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Gendered affordance perception and unequal domestic labour

Tom McClelland[1] | **Paulina Sliwa**[2]

[1]Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge, Sidgwick Avenue, Cambridge CB3 9DA

[2]Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy and Education, University of Vienna, Universitätsstraße 7, A-1010, Vienna

Correspondence
Tom McClelland, Department of History and Philosophy of Science, University of Cambridge, Free School Lane, CB2 3RH.
Email: tom.mcclelland57@gmail.com

Paulina Sliwa, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Philosophy and Education, University of Vienna, Universitätsstraße 7, A-1010 Vienna.
Email: paulina.sliwa@gmail.com

Authors are listed alphabetically and contributed equally to the paper.

Abstract

The inequitable distribution of domestic and caring labour in different-sex couples has been a longstanding feminist concern. Some have hoped that having both partners at home during the COVID-19 pandemic would usher in a new era of equitable work and caring distributions. Contrary to these hopes, old patterns seem to have persisted. Moreover, studies suggest this inequitable distribution often goes unnoticed by the male partner. This raises two questions. Why do women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare despite economic and cultural gains? And why is there a widespread one-sided misrepresentation within different-sex couples about how domestic and caring work is distributed between the two partners? We answer these questions by appealing to affordance perception – the perception of possibilities for action in one's environment. We propose an important gender disparity in the perception of affordances for domestic tasks such as the dishwasher affording emptying, the floor affording sweeping and a mess affording tidying. We argue that this contributes not only to the inequitable distribution of domestic labour but to the frequent

invisibility of that labour. We explore the consequences of this hypothesis for resistance and social change.

1 | CONTEXT

1.1 | The two questions

The inequitable distribution of domestic and caring labour in heterosexual couples has been a longstanding feminist concern. The pandemic, which shut down nurseries and schools, and thus upended the lives of working families, has brought renewed attention to it. Some have hoped that having both partners at home would usher in a new era of equitable work and caring distributions. Carlson *et al.*, for instance, speculated that '…the pandemic may provide an opportunity for fathers to act on their stated desires to be more engaged at home'.[1] Contrary to these hopes, old patterns seem to have persisted.[2] As the New York Times reports:

> Even though men and women are both doing more housework and child care than usual during the lockdown, the survey found, the results suggest they aren't dividing the work any differently or more equitably than they were before. Seventy percent of women say they're fully or mostly responsible for housework during lockdown, and 66 percent say so for child care — roughly the same shares as in typical times.[3]

This report, based on a survey of households in the US, represents a pattern that can be seen internationally. The UN's rapid assessment surveys paint a clear picture:

> Cross-country data from UN Women's rapid assessment surveys reveal that both women and men report a significant increase in unpaid care and domestic work as a result of the pandemic. While men report doing more, women continue to do the lion's share of this work – with important ripple effects for their physical and mental health as well as their ability to engage in paid work.[4]

Even more strikingly, women's disproportionate contribution seems to go unnoticed and unacknowledged by their partners:

> A much smaller share of men, about 20 percent, agree that their spouses are fully or mostly responsible for both housework and child care. About 20 percent of men say

[1] Carlson, Petts, & Pepin (2021). For pre-pandemic time survey data, see Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, & Schoppe-Sullivan (2015).

[2] Interestingly, Carlson *et al's* study of the distribution of domestic labour in US homes had mixed results. Although they found some trends toward greater equality, they note that 'mothers' burdens have increased in families where they were doing most of domestic labor both before and during the pandemic.'

[3] https://nyti.ms/3dpAAps

[4] From Insights to Action: Gender Equality in the Wake of Covid-19, p. 8. https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/Headquarters/Attachments/Sections/Library/Publications/2020/Gender-equality-in-the-wake-of-COVID-19-en.pdf

they are fully or mostly responsible for these tasks during lockdown. Only around 2 percent of women agree.[5]

These results, based on detailed survey data, highlight two things that require explanation:

DISPARITY QUESTION: Why do women continue to shoulder a disproportionate amount of housework and childcare despite economic and cultural gains?

INVISIBILITY QUESTION: Why is there a widespread one-sided misrepresentation within different-sex couples about how domestic and caring work is distributed between the two partners?

These two questions zoom in on a very specific area of gender disparity: disparities within a different-sex couple in the relative amount of domestic labour undertaken and the relative recognition of that domestic labour. Of course, this then invites further questions about the relative distribution of work in same-sex couples and in non-domestic settings. Although our answers to the foregoing could well have implications for these wider questions, our paper will remain focused on the more specific questions above.

1.2 | Existing explanations

Explanations in the social sciences have primarily focused on answering the DISPARITY QUESTION, and propose many different, sometimes overlapping factors, that contribute to the disparity.

One set of considerations often raised are economic, with the economy influencing who is available to do domestic work. Cultural factors include a gendered workplace culture pushing men back into the workplace and women, particularly mothers, out of it. Gendered career choices have also been cited, with women being more likely to go into professions that are lower-paid and that admit of flexible working and thus women being more likely to reduce their hours to accommodate other responsibilities.

These are plausibly important parts of the explanation. But equally plausibly, they are not the full story. These factors cannot explain why disparities so commonly persist when the work-hours and flexibility of a woman are no different to those of their male partner, nor can they explain the continuation of the disparities through the pandemic. Furthermore, they cannot help us to answer the INVISIBILITY QUESTION.

Sociologists have pointed to a different set of factors to answer the DISPARITY QUESTION: they focus on the influence of gender roles in structuring expectations and power dynamics within a relationship. This work draws and builds on West and Zimmerman's seminal notion of "doing gender". When partners divide up domestic labour and caring responsibilities, they enact the gender roles they have internalized – they "do gender".[6]

[5] https://nyti.ms/3dpAAps

[6] West & Zimmerman (1987)

> Simultaneously, members "do" gender, as they "do" housework and child care, and what [has] been called the division of labor provides for the joint production of household labor and gender; it is the mechanism by which both the material and symbolic products of the household are realized. (p. 201)[7]

Hochschild spells out the connection between "doing gender" and an individual's psychological states by way of a "gender strategy":

> A gender strategy is a plan of action through which a person tries to solve problems at hand, given the cultural notions of gender at play. To pursue a gender strategy, a man draws on beliefs about manhood and womanhood, beliefs that are forged in early childhood and usually anchored to deep emotion. He makes a connection between how he thinks about his manhood, what he feels about it, and what he does. It works in the same way for a woman. Each person's gender ideology defines what sphere a person wants to identify with (home or work) and how much power in the marriage one wants to have (less, more, or the same amount). (p. 15)[8]

How does the framework of "doing gender" help explain the unequal labour distribution within relationships? Gender roles shape individuals' "gender strategies" by way of shaping their deeply-held beliefs, desires, and feelings. These then influence which actions they will perform, which part of domestic work they will think of as theirs. By acting on the basis of those deeply held beliefs, desires, and feelings, both partners enact their gender roles. And gender roles' demands on who does what are, well, gendered.

It's worth noting that an explanation of the unequal division of labour in terms of "doing gender" is not an individualistic explanation. This is because what counts as "doing gender" happens in the context of interpersonal interactions and is shaped and sustained by institutional structures, including workplace arrangements, economic conditions, legal frameworks, and societal expectations. If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category. If we fail to do gender appropriately, we as individuals - not the institutional arrangements - may be called to account (for our character, motives, and predispositions).[9]

For example, in the context of family life, "doing gender", jointly with other household members, produces family life: it *creates* the family:

> In particular households, individuals engage in specific versions of the work of care, constructing located, idiosyncratic versions of family life. As they go about this work, in material settings, they refer to and draw upon cultural ideologies of family life (though hardly any households actually look like the cultural ideal). By doing the work of "wife" and "mother," women quite literally *produce* family life from day to day, through their joint activities with others. By "doing family" in traditional

[7] Berk (1985)

[8] Hochschild (2012)

[9] Berk (1985)

> ways, household members sustain and reproduce the "naturalness" of prevailing arrangements. (p.12-13)[10]

This story helps shed light on the DISPARITY QUESTION: when it comes to labour-division within a relationship, each partner's deeply-held beliefs, desires, and feelings about domestic tasks plausibly influence who takes responsibility for each task. These deeply-held beliefs, desires, and feelings constitute the individual's gender strategy, shaped by prevailing gender roles. However, it leaves the INVISIBILITY QUESTION unanswered: why does the lopsided distribution of domestic tasks remain unrecognised by one of the partners?

To make progress on this question, we start from how disparities and injustices in the distribution of domestic labour are described. It is striking that feminist philosophers, sociologists, and journalists have long reached for perceptual language – as a matter of seeing or failing to see what is to be done. For example, Haslanger suggests that gender norms provide us with schemas which shape how we perceive and respond to the world:

> Let's take schemas to be intersubjective *patterns of perception*, thought, and behavior. They are embodied in individuals as a shared cluster of open-ended dispositions *to see things a certain way* or to respond habitually in particular circumstances. Schemas encode knowledge and also provide scripts for interaction with each other and our environment. (p. 78, highlights ours)[11]

This talk of "seeing" or "being blind to" resonates because it seems to accurately capture something about the phenomenology of being stuck in such an unequal labour division: of being the one who has to point out what needs doing because the other partner seems oblivious – "blind" – to it. It is equally striking that, at the same time, this language is considered metaphorical; it is often put in scare quotes. For example, Daniels writes that men and other family members 'do not take this responsibility and so do not "see" the task until they are directed'.[12]

We suggest taking this perceptual language at face value: describing workload disparities as having to do with perception is not just a metaphor; there really is a gendered perceptual phenomenon. Drawing on recent debates in philosophy of perception, we argue for the existence of Gendered Affordance Perception. We suggest that disparities in domestic and caring labour come about not just as a result of deeply held beliefs, desires, and feelings but also as a result of gendered differences at the level of *perception*. We suggest that gendered differences in *affordance perception* partly contribute to who is more likely to perform a given domestic task. The hypothesis of gendered affordances offers an attractive answer to both the DISPARITY QUESTION – why workload inequalities in the domestic sphere persist – and to the INVISIBILITY QUESTION – why one side of the relationship remains unaware of their full extent.

In this way, our paper makes two contributions. First, we offer a novel abductive case for the conclusion that affordance perception is shaped by gender norms. Here we build on the rich interdisciplinary literature that has recently grown around the notion of gendered affordances. However, for reasons that will become clear, our account of gendered affordance perception

[10] DeVault (1994)

[11] Haslanger (2007).

[12] Daniels (1987, 407).

diverges from this literature in several key respects. Second, we put the idea of gendered affordance perception to work to explain an issue of longstanding feminist concern viz. The gender disparities in domestic labour. Here we build on an established feminist literature that examines how the individual and the structural intersect. Feminists have long critically examined how social structures shape the options available to an individual as well as their preferences and desires.[13] Although some feminists have suggested that gender norms also shape our perception, these claims stand in need of further development.[14] Our proposal offers an elaboration of these claims.

Here is how the paper will proceed. We start by introducing the Gendered Domestic Affordance Perception hypothesis (GDAP) – the hypothesis that there are gendered differences in the affordance perception of domestic tasks. This will require laying out some background on affordance perception. The next section argues that if this hypothesis is true, it gives us a compelling answer to the DISPARITY QUESTION and the INVISIBILITY QUESTION, as well as having other explanatory benefits. The section after that will consider wider evidence that enhances the credibility of GDAP. The last section considers some ethical implications.

2 | GENDERED AFFORDANCE PERCEPTION

2.1 | Affordance perception

Let us start by unpacking the notion of affordance perception. What is an affordance? An affordance is a possibility for action. As you enter your kitchen the floor affords walking-on, the knife affords chopping-with and the cup affords drinking-from. The term 'affordance' was introduced by ecological psychologist J. Gibson. He explains '[t]he affordances of the environment are what it offers the animal, what it provides or furnishes, either for good or ill.'[15] J. Gibson deployed his concept of affordances within a complex theory of action with many contentious components. But the concept has since taken on a life of its own, with theorists across multiple disciplines utilising the term whilst jettisoning J. Gibson's wider theoretical baggage. Although the term has been used in different ways by different theorists, the best way to pin it down is as follows: a situation affords an action for an agent if it is possible for the agent to perform that action in that situation. Affordances are thus subject-relative: if two people are looking at a tree it might afford climbing for one of them but not afford climbing for the other. And they are situation relative: a tree that affords climbing for you here and now ceases to afford climbing when you are no longer in its vicinity.

In itself, the claim that our environment affords different actions is not especially bold. The bolder claim, that J. Gibson himself emphasised, is that these affordances are perceptible. Rather than seeing the shape and colour of a tree then *inferring* that you can climb it, you can simply see the tree *as climbable*. So when entering the kitchen, an agent might perceive the floor as walk-on-able, the knife as chop-with-able and the cup as drink-from-able. Some argue that this is evident from first-person reflection: if you consider your perceptual experience of the kitchen you can recognise that besides perceiving various shapes, colours and textures you perceive the

[13] See, for example, Chambers (2007); Khader (2011); Srinivasan (2018); Widdows (2018).

[14] E.g. Munton (2019) argues that social structures can shape our perception.

[15] Gibson (1979, 127).

possibilities for action offered by that environment. Others focus instead on third-person evidence, citing empirical work that strongly suggests we are perceptually sensitive to the affordances around us.[16]

Perceiving an affordance does not, in and of itself, constitute a motivation to perform the afforded action. One can, for example, perceive a piece of lettuce *as edible* without being in any way moved to eat it. But in many cases our perception of an affordance does seem to have motivational force. Ridderinkhof *et al.* suggest '…intrinsic to the experience of an affordance is that stimuli incite or summon certain actions.'.[17] Unlike the lettuce, a cake might be perceived not just as edible but as *to be eaten*. Siegel refers to these as *soliciting* affordances.[18] This experience of being solicited has been variously described in terms of 'demand character' (Koffka)[19], 'a felt tension which fluctuates around a norm' (Merleau-Ponty)[20], 'affective allure' (Rietveld)[21] and 'a feeling of answerability' (Siegel).[22]

Although debate continues over how exactly to unpack this experience of soliciting affordances, recent work in cognitive neuroscience points us in the right direction. Perceiving an affordance can lead to the automatic preparation of the afforded action. Seeing a teapot that affords grasping with your left hand, for example, can trigger the neural process responsible for reaching out your left hand and making a grabbing motion.[23] Whether this automatic readying of an action occurs depends on a multitude of factors, including the agent's current task, their emotions, their attention and their habits. These factors also determine the *strength* of this preparatory response. In cases of 'response capture', the response is so strong that agents find themselves moving involuntarily.[24] For instance, someone in the passenger seat of a car who sees an animal run into the road might involuntarily slam down their foot as if they were braking.

The experience of being moved to act by an affordance can be understood, at least in part, as the experience of being automatically readied to perform the afforded action. This experience is on a continuum, with a slight urge to act at the bottom-end of the scale and an overwhelming compulsion at the top-end of the scale. When we elect not to act on a soliciting affordance, we might have to exercise self-control. If a tennis ball hurtles past you in the park, the motor process of reaching out to catch it will be automatically triggered. If allowed to run its course, this motor process would unfold and you would reach out to catch the ball. So in order to not perform this

[16] Much of the literature on affordance perception adopts a '4E' approach to the mind on which cognition is embodied, embedded, enacted and extended. On this approach, the perception of an affordance is not constituted by some skull-bound mental representation of an affordance but rather by a wider process that can include the agent's body, their environment and the interactions between them. (See, for example, Cash (2013); De Jaegher (2013); Maiese (2021)). Our hypothesis is *neutral* on the nature of affordance perception. Our proposal could, broadly speaking, be understood using a 4E framework. However, it could also be framed in terms of gender norms shaping the skull-bound perceptual representation of affordances. Dialectically we think this is important as it means that our hypothesis should be taken seriously by 4E advocates and 4E sceptics alike.

[17] Ridderinkhof, Forstmann, Wylie, Burle, & van den Wildenberg (2011, 180).

[18] Siegel (2014)

[19] Koffka (1935)

[20] Merleau-Ponty (1962)

[21] Rietveld (2008)

[22] *Op. cit.*

[23] Tucker & Ellis (1998)

[24] Ridderinkhof *et al, op. cit.*

action you have to actively *suppress* the urge to do so. When we perceive a soliciting affordance, it is thus effortful not to act on that affordance.

2.2 | Differences in affordance perception

We now have the tools to describe some important dimensions of difference in how two agents perceptually experience the same environment. Following Rietveld and Kiverstein, let us call an agent's overall perceptual experience of affordances their 'affordance landscape'.[25] The affordance landscapes of two agents in the same environment can differ with regard to:

a. what affordances they perceive
b. the degree to which the affordance solicits action

First, there are the differences in *which* affordances an agent is attuned to. Where one agent perceives a tree as climbable and the other does not, this might be because the tree doesn't actually afford climbing to the second agent i.e. they are not able to climb it. But even where we hold the abilities of a pair of agents constant, their affordance perception can differ dramatically. As you step into a kitchen, a vast number of possible actions are available to you. Just think of all the things that it's possible to do with a spoon! But our perception of affordances is highly selective. At any given time, we are sensitive to only a small subset of the action possibilities with which our environment presents us. So two agents who filter affordances in different ways could have very different perceptual experiences of the same environment. Maybe one agent would perceive how the utensils could be used for preparing food where another perceives how they could be used for making music. Here it is not that the alternative set of actions are *unavailable* to the other agent. Rather, they are not actions to which their perception is presently attuned. It is worth noting here that such differences can be present without either agent *mis*perceiving the affordances around them. Both agents may be perceiving accurately, but the specific affordances they perceive are different.

Second, even where a pair of agents are sensitive to the same affordances, they might not be sensitive to them in the same *way*. One agent might perceive the cup as *to be drunk from*, experiencing a strong solicitation to act, while another agent might perceive the cup as affording drinking from but experience little or no solicitation to act on that affordance.

The factors thought to contribute to such individual differences are many and varied. As mentioned, they include relatively stable factors such as the agent's abilities and long-term habits but also more variable factors such as the agent's current goals, their desires, their emotions and the distribution of their attention.[26] Crucially, our sensitivity to affordances has a social dimension. In the here and now, the way you perceive your environment will be influenced by how other people act, how they draw our attention to particular possibilities and what it is possible to do *with* or *to* those people.[27] And as Eleanor Gibson's work reveals, on a longer time-scale our ability to perceive affordances is at least partly learned.[28] As we will further explore in Section 4, the workings

[25] Rietveld & Kiverstein (2014)

[26] Cisek (2007)

[27] Brancazio (2020)

[28] Gibson (1963)

of affordance perception are such that society can play a major role in shaping one's affordance landscape.

2.3 | The gendered domestic affordance perception hypothesis

Let us now formulate our hypothesis. We suggest that when it comes to the domestic environment, affordance perception is *gendered*. Our hypothesis is that there are systematic differences between genders both as to which domestic task affordances are perceived and how strongly those affordances solicit action.

For any given domestic task, that task can afford acting on for an agent. A floor can afford sweeping, dishes can afford cleaning, mess can afford tidying, a crying infant can afford nappy-changing, and so on. We suggest that for many domestic tasks, women are more likely to perceive the corresponding domestic task affordance. We also suggest that where both partners perceive it, the domestic task affordance tends to more strongly solicit action for women than for men. Call this the *Gendered Domestic Affordance Perception* (GDAP) hypothesis. Thus, if our hypothesis is true, two partners in the same domestic environment can experience very different affordance landscapes.[29]

We will start by looking at how the GDAP-hypothesis helps answer the DISPARITY QUESTION and the INVISIBILITY QUESTION. In addition, we will show that it has further explanatory benefits: it fits well with the phenomenology of unequal domestic labour arrangements and sheds light on the unequal distribution of cognitive load. Thus, the GDAP-hypothesis has significant abductive support. The next section will then evaluate the plausibility of GDAP itself, highlighting some empirical considerations that lend it further support and examining how agents learn to perceive affordances.

3 | ANSWERING THE DISPARITY AND INVISIBILITY QUESTIONS

In this section, we will assume that GDAP is true and explore what follows from it for the DISPARITY QUESTION and the INVISIBILITY QUESTION. To this end, let us consider a hypothetical example. Jack and Jill are a professional couple in their mid-30s with two small kids. They are both committed to an equitable relationship in which responsibilities are shared. Jack, who grew up in a "traditional" family where the father worked outside of the house, while the mother was a homemaker, considers himself to be progressive. He is supportive of Jill's career, always encouraging her to jump at new opportunities. When it comes to Jack's beliefs and desires then, Jack is fully committed to sharing all household responsibilities. But Jack and Jill differ in how they

[29] Here we should contrast our proposal with some related claims about gendered affordances in the recent literature. We argue that the *perception* of affordances is shaped by gender roles and offer a systematic account of this difference. In contrast, much of the literature argues that *opportunities for action* are gendered: that is, which actions are *available* to an agent depends on their gender. For example, Schwartz & Neff (2019) argue that social media platforms, such as Craigslist, offer different opportunities for action (and harbour different associated risks) for men and women. Similarly, Ayala-López (2018) argues that the speech acts available to an agent depend on social factors such as their gender. In technology studies, the notion of gendered affordances takes a different form: namely, that which opportunities for (inter)action present themselves to an agent depends on the perceived "gender" of the object with which they are interacting– particularly, in the context of robot-human interaction (e.g. Brahnam & DeAngeli (2012). Our own proposal is distinct from, but consistent with, these wider claims about gender and affordances. Crucially though, these other views are not suited to explaining the disparities in domestic labour that we target.

perceive the domestic environment. When Jill enters the messy kitchen, she sees the dishes as to be washed, the floor as to be swept, the refrigerator as to be restocked, the counter as to wiped, the recycling bin as to be taken out, the ripe bananas on the counter as to be used up. Jack, of course, sees that there are dishes in the sink, that the bananas are more brown than yellow, or that the refrigerator is empty. But these perceptions do not "tug" at him – they do not present the corresponding task as to be done. Others do present a task as to be done but only to a weaker degree: as something to be done *sometime* or *eventually*, not *now*. Yet others will present him with a strong soliciting affordance but at a later point than Jill: Jill perceives the recycling to be taken out when the bin approaches fullness, while Jack will perceive the same strength affordance when it is about to overflow.

Suppose that Jack and Jill's domestic affordance landscapes differ in this way, bracketing the question how it came to be this way (to which we will turn next section). How do we think the division of the various domestic tasks will play out?

It is very plausible expect that Jill will end up doing a greater share of those tasks. All things being equal, if Jill is more sensitive to the affordance for a domestic task, she is more likely to perform it. In some cases, this may be because the undone tasks "bother her": the recycling is "calling out" to her to be taken out. In other cases, it may be because the affordance perception captures her attention and thereby distracts her from other action plans. Jill may have entered the kitchen to get a pair of scissors but on seeing the mugs in the sink ends up washing those instead – perhaps forgetting the pair of scissors altogether. In yet other cases, it may be because the affordance perception disposes her to perform the task unthinkingly and unreflectively, while doing something else. Perceiving the counter as to be wiped, Jill may simply wipe them down as she is waiting for the kettle to boil.

Being sensitive to domestic affordances doesn't *compel* one to act on those affordances. Jill, of course, always has the option of not acting on a perceived affordance. Still, her sensitivity can nudge her toward performing the afforded task. Equally, Jack's lack of sensitivity to a given domestic task affordance does not make it impossible for him to perform the domestic task. You don't have to see the recycling as 'to be emptied' in order to think of doing so. The same conclusion can be reached by an inference: Jack can look at the almost full bin and infer that he ought to take it out. But Jack's lack of sensitivity – both in whether he perceives a given domestic task affordance and how strongly it solicits action – makes it less likely that he will perform the relevant domestic tasks. And over the course of the day, such small differences quickly add up to significant disparities. The GDAP-hypothesis thus provides us with a straightforward answer to the DISPARITY QUESTION.

We can now ask a second question: given their different domestic affordance landscapes, what will Jack and Jill think about their division of labour? Here it seems very plausible that Jack will systematically overestimate his contribution to domestic work and systematically *underestimate* Jill's contribution. If you don't see the counter as 'to be wiped', you are less likely to notice when it has been wiped. And so, you are less likely to clock that it has been wiped *by someone else*. This is particularly plausible for the myriad little mundane tasks of daily maintenance which are done regularly to preserve the status quo. Jack would, of course, notice when Jill cleans up a huge mess. It's the many small tasks done that prevent the huge mess from building up in the first place which are likely to fly beneath his radar.[30] (Just recently someone tweeted about

[30] As Angela Davis observes: "Just as a woman's maternal duties are always taken for granted, her never-ending toil as a housewife rarely occasions expressions of appreciation within her family". Housework, after all, is virtually invisible: "No one notices it until it isn't done – we notice the unmade bed, not the scrubbed and polished floor." Davis, A. Y. (1983, 222).

her partner making the following observation as they were preparing to move house: "Can you imagine: we have been living here for three years and the soap dispenser has never run out of soap!"). The GDAP-hypothesis thus also offers us a compelling answer to the INVISIBILITY QUESTION: a failure to perceive an affordance for a particular domestic task makes a failure to recognize that one has not done it – and that it has been done by someone else – more likely. We introduced the label 'INVISIBILITY QUESTION' as a neutral description of the phenomenon to be explained. Now, though, it emerges that 'invisibility' is a particularly fitting term as domestic affordances are literally *not visible* to the agent.

Finally, it explains why a greater share in the domestic workload goes hand in hand with disparities in cognitive burdens. We have said that Jill's perception of a counter as 'to be wiped down' does not compel her to wipe down the counter. But her perception of this soliciting affordance creates a felt tension that can only be relieved by performing the task in question.[31] Resisting the urge to act on this affordance requires the effortful exercise of self-control. And this problem cannot be avoided by simply ignoring the affordance in question. Affordances pull on your attention, so to keep her attention elsewhere Jill would have to make an extended mental effort. Thus, even when Jill chooses to ignore the splatters on the counter or to wait for Jack to take down the recycling, these choices generate a cognitive burden.

This puts Jill in a catch-22 situation: the difference in affordance perception results either in inequitable distributions of labour or, if resisted, in inequitable distributions of cognitive load.[32] She ends up either expending effort on doing the task or expending effort on consciously ignoring it. Moreover, if Jill wants to delegate the task to Jack, this, too, requires effort on her part: she has to point out to Jack what needs doing. As Daniels describes:

> Even when tasks can be delegated to others, it is usually the wife and mother who notices what needs to be done and when. The others do not take this responsibility and so do not "see" the task until they are directed.[33]

That, too, is work. It's what Strauss calls "articulation work": organizing the tasks and relationships to them of those who perform them.[34]

4 | EXPLAINING THE GENDERED DOMESTIC AFFORDANCE PERCEPTION HYPOTHESIS

So far we have argued that the GDAP-hypothesis provides us with unified and compelling answers to the DISPARITY QUESTION and the INVISIBILITY QUESTION. Thus, the GDAP-hypothesis can do some useful explanatory work. But how plausible is the GDAP-hypothesis when considered on its own? What explains *it*?

[31] See e.g. Merleau-Ponty (1962)

[32] Daminger (2019)

[33] Daniels (1987, 407).

[34] Strauss (1985)

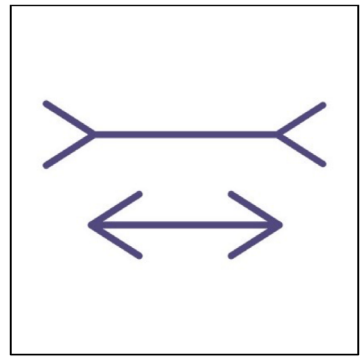

FIGURE 1 The müller-lyer illusion

4.1 | Social factors in perception

The first thing to note is that besides influencing non-perceptual states such as beliefs, desires and emotions, social factors have direct and indirect influences on perception. For instance, Clavel Vasquez highlights cultural variations in sensitivity to the Müller-Lyer illusion (see Figure 1).[35] In this illusion, two lines that are actually of the same length appear to be of different lengths. It is tempting to think that this illusion is just an artefact of processing features that are hardwired into the visual system. However, Segall *et al.* found that in societies where right-angled surfaces are uncommon people were not subject to the illusion.[36] Here patterns in the built environment influence the visual systems of those who live in it.

Empirical insights into the workings of perception make the existence of such social effects less surprising. Far from being an inflexible camera-like mechanism, the visual system is constantly updating itself in light of the regularities it finds in the environment.[37] Since society can influence the regularities to which an individual is exposed, it can indirectly mould an individual's visual system thereby shaping how they perceive the world. Furthermore, there are ubiquitous 'top-down' influences on perception. Perceptual processing is subject to 'cognitive penetration' by non-perceptual states such as beliefs.[38] Since society can clearly influence our beliefs, we should expect it to also have an indirect influence on our perceptual states.

Social factors will also shape *affordance* perception. The role of skill deserves special attention. The skills we have shape the affordances we perceive: the skilled tennis player, for example, will perceive affordances that the novice cannot.[39] But which skills we develop – whether tennis is played, whether we have a chance to play it – is influenced by various social forces.

Expectations and social cues also affect affordance perception more directly, as is suggested by empirical studies such as Eleanor Gibson's famous 'visual cliff' experiments (1960) and the variations on it later performed by Klinnert *et al.*[40,41] 12-month old babies were placed on a platform

[35] Vázquez, María Jimena Clavel (2020)

[36] Segall, Campbell, & Herskovits (1966)

[37] Hohwy (2013)

[38] Stokes (2013)

[39] Kiverstein & Rietveld (2015)

[40] Gibson & Walk (1960)

[41] Klinnert, Campos, Sorce, Emde & Svejdan (1983)

FIGURE 2 Image of the 'Visual cliff' from Klinnert et al.

from which an opaque surface falls away but a transparent panel is in place that offers a supportive surface (see Figure 2). The opaque surface is perceived as affording crawling on so the infant crawls across it as normal. When they reach the transparent region and the opaque surface reaches a cliff, however, the affordances of the environment become ambiguous. Here the infant will generally look to the adult for guidance. If the adult shows concern, the infant will avoid crawling past the visual cliff. If the adult shows encouragement, the infant will continue to crawl. This social influence from the adult then determines whether the infant perceives the surface as affording crawling on in the future.

Social norms also bear on affordance perception and affordance perception is a key mechanism by which we – unconsciously – comply with certain social norms. J. Gibson proposed that an agent's affordance landscape reflects their 'way of life', with the norms of their culture determining the affordances they perceive. Others have developed this idea in more detail. Dreyfus, for example, offers the striking example of passengers in a lift.[42] When someone stands too close to you in the lift they afford stepping-back-from and you will adjust your position to maintain an appropriate distance. What constitutes an appropriate distance is determined by social norms that vary from culture to culture. You perceive the stepping-back-from affordances that you perceive because of the society into which you have been enculturated.[43] Interestingly, you can find yourself stepping back from someone in a lift without even noticing that you're doing it. And this behaviour might not even match your beliefs about how close it's appropriate to stand next to a stranger – in fact, you may not have any explicit beliefs on how close is *too close* at all. And if everyone in the lift responds to the same affordances, a socially acceptable distribution of people is achieved without anyone even needing to think about it. You can thus conform to a social norm, and thereby reinforce that norm, without intending to do so and without avowing the norms in question.[44]

Given the profound social influences on affordance perception, it should then not be a surprise that gender norms can shape affordance perception, too. Take the role of skill in affordance

[42] Dreyfus (2002)

[43] Rietveld & Kiverstein (2014)

[44] Segundo-Ortin (2022)

perception. Which skills we acquire is mediated in various ways by gender norms and expectations. Some skills are explicitly gendered: like cooking, cleaning, and grooming. Insofar as a girl or a woman is more likely to receive formal or informal instruction in these skills, she is more likely to be attuned to the corresponding affordances (of an onion as to be chopped, a counter to be wiped, an eyebrow to be plucked). Insofar as a girl is discouraged to engage in certain "unfeminine" activities: running around, rough and tumble play, she may not acquire, for example, the skill to climb trees or to jump tall fences and, correspondingly, will fail to perceive trees as climbable or fences as jumpable. By being enculturated into gender norms, you become sensitised to affordances to act in gender-appropriate ways.[45] Maisse explains: 'Habits develop in part because social domains and institutions encourage the adoption of certain patterns of engagement while discouraging and sanctioning others. Higgins …points to gender as an example: 'Due to expectations and norms regarding the enactment of "feminine" and "masculine" activity, individuals routinely adopt gendered mannerisms and habitually come to regard and experience their bodies in particular ways.'[46] Similarly, Brancazio argues '…gender is already influencing our intentional movements and actions in such a way that we are not fully aware of its effects when we retrospectively attribute the rules we think are guiding those behaviors.'[47]

Another factor worthy of special attention is the body. There is a close relationship between an individual's body image and their affordance landscape. Feminist phenomenologists have long drawn attention to how one's body image is shaped by gender norms.[48] De Beauvoir writes that the body 'is the instrument of our grasp upon the world, [and] a limiting factor for our projects'.[49] By shaping a woman's body image, society can shape the affordances that a woman perceives. Iris Marion Young argues that where males are trained to see their body as providing the potential to influence the world, females are trained to focus on the limitations of their body (both real and illusory).[50] The affordances we perceive are, in turn, shaped by our body image. Whether you perceive a high shelf as reachable depends on the body image you have. If, according to your body image, you are sufficiently tall, you will perceive the shelf as reachable. And if, according to your body image, you are not sufficiently tall, you won't. This has the result that a woman might not perceive her environment as affording an action even though that action is objectively available to her. Building on this proposal, Nick Brancazio argues that, for some affordances, this pattern is inverted with males being trained not to see certain 'feminine' actions as possible and women being sensitised to the presence of such affordances.[51]

Gendered norms also shape whether and how *the body itself* features in perception. Sandra Bartky, in particular, explicitly notes the close connection between perception of the body and know-how. Both perception and know-how come together when gender norms are internalized:

> Something is "internalized" when it is incorporated into the structure of the self. By "structure of the self" I refer to those modes of perception and of self-perception that

[45] Fausto-Sterling, Garcia Coll &Lamarre (2012)

[46] Maiese (2019, 370).

[47] Brancazio (2018, 438).

[48] We should not be distracted by perceptual differences grounded in *sex*. For instance, innate biological differences are thought to make a subtle difference between how biological males and females perceive colour. This is not the kind of effect we are interested in.

[49] De Beauvoir, S. (1997, 173). See also Bartky (1990) .

[50] Young (1980)

[51] Brancazio (2019)

> allows a self to distinguish itself both from other selves and from things that are not selves. I have described elsewhere how a generalized male witness comes to structure woman's consciousness of herself as a bodily being. This, then, is one meaning of "internalization." The sense of oneself as a distinct and valuable individual is tied not only to the sense of how one is perceived, but also to what one knows, especially to what one knows how to do; this is a second sense of "internalizaton".[52]

As for the first sense, Bartky argues that a woman's perception of her own body is influenced by the perspective of an outside, male observer:

> In contemporary patriarchal culture, a panoptical male connoisseur resides within the consciousness of most women: they stand perpetually before his gaze and under his judgment.[53]

As for the second sense, Bartky catalogues the 'disciplinary practices that produce a body which in gesture and appearance is recognizably feminine' and describes these practices as both skilled and a form of self-surveillance.[54]

> The woman who checks her make-up half a dozen times a day to see if her foundation has caked or her mascara run, who worries that the wind or rain may spoil her hairdo, who looks frequently to see if her stockings have bagged at the ankle, or who, feeling fat, monitors everything she eats, has become, just as surely as the inmate of Panopticon, a self-policing subject, a self committed to a relentless self-surveillance.[55]

Affordance perception, plausibly, plays an important role in this self-surveillance. The woman perceives the shadow underneath her eyes as cover-up-able, her hair as smoothable, her eyebrow as pluck-able, her waist as cinch-able. She perceives her body itself as an opportunity for action: as something-to-be-done-to, to be acted on. And in fact, sometimes the aim of those actions is in turn to make the body elicit gendered affordances, as Bartky notes: 'her lips must be made more kissable'.[56] Because gender norms shape perception and action in such subtle ways, you might find yourself enacting your gender role without noticing and/or enacting gender roles that you actually disavow: smoothing your clothes upon glancing your reflection, readjusting your posture.

Naomi Wolf also points out the connection between perception and action:

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[52] Bartky (1990, 38-39).

[53] Bartky (1990, 34).

[54] Bartky, S. (1990, 37). Bartky stands out in emphasising the perceptual aspect of internalising gender norms. The insight that the *body itself* is shaped by gender norms – that the gendered body is socially constructed – is taken up and elaborated by much contemporary feminist literature. See, for example, Greer, G. (1971), Wolf, N. (2013) Bordo S. (1993), Chambers (2007). Recently, Widdows (2018) describes how social media and the visual culture of the internet have extended the reach of this "panopticon" into ever more areas of our life.

[55] Bartky, S. (1990, 42).

[56] Bartky, S. (1990, 33). Note that this – the women's lips affording kissing – is an example of what Brancazio calls "interpersonal affordances" , which are defined as "defined as opportunities afforded by other agents" (p.2) See Brancazio (2020). Being perceived and being "seen": Interpersonal affordances, agency, and selfhood. As noted by Brancazio, there are some interesting questions about the relationship of interpersonal affordances and objectification. For classic feminist work on the latter, see Langton (2009). Nussbaum (1995)

> The qualities that a given period calls beautiful in women are merely symbols of the female behavior that that period considers desirable: *The beauty myth is always actually prescribing behavior and not appearance*.[57]

Someone enculturated into gender norms is effectively taught the *skill* of 'doing gender': they are trained in what the 'right' ways and 'wrong' ways to act are given their designated sex. And this skill then shapes their affordance landscape like any other, sensitising them to opportunities to do the 'right' things and desensitising to them to possible performances of the 'wrong' things.

4.2 | Gender influence on domestic affordance perception

Having got this far, we can now see how it's possible for gender to influence whether and how men and women perceive domestic affordances. Social factors influence perception. Gender is an especially central social factor, and sensitivity to affordances is an especially important aspect of perception. Here our hypothesis integrates neatly with existing theories of disparities in domestic labour. Gender categories prescribe that women should take more responsibility for domestic tasks than men. West and Zimmerman, for instance, claim that:

> Whenever people face issues of allocation - who is to do what, get what, plan or execute action, direct or be directed, incumbency in significant social categories such as "female" and "male" seems to become pointedly relevant. How such issues are resolved conditions the exhibition, dramatization, or celebration of one's "essential nature" as a woman or man. (p. 143)[58]

We are trained into these gender norms from a young age, with girls being encouraged to play with toys like vacuum cleaners that encourage imitation of cleaning activities and dolls that encourage imitation of childcare activities.[59] These gender norms shape our beliefs, desires, emotions, skills, habits and body image in such a way that women will generally be more attuned to domestic affordances than men. So the non-perceptual factors identified by existing theories can actually generate the kinds of perceptual difference that we highlight.

Interestingly, there is some empirical work that fits excellently with the hypothesis that gender influences our perception of domestic affordances. Environmental Dependency Syndrome (EDS) is a rare condition in which subjects are unable to initiate actions for themselves and are instead led by prompts in their environment. When led into a bedroom, for example, patients would start to undress and get into bed even in the middle of the day and when it's not their bedroom. EDS and related conditions are thought to offer a window onto the affordances that an agent perceives. As discussed in section 2, perceiving an affordance can automatically trigger the neural preparation of the afforded action. These preparatory responses underwrite the experience of being solicited to act on an affordance. In typical subjects, these responses can be deliberately or unconsciously

[57] Wolf, N. (2013, 36–37); emphasis in the original.

[58] West & Zimmerman (1987)

[59] Valian (1999). Studies suggest that these patterns are perpetuated in childcare settings even in countries that actively encourage gender-equity in children's play and that it also extends to outdoor play. See, for example, Ärlemalm-Hagsér (2010). See also MacNaughton (1998). MacNaughton (2000). MacNaughton (2006). Yelland (1998), see Rogoff (2003).

FIGURE 3 Patient 2 washing dishes from Lhermitte (1986)

inhibited, which is why we don't act on all the affordances we see. But this capacity for inhibition is precisely what's missing in EDS patients. Consequently, the affordances perceived by an EDS patient can be directly inferred from their behaviour. In an influential study by Lhermitte, the actions of a male patient (Patient 1) and female patient (Patient 2) were compared.[60] The behaviour of the two patients was strikingly gendered:

> A buffet had been laid out in a lecture room where there were about 20 people. When Patient 1 came in, he clearly indicated his delight by word and gesture. He helped himself to the food and the orange juice…He behaved like a guest, not even thinking of offering anything to me or anybody else. When Patient 2 came in, she saw some stacks of chairs and proceeded to set them out side by side. She took the glasses that were stacked on the buffet table and laid them out one by one. She then offered me food on various plates and asked me if I wanted any port. Although I declined the offer, she poured some into a glass…In short, she behaved like a hostess, without thinking of serving herself. (p. 336)

This suggests that the affordance landscape of each patient reflected their respective gender roles. Patient 2 saw a *serving* affordance and acted on it while Patient 1 was insensitive to such an affordance. Another observation by Lhermitte connects with our hypothesis more directly [Patient 2] saw the balls of yarn and knitting needles and began to knit:

> When she spotted sewing needles, spools of thread, and pieces of fabric, she put on her glasses and began sewing in a precise manner. In the kitchen, she swept the floor, after spotting the broom; when she saw dishes in the sink, she washed them. (p. 338)

Patient 1, by contrast, didn't perform these actions in the same environment. This encourages the conclusion that Patient 2 was sensitive to these domestic affordances in a way that Patient 1 was not. Patient 2 can be seen washing the dishes in the Figure 3. We must, of course, be careful drawing conclusions about the general population from a few pathological case studies. That said, cases like this vividly illustrate our hypothesis and open up interesting new avenues for future research.

[60] Lhermitte (1986)

5 | RESPONSIBILITY, RESISTANCE, AND SOCIAL CHANGE

We have argued that the GDAP-hypothesis has significant explanatory payoff. It explains both why there are disparities in domestic labour distributions and why these disparities are so often invisible to the partner doing the lesser share. In this section, we address the objection that the GDAP-hypothesis has problematic consequences for attributing responsibility for the inequitable distribution of domestic labour. We argue that the GDAP-hypothesis neither absolves the partner who slacks off, nor "blames the victim" for doing the disproportionate share. Instead it helps us see how remedial action will require effort, both at the level of individuals and at the political level.

An immediate concern one may have is that the GDAP-hypothesis has unwelcome moral implications. In particular, you may worry that to explain inequitable distributions in workload by appealing to gendered differences in perception implies that we can't hold male partners who do less than their fair share responsible. After all, if Jack doesn't see the counter as to be wiped – if he is insensitive to the affordance – then surely he cannot be blamed for failing to wipe it. Thus the GDAP-hypothesis may seem to imply that, if Jack really does lack sensitivity to a range of domestic task affordances, then this provides him with an easy excuse for not doing them.

This, however, is much too quick. To see this, suppose Jack does try to avail himself of this excuse upon being confronted by an exasperated Jill observing that, once again, he's walked past the counter covered in toast crumbs without pausing to wipe it down. "I just didn't perceive a counter-wiping affordance," Jack points out. "So what?!", Jill may well respond. After all, perceiving a task-affordance is not necessary for performing the task. Thus, even if it is true that Jack does not see the counter as to be wiped, he perceives the crumbs and he knows that wiping down the counter is an essential task to keep the kitchen tidy. Insofar as he desires to do his fair share in this project, this should be sufficient to move him to act. In the absence of affordance perception, you can still reason your way to what is to be done. Moreover, if Jack is aware of his affordance blind spots, he ought to take precautions – just as we rely on calendars and daily reminders to remember appointments and birthdays. He can adopt the resolution to check for crumbs every time he waits for the kettle to boil or put a "CRUMBS?" post-it note on the kitchen cupboard.[61]

This is not the only way Jack's lack of sensitivity fails to provide an excuse for doing the task. Jill may, in addition, blame him for this very perceptual failure. "Yes, that's exactly the problem," she may say, "you don't *see* it. Because you don't care." Lack of sensitivity to domestic task affordances is not a visual impairment; it's not like, say, color blindness. Affordance perception is not set in stone: we can change which affordances we perceive through continued conscious effort. We can sensitize ourselves to a task-affordance by cultivating habits of doing the task, by consciously paying attention to cues whether the task needs to be done. We can cultivate affordances by putting ourselves in situations where we have plenty of opportunity to practice. That, in turn, means that one way in which Jack can improve his sensitivity to domestic task affordances is by taking responsibility for those tasks. And insofar as Jack remains obstinately insensitive to affordances of domestic tasks, Jill may well be right in that it reflects insufficient commitment to doing his fair share.[62]

A second, related, concern may be that the hypothesis ends up holding *Jill* responsible for doing the greater share. Insofar as she is more sensitive to the affordances, maybe it's that she just *cares*

[61] See Sliwa (2019).

[62] See Smith (2005). for a general argument that we can be held morally responsible for "passive attitudes" – what we see, what we remember, what we notice, what we feel – since those attitudes reflect our underlying values and commitments.

more about a clean kitchen, a swept floor, or an empty rubbish bin. In other words, the worry is that the GDAP-hypothesis ends up attributing to a woman who is more sensitive to such affordances a natural affinity for housework. She performs these tasks because she *wants* to do those tasks.

Again, this is too quick. From the fact that Jill is more perceptually attuned to domestic affordances than a male partner, it simply does not follow that she wants to perform those chores – much less that she *naturally* wants to do those tasks. Such an inference would commit a variant of, what Khader calls, the error of psychologizing the structural:

> We psychologize the structural when we incorrectly assume that a person is failing to flourish primarily because of problems with her psychology (her values, desires, etc.) rather than because of her structural environment. (p. 57)[63]

The GDAP-hypothesis does not psychologise the structural. On the contrary, it makes explicit that there is a close interplay between the individual and the social. Social norms and individuals' affordance landscapes are inextricably linked. Social norms shape which affordances we perceive. That's because social norms shape which opportunities for action are accessible to an agent in a particular social location. "Accessible" here means both: which one's are actually available (if girls playing sports is frowned upon, there may simply not be any opportunities for girls to play sports) and which one's are encouraged (even if there are opportunities for playing sports, girls may be discouraged from taking advantage of them). By shaping which opportunities are accessible, social norms shape which affordances agents in a given social position are attuned to.

Importantly, we have already noted that which affordances we perceive need not be mediated by conscious representations of social norms. This means that our affordance perception can prompt us to conform with and thus reinforce social norms that we consciously disavow. This opens up possibilities for resistance. It points to ways in which individuals like Jack can thus resist gendered norms when they improve their sensitivity to domestic task affordances even if they started out being insufficiently attuned to them. The process of changing an affordance landscape shaped by a social norm can be a way of resisting that norm. Insofar as Jack's lack of domestic affordance perception reflects gendered norms about division of labour within a relationship, his conscious effort to become more attuned to certain tasks is a way for him to push back against those gendered norms.

Similarly, Jill's refusal to act on her affordances (waiting for Jack to do his part) is also a way of resisting the affordance landscape and the social norms that shaped it. As we have already noted, such resistance is effortful because it can involve actively ignoring what one perceives as to be done.

Individuals can change their affordance landscapes through conscious effort. Here an awareness of how one is perceiving one's environment is a crucial first step. Brancazio argues:

> …being aware of the influence of gender on our minimal sense of agency can help us bring our attention to several facets of this influence. We can be more attentive to the ways in which we are drawn to interact with our environments, we can bring our habits of interaction into reflective analysis, and we can be more aware of the

[63] Khader (2011). This also flies in the face of decades of sociological work on women's experiences of domestic labour, which catalogues that women experience household tasks "as tiresome, menial, mindless, repetitive, and lonely". Thompson (1991). Or as Angela Davis writes: "Invisible, repetitive, exhausting, unproductive, uncreative – these are the adjectives which most perfectly capture the nature of housework." Davis, A. Y. (1983, 222).

kinds of embodied, sub-personal (motor) programs and ways that we use our bodies in achieving our goals.[64]

But for wholesale social change, individual efforts are not enough. Collective efforts to change social norms, if they are to be effective, will require efforts to reshape collective affordance landscapes. This also calls for policy-level interventions. For example, after the arrival of children, women shoulder the lions' share of caring work. At the same time, there is empirical work suggesting that fathers who take longer parental leave do more care-taking work well after the end of their parental leave.[65] Why is that? We suggest that at least part of the explanation may have to do with the fact that spending time with their child gives fathers opportunity to both acquire the relevant caring skills – knowledge how to perform certain caring tasks – as well as honing their affordance perception – that is, seeing those tasks as to-be-done. Shared parental leave may thus be an effective policy for tackling gendered inequalities in the distribution of caring work partly because it gives fathers the opportunity to become sensitive to caring-task affordances, thus leading them to shoulder more of the care-work long-term.[66]

6 | CONCLUSIONS AND CONTINUATIONS

In this paper we have made a case for the Gendered Domestic Affordance Perception hypothesis. The hypothesis offers a plausible answer to the DISPARITY QUESTION, explaining continued gender disparities in domestic labour in terms of gender differences in the perception of domestic affordances. The hypothesis also offers a plausible answer to the INVISIBILITY QUESTION, explaining why males would fail to notice that a task has been performed by their female partner. Moreover, these explanations have significant advantages over existing proposals in in the literature. The hypothesis also has some wider explanatory benefits. It helps to capture the gendered *phenomenology* of the domestic environment, describing differences in what it is like for women and men to experience the same domestic environment. It also helps to capture a further dimension of disparity: the inequitable distribution of mental load. On our account, gendered differences in affordance perception generate gendered differences in the mental load that a domestic task causes. And all of these explanations integrate well with existing theories of gender disparities and existing theories of affordance perception.

The GDAP-hypothesis also invites new strategies for intervention. If gender disparities, and the invisibility of women's work, are underwritten by differences in affordance perception, measures should be taken to prevent these perceptual differences from emerging. Affordance perception is shaped by gender training that children receive from a young age, so by correcting the practice of encouraging girls to play with vacuum cleaners and boys to play with trucks, we can lower the chances of perceptual differences in later life. Affordance perception is also shaped by habits, so measures to ensure that men get in the habit of performing domestic tasks can also ameliorate these perceptual differences. For instance, extending parental leave for fathers could plausibly help attune new fathers to childcare affordances.

[64] Brancazio (2018, 438).

[65] Nepomnyaschy & Waldfogel (2007)

[66] Perhaps this could explain how shared parental leave helps narrowing the gender pay gap (https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/731288/Gender-Pay-Gap-actions.pdf)

Our proposal also opens up several new lines of enquiry. The intersubjective dimension of affordance perception can be further explored. The way we perceive affordances in our environment is shaped by other people in our environment, by their actions and by our interactions with them. How might the dynamics within a relationship alter the affordance landscape of each partner? Could Jack's action (or inaction) make Jill more attuned to domestic affordances? Could Jill's actions further desensitise Jack to those affordances? Could Jill and Jack redress the imbalance in domestic affordance perception through subtle changes in how they interact? How would Jack and Jill's respective affordance landscapes change if they lived alone? These questions all deserve further attention.

The scope of the relevant affordances could also be considered. Although our focus has been an affordances for bodily actions, like sweeping and wiping, a growing body of work suggests we are also sensitive to affordances for mental actions like attending, remembering and deliberating.[67] The concept of affordances for mental action might shed light on inequitable distributions of mental load.[68]Is a female partner more likely than a male partner to perceive a scheduled event as affording remembering, or perceive a child's problem as affording deliberation? And although our focus has been on the gendered distribution of labour in a domestic setting, similar issues arise for the gendered distribution of labour in other contexts such as the workplace. Is a woman more likely to perceive mugs in the office kitchen as affording cleaning? Is a woman more likely to see a distressed colleague as affording aid? Is a woman more likely to see certain kinds of work decision as affording deliberation? If so, how might this contribute to inequitable distributions of labour in the workplace? These questions and others offer promising directions for future research into this important topic.

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ORCID

Tom McClelland https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5956-1425

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[67] Metzinger (2017), McClelland (2020)

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