenkoski
Ohio University

Gigi Foster
University of New South Wales

The standard household production model does not incorporate multitasking, but time-diary data reveal that individuals regularly multitask. In the context of household production, child quality is one of the most important outcomes produced, and time-diary data confirm that time spent in child care is often multitasked with time spent in housework. Yet, such data do not usually provide any information on the outcomes generated by the various uses of time. Therefore, we cannot use typical time-diary data sets to estimate the relative productivity of sole-tasked versus multitasked child care time. In this paper, we introduce a new experiment designed to enable us to directly observe and quantitatively compare participants' productivity in sole-tasked and multitasked household production. Because our experimental participants also completed a questionnaire capturing demographic, household, experiential, and psychological characteristics, we are also able to examine the correlates of individuals' relative productivity of multitasked versus sole-tasked child care time. Using regression analysis, we estimate the relationships between the relative productivity of multitasked time and these various characteristics. We focus on gender to determine whether there is a scientific basis for the frequent claim that women are better at multitasking in the home.