

UC Irvine

UC Irvine Previously Published Works

Title

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Gender Gap in Newly Created Domains of Household Labor

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/6216m8pw>

Journal

Sociological Perspectives, 65(6)

ISSN

0731-1214

Authors

Abromaviciute, Jurgita
Carian, Emily K

Publication Date

2022-12-01

DOI

10.1177/07311214221103268

Copyright Information

This work is made available under the terms of a Creative Commons Attribution License, available at

<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>

Peer reviewed

The COVID-19 Pandemic and the Gender Gap in Newly Created Domains of Household Labor

Sociological Perspectives
2022, Vol. 65(6) 1169–1187
© The Author(s) 2022
Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/07311214221103268
journals.sagepub.com/home/spx



Jurgita Abromaviciute¹ and Emily K. Carian²

Abstract

In this study, we draw on interview data from 62 matched different-sex, dual-career spouses raising young children to examine the mechanisms behind the gender gap in household labor during the COVID-19 pandemic. We argue that the pandemic represents a unique case of social uncertainty and an opportunity to observe how structural conditions shape the gendered division of household labor. We find that under the rapid social transformation imposed by the pandemic, gender serves as an anchor and orienting frame for couples with young children. We argue that the pandemic (1) expanded traditional gender expectations to new domains of household labor and (2) heightened the importance of gendered explanations for the division of labor that justified intra-couple inequality. Our findings suggest that the particular structural conditions that characterize different times of uncertainty work through slightly different mechanisms, yet produce the same outcome: gender inequality, with long-lasting and wide-ranging implications.

Keywords

COVID-19 pandemic, gender, household labor

In the United States, restrictions issued by state and local officials to control the COVID-19 pandemic suddenly altered the conditions under which families navigated work and home responsibilities. Many employees moved to working from home for the first time (Kramer and Kramer 2020). Schools and daycares closed overnight and other means of childcare, like babysitters and elderly relatives, became too risky for many families (Lee and Parolin 2021). Parents suddenly became responsible for supervising their school-aged children's virtual learning (C. Collins et al. 2021). Often with little help from their employers and the government, they were left to navigate a crisis in which two greedy institutions—work and family—had collided in unprecedented ways, creating more and more complicated household labor.

¹California State University, San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA, USA

²University of California, Irvine, CA, USA

*Jurgita Abromaviciute and Emily K. Carian contributed equally to this paper.

Corresponding Author:

Jurgita Abromaviciute, California State University, San Bernardino, San Bernardino, CA 92407, USA.

Email: jurgita.abromaviciute@csusb.edu

Research conducted before the pandemic documents how, under typical conditions, women in different-sex married couples do more housework and childcare than men (Damingler 2019; Sayer 2005). Research on times of uncertainty shows how gender intervenes in and complicates seemingly rational labor allocation processes (Brines 1994; Damaske 2021; Gough and Killewald 2011; Rao 2020). As a period of uncertainty that altered both the structural and personal conditions under which families do paid and unpaid labor, the COVID-19 pandemic provides an opportunity to investigate the processes that shape how different-sex married couples divide house- and carework. But the pandemic is unique compared to other cases of uncertainty (e.g., unemployment). First, it is different in scope, affecting nearly all families with young children and creating more household labor. The pandemic also altered the nature of work, as many employees shifted to working from home. While the cultural norms governing work and family spheres continued to demand complete devotion, the physical and temporal barriers between the two ceased to exist during the pandemic.

Research conducted thus far shows that women have borne the brunt of these new childcare and housework responsibilities at the expense of their paid labor. During the pandemic, mothers increased their hours of childcare (Zamarro and Prados 2021) and decreased their hours of paid labor significantly more than fathers (C. Collins et al. 2020), and were more likely than fathers to leave the labor force (C. Collins et al. 2021; Landivar et al. 2020). Simply put, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified the already gendered division of labor.

How were the unequal burdens of the pandemic set in motion, sustained, and amplified? We argue that the conditions, risks, and restrictions of the pandemic (1) expanded traditional gender expectations to new domains of household labor and (2) heightened the importance of particular family myths, or accounts coproduced by spouses, that justified unequal household labor arrangements. We argue that these two mechanisms increased intra-couple inequality and explain how the gendered division of labor became even more gendered during the pandemic. Our study is distinct from previous work on the COVID-19 pandemic because it compares the experiences and sense-making of matched spouses—men and women who are married to each other. Our unique sample of 62 spouses (31 couples) and our rich interview data provide an in-depth picture of how different-sex married couples with young children navigate work-family conflict during the pandemic. More broadly, this research leverages pandemic-related shifts in structural and personal conditions to shed light on the factors that shape couples' division of labor with important implications for gender inequality, including for women's labor force participation, marital satisfaction, and mental health, and children's socialization.

Trends in the Household Division of Labor during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Research conducted so far indicates that couples' division of labor became even more unequal during the COVID-19 pandemic. Caitlyn Collins and colleagues (2020) found that mothers reduced their work hours between four and five times more than fathers at the onset of the pandemic. Reductions were greatest for mothers of young children, indicating that supervising virtual learning and homeschooling demands drove decreases in women's paid labor. Gema Zamarro and María J. Prados (2021) reported that working mothers with a college degree were more likely to reduce their working hours compared to both working fathers and working women without children in the early months of the pandemic. They also found that mothers were more likely to be the sole providers of childcare compared to fathers during times of school closures. Not only did working mothers reduce their work hours more than fathers, they were also more likely to exit the labor force. Liana Christin Landivar and colleagues (2020) showed that the largest reduction in labor force participation at the onset of the pandemic was among mothers of young children. Caitlyn Collins et al. (2021) found that, in states that offered primarily remote instruction, the gender gap in labor force participation grew by five percentage points from fall 2019 to fall

2020, and this change was statistically significant. In states that offered primarily hybrid or in-person instruction, there was no change in the gender gap in labor force participation.

As this research shows, mothers' reduction in work hours and decreased labor force participation can be attributed to the increased demands at home borne out of the pandemic. Richard J. Petts, Daniel L. Carlson, and Joanna R. Pepin (2021) showed that participation in homeschooling early in the pandemic was associated with the risk of losing a job and voluntarily leaving work or voluntarily reducing work hours for mothers, but not fathers. They also found that fathers' participation in homeschooling buffered against negative employment outcomes for mothers. While mothers' increased responsibilities at home hurt their careers, Jessica M. Calarco et al. (2021) found that mothers justified unequal parenting arrangements as practical and natural, referring to fathers' status as primary breadwinners, their own availability for parenting on account of layoffs and telecommuting, and gendered stereotypes of women as caregivers.

What processes explain these statistical trends? Before turning to our analyses, we review previous work on gender's multifaceted role in shaping the household division of labor in times of relative social stability as well as in times of uncertainty. Then, we situate the COVID-19 pandemic as a unique case of social uncertainty and a window to observe what mechanisms are set in motion (and how) that amplify unequal burdens within families.

How Gender Shapes the Division of Household Labor

Women in different-sex couples typically complete more unpaid household labor than their husbands (Daminger 2019; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Shelton and John 1996). This gendered division of labor is relatively stable across time and, despite being influenced by state-level policies and contexts, geography (Calasanti and Bailey 1991; Prince Cooke and Baxter 2010). In the United States, the time mothers and fathers spend on paid and unpaid labor has become more similar over the past several decades, but mothers still spend nearly twice as much time on housework and child-care compared to fathers (Bianchi et al. 2012). This pattern cuts across racial and class lines, although research documents important nuances across demographic groups—for instance, that the gender gap is smaller among Black couples compared to white couples (John and Shelton 1997) and that working-class couples may have more traditional ideologies than middle-class couples when it comes to who should do what around the house (Perry-Jenkins and Folk 1994).

To understand how gender intervenes in the division of household labor, and how gender inequality was amplified during the pandemic, we draw on work that conceptualizes gender as a social institution or multi-level structure, constraining and facilitating action at the macro-, meso-, and micro-levels (Martin 2004; Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Risman 1998). Cecilia L. Ridgeway (2009, 2011), for example, argues that gender is a primary frame that organizes social life at each of these levels. According to Ridgeway, macro-level cultural beliefs about gender permeate social interaction, allowing individuals to coordinate action by organizing expectations of themselves and others. In aggregate, these effects transform what are perceived as gender differences into inequality across a host of institutional settings. The home is a key institution where gender is especially salient, resulting in a highly unequal division of labor. Below, we elaborate further on how gender works at each of these levels to shape the gendered division of labor.

At the macro-level, American society is entrenched in robust yet conflicting cultural schemas. According to these schemas, a good mother is devoted to her children above all else (Hays 1998), which conflicts with norms that require employees to be always available for work (Acker 1990; Williams 2000). These cultural ideals are institutionalized in state and federal policies that shape couples' division of labor (Calasanti and Bailey 1991). Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were few institutional supports to assist families in balancing unpaid household labor and paid labor. Federally mandated parental leave is limited to 12 weeks, is unpaid, and applies only to certain employees (Han, Ruhm, and Waldfogel 2007). Other processes, like the gender wage

gap (Prince Cooke and Baxter 2010), and policies, like taxing the first dollar of the lower-earning spouse's income at the highest marginal rate set by the higher-earning spouse (Pignataro 2015), encourage a man-breadwinner/woman-caretaker model. Together, these cultural beliefs and policies encourage women to divest from paid labor to fulfill their families' household labor.

Moreover, macro-level cultural schemas position women as ultimately responsible for household labor. Even when men in different-sex couples share in the household responsibilities, women are often expected to manage the household labor (Daminger 2019) while men take on the role of the "compliant helper" (Coltrane 1989; Singleton and Maher 2004:230–31). Even when "family friendly" leave policies are made available to men, they may not utilize them in keeping with ideal worker norms and norms around housework and masculinity (Haas, Allard, and Hwang 2002; Thébaud and Pedulla 2016). As a result, in the context of the institutional constraints described above, balancing work and family is often seen as a "woman's problem."

In smaller scale interactions, household labor is seen as a symbolic resource through which men and women perform gender (Erickson 2005; Shelton and John 1996). Gender is not an inherent or natural attribute of individuals, but rather something that must be routinely performed and accomplished in interaction (West and Zimmerman 1987). Men and women are held accountable—and hold themselves accountable—for performing their gender appropriately. For example, Hochschild and Machung (2012) show how spouses must navigate the appropriate performance of their gender with their deeper feelings and desires around housework and childcare. To that end, couples will sometimes develop "family myths," or "versions of reality that obscure a core truth in order to manage a family tension" (Hochschild and Machung 2012:18–19). Such family myths often conceal how couples' division of household labor is gendered and simultaneously allow spouses to perform gender in the home. More recently, Allison Daminger (2020) demonstrates how couples' understanding of labor allocation processes as gender-neutral allows them to overlook gendered inequalities in outcomes.

Macro-level cultural norms are reproduced through gender socialization and shape preferences, skills, and behaviors at the micro-level. Boys and girls are socialized differently in regard to household labor through differential assignment to household chores (Peters 1994). However, a recent study found limited evidence that men and women differ in their perceptions of messiness or its importance (Thébaud, Kornrich, and Ruppanner 2021), suggesting this explanation does not hold up.

The Gendered Division of Labor in Times of Uncertainty

To better understand gender inequality in household labor, scholars have studied whether and how times of uncertainty alter couples' arrangements. Chief among the factors researchers have investigated is unemployment. From an economic perspective, irrespective of gender, the unemployment of one spouse should alter a couple's division of labor due to the unemployed spouse's lower income, lower bargaining power, and greater time availability (Calasanti and Bailey 1991). Yet, research consistently shows that the effects of unemployment on the division of household labor are moderated by gender. For example, Margaret Gough and Alexandra Killewald (2011) found that even though couples reallocate their time spent doing household labor when one spouse lost their job, unemployed wives increased their time spent doing household labor by six hours per week, whereas unemployed husbands increased theirs by only three hours. Julie Brines (1994) found that, net of unemployment, the more husbands depend on their wives for economic support, the less they contribute to the domestic labor as a compensatory behavior. Brines operationalizes dependency as the difference between the husband's and wife's income as a proportion of their total income. While at odds with economic reasoning, these findings are consistent with the explanations above, where household labor is inseparable from gender identity and

performance. Employment and providership are central to contemporary masculinity (Carian and Sobotka 2018) and unemployed and dependent men's relatively lower engagement with household labor is a way to perform masculinity.

In a recent study of how married couples confront unemployment, Aliya Hamid Rao (2020) also found that unemployed men do not significantly alter their household labor while unemployed women do, which she describes as a gender performance. When unemployed men do incrementally increase their household labor, they also engage in compensatory disclaimers (i.e., statements that housework is not their priority or that they are just "helping" their wives) and behaviors (i.e., increased involvement in "masculine-typed" vs. "feminine-typed" chores). Furthermore, couples protect unemployed men's time under the pretense that their unemployment is "temporary" and they need time to look for a job. On the other hand, unemployed women in Rao's study significantly increased their unpaid household labor, most of which was reallocated to unpaid childcare, hindering their ability to look for new employment. Sarah Damaske (2021) also recently found support for the same pattern: a gender gap in change in household labor contributions upon unemployment. More importantly, Damaske shows how this gender gap is driven by a gendered "guilt gap": women dealt with the guilt of being unemployed by taking on all of the routine housework tasks and most of the childcare. Men, on the other hand, did not associate an increase in their free time with guilt nor feel the need to increase their household labor.

The COVID-19 Pandemic as a Unique Case of Uncertainty

We treat the COVID-19 pandemic as another case of uncertainty that might alter the processes underlying couples' division of household labor. The pandemic fits with Ann Swidler's (1986) conceptualization of "unsettled times" as periods of social transformation with rapidly changing ways of organizing individual and collective action. However, we argue that the pandemic is different from other times of uncertainty (e.g., unemployment) previously examined as contexts for the household division of labor, first because of its scope. Even though unemployment can be widespread during times of recession, it does not affect all families with young children; the pandemic did (Lee and Parolin 2021; Yavorsky, Qian, and Sargent 2021). Moreover, the pandemic created a sudden structural change that impacted both work and family, uprooting a range of social norms and behaviors associated with them. For many workers, the pandemic altered working conditions; many employees found themselves working from home for the first time (Kramer and Kramer 2020). In contrast to the change of employment status of one spouse, which alters only the unemployed spouse's time and relative power within the couple, the pandemic also interrupted the functioning of schools and daycare centers, creating substantially more and more emotionally and cognitively demanding unpaid care work. What is more, it disrupted access to social capital—help from family members, friends, and paid babysitters (Yavorsky et al. 2021). Finally, the pandemic created new housework tasks, like sanitizing groceries and surfaces. In sum, the pandemic is unique in its scope not only in terms of how many families it affected, but also the essential domains it altered, producing more and more demanding household labor.

Second, the pandemic merged the private and public spheres into one, temporally and spatially (Yavorsky et al. 2021). The private sphere and all that it encompasses—home and household labor—is historically feminine (Calasanti and Bailey 1991; Goldin 2021; Williams 2000). The public sphere and paid labor, on the other hand, is historically masculine. By moving paid work to home, the pandemic combined these two spheres and their corresponding and conflicting norms. It is possible that this merging created opportunities to decouple gender from the home sphere or reduced the effects of this coupling, because, when at home, mothers and fathers were also workers. Alternatively, one might expect that gender, as a master frame (Ridgeway 2011), would transcend any worker role and supersede ideal worker norms. Either way, the COVID-19

pandemic is different from other times of uncertainty as it simultaneously activates multiple expectations (parent and worker) for *both* mothers and fathers.

Given these defining characteristics, we ask *how* the gendered division of labor was exacerbated during the pandemic. In contrast to similar existing studies (e.g., Calarco et al. 2021), we use interview data from *both* women and men spouses to closely examine their sense-making of gendered arrangements during the pandemic. This not only allows us to access the perspectives of both spouses, but it also provides an opportunity to critically assess the convergence and divergence of their accounts, which, as we show below, illuminates the mechanisms of inequality.

Data and Methods

Our data come from a larger study of 31 couples. All couples (1) were different-sex, married, and living together; (2) had at least one child in the household, with all children 12 years old or younger; (3) did not live with their own parents (children's grandparents); and (4) were employed professionals with at least one spouse working full-time from home. These criteria were theoretically motivated, as we sought to see how couples who had highly demanding childcare duties (because of the age of their children), had limited familial assistance with childcare (because they did not live with their own parents), and labored under substantial ideal worker norms (because they were employed professionals) would navigate the division of household labor. Not all couples live and work under these conditions, so our findings are limited. However, our sample represents one type of couple in which—arguably—work and family conflict most, and so our findings speak to how couples used gender to negotiate particularly difficult circumstances during the pandemic. To limit variation in participants' experiences with pandemic-related restrictions and to ensure a racially diverse sample, we restricted our sample to the larger Southern California region. We recruited participants through social media, message boards, email listservs, and snowball sampling.

We collected demographic information about the sample through a survey (described below). One woman respondent and three men respondents did not complete the survey, so Table 1 provides demographic information for 30 women and 28 men. As shown in Table 1, the sample is fairly diverse in terms of race and ethnicity: 21 percent of respondents identified as Asian, 14 percent as Black, 65 percent as white, 18 percent as Hispanic or Latino, and 9 percent as another race.¹ On average, respondents were 38 years old and had approximately two children. While men and women in the sample had approximately the same level of education, men had higher average income (\$85,600) than women (\$74,300). Because we recruited couples in which at least one spouse was working from home, respondents tended to be professionals and more educated and higher-income than the general population. Even considering the high cost of living in Southern California, this means couples had more financial resources they could employ for managing work-family conflict compared to the general population. Additionally, previous research has shown that couples with more education typically have more egalitarian divisions of labor (Shelton and John 1996). Thus, our findings could be a more conservative depiction of gendered processes. With only two exceptions, all couples in the sample lived in nuclear households. This is partly by design, as parents living with their own parents were excluded from the study, and partly a function of couples' higher income.

Data were collected from September to December of 2020. This time period was significant for families' experiences of the pandemic. First, our data collection covered the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, which parents described as a particularly challenging time in terms of work-family conflict. Even though schools remained largely online, many respondents felt teachers were holding students to more rigorous academic standards compared with what they described as a more relaxed attitude at the end of the disrupted 2019-2020 school year. Second, the data collection spanned a winter surge in COVID-19 cases that more than doubled the

Table 1. Demographic Information for Survey Respondents.

Spouse-level data	Frequency or Mean	
	Women (n = 30)	Men (n = 28)
Age (Years)	36.7 (5.1)	39.3 (6.1)
Race		
Asian or Asian American	8	4
Black or African American	4	4
White	20	17
Hispanic or Latino/a	4	6
Other Race	2	3
Highest level of education		
High school degree	1	1
Some college	1	2
Bachelor's degree	13	9
Graduate degree	15	16
Works in executive or managerial position	11	11
Hours worked per week	39.7 (11.0)	41.7 (12.6)
Personal income (thousands of dollars)	74.3 (35.4)	85.6 (46.9)
Couple-level data (n = 31)	Mean	
Number of children	1.9	
Family income (thousands of dollars)	170.5	

Note. Standard deviation shown in parentheses. Survey data is missing for four respondents, and other respondents declined to answer demographic questions. Race categories are not mutually exclusive. Couple-level data was calculated by averaging by couple (allowing for missing data from one spouse within each couple), then averaging across couples.

number of deaths from the disease in California (Karlman and Lin 2021). This surge prompted more stringent public health orders and sparked renewed fears about the coronavirus, all of which impacted families' ability to manage work-family conflict. Finally, because we began collecting data six months after pandemic-related restrictions first went into place, our data reflect when couples' arrangements for handling housework and childcare had changed but were also relatively established. We are thus able to observe how gender inequalities became entrenched under these new conditions.

We surveyed and interviewed men and women spouses separately; our analysis is thus based on data from 62 spouses across 31 couples, including 62 interviews and 60 surveys.² The survey asked participants about their perceptions of which and what proportion of various tasks each member of their household typically completed before and during the pandemic. It also collected demographic information. Participants were asked to complete the survey before their interview. We reviewed participants' survey responses in preparation for the interview, which allowed us to ask individualized follow up questions about particular household tasks.

Both spouses were interviewed by the same author, and each author interviewed roughly half of the sample. During interviews, we followed a protocol that included questions about participants' perceptions of how they, their spouse, and their family handled different household and childcare tasks during the pandemic and why, and about their perceptions of changes to their household and paid labor because of the pandemic. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. In accordance with social distancing guidelines, we conducted interviews virtually using Zoom. All interviews were recorded and transcribed.

We used modified conventional content analysis to analyze the interview data (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). While we allowed themes to emerge inductively, we also developed an initial coding scheme based on the previous literature and our knowledge of the data. Each author coded half of the interview data, dividing the sample randomly by couple. Before coding, we developed specific definitions for each code and resolved coding differences by discussing—line-by-line—our separate coding choices for two transcripts (the transcripts from one couple) over the course of multiple meetings. As we analyzed data, we developed new codes and returned to previous transcripts for re-coding. We also wrote more than 50 memos to further develop findings. We used Dedoose, a qualitative analysis software, for coding and memo-writing.

Because we interviewed both women and men spouses, we were able to triangulate couples' recollections and perspectives. Within each couple, we were able to observe three different accounts of the division of household labor: the account coproduced by the couple and each spouse's account. Accounts are social and informed by feedback from others, and the account an individual presents can vary by context and audience (Orbuch 1997; Scott and Lyman 1968). In everyday interaction, husbands and wives coproduce explanations of their division of labor together. Husbands and wives do not abandon this coproduced account when they enter the interview setting without their spouse. While we interviewed spouses separately, they still presented the coproduced account in interviews because it allowed them to control the interviewer's perception of themselves, their spouse, and their marriage, and manage an emotionally charged topic (Bergen and Labonté 2020). We are able to identify the coproduced account when spouses' recollections and perceptions converge across the two interviews. In our data analysis, we paid special attention to when spouses' accounts converged and diverged. Moments of convergence reveal how husbands and wives make sense of the division of labor together; divergence reveals points of tension that, as we show below, highlight gendered processes.

Using our interview data, we distinguished between traditional, egalitarian, and nontraditional couples to analyze variation in our findings. We categorized couples as egalitarian if each spouse reported doing about the same proportion of the housework and childcare. Traditional couples are those in which the wife reported doing more housework and/or childcare than the husband reported doing; the opposite is true of nontraditional couples. According to these criteria, eight couples were egalitarian, 20 couples were traditional, and three were nontraditional.

We analyzed survey data using Stata, a statistical analysis software. Because our sample is not a probability sample, we did not perform statistical analyses, but rather tabulated survey data and used it to inform and bolster our qualitative analyses. While the present research draws mainly on our interview data, we use our survey data to illustrate the overall pattern in men and women's household labor during the pandemic below.

Findings

How Gendered Scripts Expanded to New Domains during the Pandemic

Previous research has documented that women often view themselves and are viewed as ultimately responsible for housework and childcare (Coltrane 1989). This cultural expectation existed long before the pandemic, and the pandemic's onset did not diminish it. Indeed, the pandemic expanded its relevance to new domains, like monitoring virtual learning, planning homeschool lessons, and sanitizing. Our survey data show that wives were nearly four times more likely to report doing all or most of the new pandemic-related childcare and more than four times as likely to report doing all or most of the new pandemic-related housework compared to their husbands. For the most part, this transition was seamless, as many women had internalized these gender norms and their husbands reinforced them externally. These assumptions about family gender roles manifested in two ways: (1) the lack of explicit conversations among spouses about

handling their family's sudden increase in parenting duties and household chores and (2) distinctive linguistic patterns casting husbands as "helping" to complete new pandemic-related labor. Both of these themes reveal the strength of the gendered assumption under which most couples continued to operate during the pandemic: that the wife is largely responsible for the domestic labor.

Interviews with Marissa and William Perry illustrate how the pandemic influenced even relatively egalitarian couples to shift to traditional patterns when structural resources became unavailable. Both Marissa and William balance full-time jobs with raising their two school-aged children. Marissa is an executive assistant, whereas William works at a small consulting firm. Prior to the pandemic, Marissa took care of the kids in the morning, while William did so after school. Marissa was responsible for cleaning, William did the cooking, and a house cleaner came once every two weeks.

But when the resources the couple used to manage their household labor—their children's school and their house cleaner—became unavailable, William and Marissa defaulted to gendered scripts to tackle new household responsibilities without consulting one another. According to the accounts of both spouses, when the pandemic started, Marissa took on the brunt of the childcare, including supervising the children's online education, and the cleaning tasks, which significantly increased without the house cleaner and with the family's additional time at home. The Perrys did not discuss who would assume these new, pandemic-borne responsibilities. Marissa said, "There wasn't one specific [conversation] where [we said] like, 'this is what we're going to do—we're laying out all of the duties and responsibilities,' nothing like that." She added,

Obviously, we're both working from home, but in my situation, my workload is nothing compared to my husband's. [. . .] He just has a lot on his plate. [. . .] I took it upon myself like, "well, obviously, you're busy, you need to focus."

The way that the Perrys instantly fell into an unequal pattern without any discussion shows the strength of internalized cultural expectations during times of uncertainty, like that of the pandemic. The Perrys' previous, egalitarian arrangement did not negate broader cultural expectations about housework and childcare. In fact, the pandemic revealed that the Perrys leveraged services like house cleaning, not to reduce their joint workload, but to reduce Marissa's. Resources allowed the Perrys to be egalitarian; in their absence, the Perrys fell back on familiar cultural scripts. The result, as William admitted, was that "probably more of it has fallen onto her plate."

The Perrys were not unique: 10 couples reported not having an explicit conversation about how they would manage their family's new pandemic-related household responsibilities. In addition, seven couples had diverging recollections about whether they had such a conversation; within these couples, it was more likely for women to remember having a conversation than men (five compared to two). This might suggest that these conversations were not explicit or did not address all key aspects of house- and carework, or that they mattered less to husbands. Moreover, six of eight (75 percent) egalitarian couples explicitly discussed their division of labor at the outset of the pandemic, compared to only seven of 20 (35 percent) traditional couples. As compared to traditional couples, it is likely that egalitarian couples had built routine avenues for communication so that they could cooperate in regard to house- and carework before the pandemic, which they used once pandemic-related restrictions struck. Additionally, this pattern suggests that proactively communicating, rather than relying on gendered assumptions or previous arrangements, can lead to more equitable outcomes.

In contrast to the Perrys, Ann and Edward Rossi reported having always had a traditional arrangement in which Ann performed all of the caring tasks for their two daughters and the housework, whereas Edward focused on his job. Ann, a case manager, and Edward, a corporate executive, explained that this was because of Edward's more demanding job. However, as soon

as the pandemic started, Edward lost his job. Despite this sudden shift in their relative work responsibilities and time, Ann and Edward did not have a conversation about how they would approach their new household responsibilities. Instead, Ann continued to do nearly all of the household labor, including the additional tasks created by the pandemic. Edward attributed this to the suddenness of the pandemic:

When it first took place, we didn't [have a conversation] because the two kids were suddenly home, which was an absolute nightmare. So there wasn't a lot of time to talk. It was mainly just to be honest trying to survive. It was pretty brutal. And now it just settled into—I want to kind of call it—a routine. [. . .] We just kind of have a flow now that worked out.

Most couples described pandemic-related restrictions, like school closures, as sudden, leaving them little time for deliberate planning. The result for the Rossis was an even more intensely gendered division of labor than before. This arrangement, despite Edward's unemployment, provides evidence of the strength of gendered expectations in shaping Ann's and Edward's distinct responsibilities in the home, and supports previous research (Damaske 2021; Gough and Killewald 2011; Rao 2020).

With both children at home and increased cleaning tasks, Ann found herself strained while trying to fulfill the responsibilities of a job that served as the family's only source of income. When asked whether they had a conversation at the outset of the pandemic about these issues, she referred to the conversations that ensued later, after she grew frustrated with the couple's unequal divide: "I mean—I'm sure I have [said] like, 'Wow, you're not working, yet I'm the one still doing everything.' [. . .] He'll own up to it and he'll be like, 'Yeah, I know, I know. You do everything.'" In the case of this traditional couple, the pandemic further exacerbated their unequal workload at home because it created additional responsibilities and they continued to operate under deeply gendered expectations. It is noteworthy that Ann and Edward had different perceptions about how well the arrangement was working. In the quotes above, he called it "a flow that worked out," while she brought up frustrations with having to do nearly "everything."

Unspoken gender expectations were also evident in the language with which spouses described fathers' role in the home. Previous research has documented how fathers are described as "helping" with household labor, rather than being responsible for it as mothers are described (Coltrane 1989; Singleton and Maher 2004). This dynamic was apparent in our data. As the amount of household labor expanded during the pandemic, fathers were assumed to be "helpers" vis-à-vis these new and more numerous tasks. The following exchange with Rebecca Green, a university administrator, who is married to Anthony Rodriguez, a financial advisor, illustrates this discourse well. Rebecca and Anthony have two children. Since the onset of the pandemic, the couple decided to take their school-aged son out of virtual learning through the public school because they did not think he would do well in that modality. Despite this being a joint decision, Rebecca described herself as doing about 90 percent of the homeschooling; Anthony only took over when she had "had enough" and needed to take a walk by herself. She also described Anthony as only reluctantly engaging in housework. When asked about what she thought of how they divided the childcare and housework and what she would change if she could, she said:

I think that it would be better if I had a little more help, but I don't want to say that, you know, he doesn't [do anything]—he helps. He does dishes. He does laundry. He does things. [. . .] I guess, mainly like I'd want him to do more help with the homeschooling.

It is apparent that Rebecca thinks of Anthony as occupying a "helping" role when it comes to homeschooling, a domain of unpaid labor new to both of them. Anthony too used helping discourse, saying, "I try [to do household work] and it creates conflict with us because she does do

a lot of stuff. She has a lot of stuff on her plate. I try and help when I can.” This sort of helping discourse was common: over half (32, or 52 percent) of our interviewees deployed it. Men and women were nearly equally likely to use helping discourse (18 men compared to 14 women), which demonstrates how both men and women think of women as ultimately responsible for the home and children, including new pandemic-related tasks.

In several instances, casting men in helping roles served to rhetorically maximize their smaller contributions to the household labor. In the context of the pandemic, which created additional household labor disproportionately done by women, helping discourse allowed husbands to portray themselves, not as contributing to the problem, but as helping to solve it. The quote from Anthony above illustrates this. Likewise, William situated himself as a helper to Marissa while recognizing the unfairness of their division of labor during the pandemic:

Is it fair that she has to deal with all the screaming kids all day? No, that’s not fair. That sucks. I mean, it’s hard for that to become part of your job. She also has to manage her day job too, and so when I know that—like I said, her work comes in spurts. And so when she has something to do, I definitely try to, like, distract the kids or keep them away from her and say, “Get away from there.”

William framed those moments in which he takes slightly more responsibility for childcare—telling his children not to bother their mother—as an important contribution in that it allows Marissa time for her paid labor. This obscures the fact that Marissa is doing nearly all of the new household labor created by the pandemic and the deep frustration she expressed in her interview. The helping discourse reinforces the idea that women are ultimately responsible for the household labor and serves as a linguistic tool for men to frame their smaller contributions in an agentive, problem-solving way.

Pandemic-related Myths That Justify Unequal Labor

In interviews, spouses used a wide range of accounts for why they divided the housework and childcare in the way they did during the pandemic. For many couples, the restrictions and stressors of the pandemic made certain rationales seem more or less relevant. The most immediate concern for many parents was satisfying what they saw as their two primary responsibilities: caring for children and completing urgent work tasks. Professors Linda Wu and Ben Flemming reported striking a fairly egalitarian division of labor during the pandemic as necessitated by their need to care for their son and teach online. Linda said, “I think we just decided what our schedule would be based on whether we weren’t teaching. It was like whoever is not teaching should do the childcare, because those are our commitments.” Likewise, Ben explained, “I think we would set him up [on the computer] and anytime that one of us was occupied with teaching or a meeting, then the other one would have the task of taking him.” Linda and Ben sacrificed other work tasks, like their research, to meet their students’ needs in the virtual classroom and their son’s needs at home.

By and large, the explanations couples used to justify their division of labor during the pandemic were not explicitly gendered. This fits with research conducted before the pandemic, which showed that couples “de-gender” their labor allocation process, even when the outcome is gendered and unequal (Damingier 2020). We find that the accounts portrayed by couples as gender-neutral and highly rational were often deployed to justify women’s greater labor in the home, particularly in relation to new responsibilities and tasks that were borne of pandemic-related restrictions and risks. The comparative nature of each spouse’s work was a particularly common way to explain the division of labor, utilized by over half (34, or 55 percent) of interviewees. Across our sample, 60 percent of such explanations were used to justify why wives did household labor. They did so by constructing husbands’ paid labor as more important, more urgent, and

more inflexible than that of their wives. When the childcare solutions couples had previously relied on were unavailable, these accounts excused fathers from childcare duties and passed the brunt of the household labor to mothers. It was common for both fathers and mothers to make sense of their household labor in this way. Recall, for example, Marissa's explanation that her "workload is nothing compared to [her] husband's." Moreover, within a couple, spouses' explanations often converged on this point. While these coproduced accounts, at first blush, appeared to be credible reasons why mothers would necessarily be responsible for a greater proportion of the household labor, at closer inspection they were tenuous and contradicted elsewhere in fathers' or mothers' interviews. The rationales portrayed by couples as particularly relevant during the pandemic, like the flexibility of work tasks, justified intra-couple inequality.

This was apparent in the case of Javi and Jessica De León. Jessica had been solely responsible for caring for their four children and supervising their virtual learning during the pandemic. Javi, who is a sales representative, described this arrangement as their only choice because of the nature of his work:

But now like I said, I'm all about numbers, about results. So I'm lucky enough for now to be doing really, really well, because I have opened a lot of new business, but it's because I'm out [of the home]. [. . . Jessica] understands and she sees why [there's no other] decision, like, "Oh, I'm just letting her do this [the childcare]." It's more like, "Literally no other option, and we have to see how we [can] do it."

Javi said that he does not force Jessica to care for the children, but that they both understand it is their only option while schools and daycares remain closed. His account constructed his work as demanding, results-driven, necessarily taking place outside the home, and thus incompatible with childcare.

In comparison with Jessica's work, however, Javi's work appears much more flexible. Jessica explained the rigid requirements of her work as a postdoctoral researcher: "I do have to go into the lab and when I do go into the lab, it has to be the same time every day for three days because I run experiments and it's bacteria." At the time of our interview, Jessica had only recently returned to the lab after months of not being able to do lab work, sometimes taking the children to the lab with her and at other times leaving them with Javi after dinner. As a result, Jessica reported being able to complete only two to four hours of paid labor per day and Javi reported spending forty more hours on paid labor than Jessica had the prior week.

Despite these contradictions, Jessica and Javi's accounts of why Jessica was responsible for the majority of the household labor converged. Jessica drew on the same explanation, justifying why he did not supervise their children's virtual learning:

He's really busy in the mornings. He just locks himself in the room sometimes, and just stays there. And I'm giving him breakfast and food in there so he can actually eat. But yeah, he really can't leave his work once he gets started.

While the De Leóns discursively constructed Javi's work as more urgent and inflexible than Jessica's when justifying her total responsibility over childcare, both of them contradicted this account elsewhere in their interviews. Javi described his work as "flexible" four times during his interview since it consists mainly of calling clients, allowing him to work from home even before the pandemic began. For example, he said, "Even though my work takes a lot of my time, it's also very, very flexible."

In contrast to what we observe among the De Leóns, 40 percent of justifications around flexibility and other aspects of work were used to explain husband's unpaid labor at home. These justifications often explained why husbands were doing more household labor than they had

before the pandemic, even though they were still not doing as much as their wives. For example, Jennifer Song explained that her husband, Chris Cho, had recently been doing more cooking and childcare since he started working from home: “Just the fact that he ends up making breakfast, making coffee, whereas he probably wouldn’t have done that before, and then spending more time with Kara [their daughter] in the afternoon.” Still, Jennifer did the majority of the childcare after the couple’s nanny left for the day. Chris confirmed this, saying, “It wasn’t like I replaced the work that my wife was doing. It was kind of more like an augment.” So while the relative nature of each spouse’s work was used to justify both men and women’s household labor, these justifications were deployed in markedly different and gendered ways. Moreover, it is worth noting when such justifications were *not* used, such as in Edward Rossi’s case, when he was laid off but did not put his newfound time toward household labor.

The circumstances of the pandemic made another rationale particularly relevant to the De Leóns: the relative security and pay of their jobs. Javi’s salary is around 25 percent higher than Jessica’s, and his employer laid off significant numbers of employees during the pandemic. Javi was understandably concerned: “Performance-wise, I didn’t know if I was going to be able to stay. But when they started laying off, I was thinking I could be one of those.” As a result, Javi not only pursued clients in-person, but also did other service work for his employer. Javi compared the quick performance feedback in his job to the longer timelines in Jessica’s line of work (scientific research in the academy), saying, “So, it’s not like I can just [say], ‘No.’ [. . .] I could not just be like, ‘Okay, I’m taking a break.’ No. [That would be like] saying, ‘I’m sorry, I cannot do this job.’” While Javi might face more immediate repercussions for not completing his responsibilities at work, Jessica stood to suffer delayed but severe consequences in an industry where workers are expected to “publish or perish.” While she once dreamed of being a principal investigator at an R1 university, Jessica was no longer sure if that was a possibility. She felt she had squandered her funding and postdoc during the pandemic. In constructing their jobs as different—in terms of their urgency and their relative security—the De Leóns’ account reflected the heightened economic anxieties brought on by the pandemic, ignored the long-term consequences for Jessica’s career, and justified her greater labor in the home. Previous research has shown how loss of full-time childcare and participation in homeschooling was associated with negative employment outcomes for mothers early in the pandemic (Petts et al. 2021); Jessica’s case shows how these negative consequences have far-reaching consequences for mothers’ career trajectories.

While Javi portrayed their arrangement as their only option, contradictions within and across Javi’s and Jessica’s accounts divulge other possibilities that would entail Javi doing more childcare. The De Leóns had coproduced a family myth (Hochschild and Machung 2012) to legitimize the priority placed on Javi’s career and the complete responsibility for childcare placed on Jessica’s shoulders. Javi also believed meeting with clients in person versus over the phone was “completely different” in terms of their effectiveness, which he saw as a legitimate reason for why he had to work outside the home and could not do more childcare: “No, I have to. I have to get out.” Javi had decided that any alteration to his work because of the pandemic—even just the mode of client meetings—was too big of a disruption to justify changing the childcare arrangement that had derailed his wife’s career. While the De Leóns constructed the nature of Javi’s work—its “inflexibility” and higher income—as a gender-neutral and rational justification for their division of labor, the justification was in fact a highly gendered one, legitimizing Jessica’s labor in the home and Javi’s lack thereof.

Like Javi, other interviewees used income to justify the greater importance placed on a particular spouse’s job during the pandemic. Of the 24 couples for which we have both spouses’ incomes, husbands had higher incomes than their wives in 14 couples (59 percent), wives had higher incomes than their husbands in seven couples (38 percent), and spouses had equal incomes in one couple (3 percent). Thus, this particular explanation interacted with the gender pay gap to

produce gendered outcomes in the division of labor during the pandemic. Yet, even when women made more than their husbands, this did not necessarily translate into nontraditional or even egalitarian arrangements. For instance, even though Anthony's work dried up during the pandemic, making his income (which is based on commission) half of Rebecca's, the couple did not prioritize Rebecca's paid labor. He explained:

I mean money was one factor. [. . .] So there was kind of the feeling that we need to make sure that her work is getting done for sure. But on the other hand, we also realize that her work is secure. She's been there for a long time now.

Even though Anthony said Rebecca's paid labor should take precedence as their main source of income, he justified her greater household labor at home through the relative "security" of her job.

Couples' explanations often sustained gendered divisions of labor despite spouses' intentions and circumstances. Grace and Louie Abbott have three children—a four-year-old and twin toddlers. Grace, a social worker, began working at home because of the pandemic; Louie, who works in construction, continued to work outside the home. Their children's daycare center had closed twice for three weeks each time. The Abbotts decided that Louie would be responsible for caring for the children because he was able to take time off from work the first time the daycare closed and he was furloughed the second time. Louie recognized that Grace would not be able to do her job while watching the kids. He said, "The reality of the situation is even though she's at home, she can't be productive while she's doing her job with having the kids around." Yet Grace had to take on more childcare than they had initially planned, which she attributed to the children's preference and breastfeeding:

They take two naps a day, and I have to nurse them each to sleep. And then they're just screaming and just throwing a fit with my husband. And I hear him in the other room getting exasperated and getting frustrated that they're crying. So I'm not going to sit in the bedroom and do my work. I'm going to go tend to my kids. [. . .] It's just the kids, the babies, in particular, they just want me.

Likewise, Grace said that Louie "would always blame the breastfeeding" for why he could not take more responsibility over childcare. As is also reflected in this quote, Grace felt unable to relinquish control over childcare to Louie. The Abbotts' planned response to the circumstances of the pandemic—Louie's responsibility over childcare during the closure of their children's daycare—was, according to both spouses, disrupted by the preferences of their children and Grace's personality.

Grace's account eventually diverged from the one the Abbotts had coproduced, laying bare a deeply gendered process: Louie's lack of effort and skill with their younger children. Later in her interview, Grace divulged that she did not entirely agree that her ability to breastfeed should dictate who does the childcare:

But at the same time, there are plenty of times where they [the toddlers] would be upset, and they didn't want to nurse and I would figure out other ways to comfort them. Rocking them, or holding them or interacting with them. [. . .] And he doesn't think, "let me grab a toy and play with them."

While Grace believed that breastfeeding played some role, she thought Louie's effort and skill, or perhaps creativity, were the bigger detriments to his comforting their toddlers. When Grace rejected the couple's coproduced explanation, arguments ensued. She recalled,

We were all kind of losing it on each other. It just wasn't good. [. . .] I'm frustrated, cuz I'm like, "Dude, figure it out." I had to figure it out. And a lot of that frustration comes from when the babies

were first born, he took like a week off and then he went back to work. So I was alone with two newborn babies for the first seven months of their lives before I went back to work. So my attitude is kind of like, “okay, I had to figure it out. So you figure it out. You know, make it work.”

Grace betrays a different understanding of both the nature of parenting—that it is learned, not innate—and their division of labor—that it is determined by Louie’s unwillingness to learn—that contrasts with their coproduced account. The issues Grace perceived in regard to Louie’s parenting were not caused by the pandemic, but preceded it. The Abbotts’ earlier division of labor, beginning when the twins were newborns, set a strong precedent for the pandemic, which brought their conflict to a head. In the absence of other resources (like daycare), the couple was “losing it on each other.”

Discussion

In this article, we argue that the gender gap in household labor among different-sex married couples with young children was reinscribed and exacerbated during the social uncertainty of the pandemic through two key mechanisms. First, rapid structural changes in multiple institutions expanded existing gender expectations to new housework and childcare tasks. Second, these changes heightened the importance couples placed on particular ways of assigning household labor that justified intra-couple inequality in the home. Our study provides a close examination of *how*, during this unprecedented time of uncertainty, gender served as an anchor and orienting frame that structured couples’ lives and amplified inequalities. Couples’ reliance on familiar gender scripts served as a shorthand to determine how tasks would be accomplished (Ridgeway 2011). This manifested in couples’ lack of explicit conversations about dividing new pandemic-related work, as well as a discourse casting men as “helpers” rather than equal partners in completing these new tasks. This was also evidenced by couples’ reliance on contradictory family myths, like those around work flexibility and job security, that decoupled gender from new arrangements, yet led to gendered outcomes. Importantly, we show how, in some instances, egalitarian couples defaulted to gendered and unequal divisions of household labor in the absence of institutional childcare and at the cost of women’s careers and health.

From an analytical standpoint, we treat the pandemic as a distinctive and unprecedented case of social uncertainty, defined by rapidly changing structural conditions (Swidler 1986). Uncertain times provide opportunities for change in existing cultural scripts and a window for researchers to observe the link between structural conditions and behaviors. Though the pandemic shares some features with other times of uncertainty (e.g., unemployment), it represents a distinct case with unique defining characteristics and more far-reaching implications. In contrast to widespread unemployment, the pandemic is (1) larger in scope, affecting multiple social institutions at once and nearly all families; (2) characterized by the creation of new household tasks; and (3) marked by the integration of the historically masculine public and feminine private spheres.

Yet, despite these unique characteristics, we find that gender structured couples’ division of household labor during the pandemic in ways similar to other times of uncertainty. Chiefly, we reveal that gendered processes triumph over alternative courses of action (e.g., those based on economic or relative time considerations). Like Rao (2020), we found that both men and women often employed a helping discourse in the context of housework, casting women as primarily responsible for unpaid labor. Moreover, we observed that men’s time during the pandemic was more protected than women’s. While participants justified the time gap by explaining that men needed time to look for a job in Rao’s study, our participants rationalized it by explaining that men have more urgent, inflexible, or higher-paying jobs. Somewhat similarly to Damaske (2021), who documented how women, but not men, expressed guilt related to their unemployment that they tried to resolve by taking on all the housework, we observed that women had very strong internalized gender expectations around household labor that led them to take on the additional tasks during the pandemic. Unlike participants in Damaske’s study, the women we interviewed

often voiced concerns about fairness. While the rapid and unprecedented structural changes of the pandemic theoretically provided an opportunity to rewrite cultural scripts around household labor, our findings mirror—with some fine distinctions—previous work on other, smaller-scale moments of uncertainty. Together, our research and research by Rao and Damaske show that the particular structural conditions that characterize different times of uncertainty work through slightly different mechanisms, but produce the same outcome: gender inequality.

These similarities and our analyses specifically show *how* gender operates as a master frame (Ridgeway 2009, 2011) during times of structural change and social uncertainty. Consistent with Ridgeway's gender-as-a-frame argument, our analyses exemplify how a diffuse characteristic becomes salient and specific in the family. The family is infused with strong cultural expectations that are activated as men and women coordinate their labor in the home. Even during the pandemic, when both men and women were exposed to the *same* structural conditions (i.e., working from home with increased household labor demands), cultural gender beliefs organized men and women's time *differently*. Thus, gender was reinscribed in the new pandemic context, even though it was unprecedented in the lives of our participants. In fact, gender may have played an even more important organizing role in the household division of labor during the pandemic compared to other, smaller-scale moments of uncertainty, as couples sought to find an immediate way to coordinate their behavior as they were cut adrift from structural support. This study shows that structural resources, such as schools and daycares, are vital in alleviating the burden of domestic work on women. However, while they help women to pursue their careers, they do little to unravel cultural ideas about what it means to be a woman and, especially, a wife and a mother.

It is worth noting that we did not observe variations in our findings by race or class. While future research should examine these questions using a more diverse sample, we believe this speaks to the salience of gender as a cultural frame in the context of the family, rather than a limitation of our sample. Moreover, white, middle-class, different-sex couples are treated as the norm by which other couples are judged (P. H. Collins 1991). The new and more unequal gendered division of labor established in these families has important consequences for more marginalized families, who are held accountable to the same standards of paid and unpaid labor.

Our study also offers methodological innovations when it comes to COVID-19 research. In interviewing husbands and wives within the same couple and noting where their sense-making converged and diverged, we were able to identify the account spouses coproduced together and each spouse's account. Within the coproduced account, it was typical for husbands and wives to recognize that wives did more household labor, including new pandemic-related tasks, which they explained as rational, natural, and gender-neutral. Yet, at times, wives and, less frequently, husbands betrayed an alternative understanding of their family's division of labor: deeply gendered, unequal, and compulsory. As one woman respondent said of her greater responsibility over her family's childcare, "if I was the male in the family, and he was the female in the family, it [the division of labor] wouldn't look like that." The interplay and juxtaposition of these accounts reveal how women hold themselves and are held accountable for performing their gender through household labor. When husbands' and wives' accounts converged, they often functioned to conceal inequality and the gendered processes that create it, naturalizing the gendered division of labor. When spouses' accounts diverged, they illuminated the contradictions particularly in wives' wants and needs and what is prescribed of women by the processes—the expectations and justifications—that structure their lives.

While our findings largely support those of previous work that uses times of uncertainty to analyze the household division of labor, the pandemic is likely still unique in terms of the scope of its implications. The intra-couple inequality we observe and explain in this paper will likely have significant consequences for numerous families long after the pandemic is over, even beyond women's participation in the labor force (C. Collins et al. 2020; C. Collins et al. 2021; Landivar et al. 2020; Petts et al. 2021; Zamorro and Prados 2021). First, spouses' perceptions of the division of labor are important for marital satisfaction (Stevens, Kiger, and Riley 2001; Wilkie, Ferree, and Ratcliff 1998). The increase

in inequality we theorize in this paper is likely to decrease marital satisfaction, particularly for women (see Calarco, Meanwell, et al. 2020). While we did not ask about marital satisfaction directly, it was evident that this was the case in interviews, for instance in Grace's wish that her husband just "figure it out." Second, it is likely that this decrease in marital satisfaction (Fowers 1991) and the severe role conflict (Hecht 2001) women experienced during the pandemic negatively impacted their psychological well-being (see Calarco, Anderson, et al. 2020). Finally, parents' division of household labor influences children's gender-role beliefs and attitudes about household labor (Gardner and LaBrecque 1986). In particular, fathers' involvement in housework and childcare is positively related to that of their sons come adulthood (Cunningham 2001). In sum, parents' division of labor socializes children. The deepening of the gendered division of labor during the pandemic, and the two mechanisms we identify, will likely have consequences for families today and for the next generation.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Race and ethnicity categories are not mutually exclusive. Race and ethnicity data are missing for one survey respondent.
2. Survey data are completely missing for two respondents.

References

- Acker, Joan. 1990. "Hierarchies, Jobs, Bodies: A Theory of Gendered Organizations." *Gender & Society* 4(2):139–58.
- Bergen, Nicole and Ronald Labonté. 2020. "'Everything Is Perfect, and We Have No Problems': Detecting and Limiting Social Desirability Bias in Qualitative Research." *Qualitative Health Research* 30(5):783–92.
- Bianchi, Suzanne M., Liana C. Sayer, Melissa A. Milkie, and John P. Robinson. 2012. "Housework: Who Did, Does or Will Do It, and How Much Does It Matter?" *Social Forces* 91(1):55–63.
- Brines, Julie. 1994. "Economic Dependency, Gender, and the Division of Labor at Home." *The American Journal of Sociology* 100(3):652–88.
- Calarco, Jessica M., Elizabeth Anderson, Emily V. Meanwell, and Amelia Knopf. 2020. "'Let's Not Pretend It's Fun': How COVID-19-related School and Childcare Closures Are Damaging Mothers' Well-being." *SocArXiv*. doi:10.31235/osf.io/jyvk4.
- Calarco, Jessica M., Emily V. Meanwell, Elizabeth M. Anderson, and Amelia S. Knopf. 2020. "'My Husband Thinks I'm Crazy': COVID-19-related Conflict in Couples with Young Children." *SocArXiv*. doi:10.31235/osf.io/cpkj6.
- Calarco, Jessica M., Emily V. Meanwell, Elizabeth M. Anderson, and Amelia S. Knopf. 2021. "By Default: How Mothers in Different-sex Dual-earner Couples Account for Inequalities in Pandemic Parenting." *Socius* 7:1–15. doi:10.1177/23780231211038783.
- Calasanti, Toni M. and Carol A. Bailey. 1991. "Gender Inequality and the Division of Household Labor in the United States and Sweden: A Socialist-feminist Approach." *Social Problems* 38(1):34–53.
- Carian, Emily K. and Tagart Cain Sobotka. 2018. "Playing the Trump Card: Masculinity Threat and the U.S. 2016 Presidential Election." *Socius* 4:1–6.
- Collins, Caitlyn, Liana Christin Landivar, Leah Ruppner, and William J. Scarborough. 2020. "COVID-19 and the Gender Gap in Work Hours." *Gender, Work, and Organization* 28(Suppl. 1):101–12.
- Collins, Caitlyn, Leah Ruppner, Liana Christin Landivar, and William J. Scarborough. 2021. "The Gendered Consequences of a Weak Infrastructure of Care: School Reopening Plans and Parents' Employment During the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Gender & Society* 35(2):180–93.

- Collins, Patricia Hill. 1991. "The Meaning of Motherhood in Black Culture and Black Mother-daughter Relationships." Pp. 42–60 in *Double Stitch: Black Women Write about Mothers and Daughters*, edited by P. Bell-Scott, B. Guy-Sheftall, J. R. J. Janet, M. DeCosta-Willis, and L. Fultz. Boston, MA: Beacon Press.
- Coltrane, Scott R. 1989. "Household Labor and the Routine Production of Gender." *Social Problems* 36(5):473–90.
- Cunningham, Mick. 2001. "Parental Influences on the Gendered Division of Housework." *American Sociological Review* 66(2):184–203.
- Damaske, Sarah. 2021. *The Tolls of Uncertainty: How Privilege and the Guilt Gap Shape Unemployment in America*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Daminger, Allison. 2019. "The Cognitive Dimension of Household Labor." *American Sociological Review* 84(4):609–33.
- Daminger, Allison. 2020. "De-gendered Processes, Gendered Outcomes: How Egalitarian Couples Make Sense of Non-egalitarian Household Practices." *American Sociological Review* 85(5):806–29.
- Erickson, Rebecca J. 2005. "Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labor." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 67(2):337–51.
- Fowers, Blaine J. 1991. "His and Her Marriage: A Multivariate Study of Gender and Marital Satisfaction." *Sex Roles* 24(3):209–21.
- Gardner, Kaye E. and Suzanne V. LaBrecque. 1986. "Effects of Maternal Employment on Sex Role Orientation of Adolescents." *Adolescence* 21(84):875–88.
- Goldin, Claudia. 2021. *Career and Family: Women's Century-long Journey toward Equity*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Gough, Margaret and Alexandra Killewald. 2011. "Unemployment in Families: The Case of Housework." *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 73(5):1085–100.
- Haas, Linda, Karin Allard, and Philip Hwang. 2002. "The Impact of Organizational Culture on Men's Use of Parental Leave in Sweden." *Community, Work & Family* 5(3):319–42.
- Han, Wen-Jui, Christopher Ruhm, and Jane Waldfogel. 2007. *Parental Leave Policies and Parents' Employment and Leave-taking*. Working Paper No. 13697. National Bureau of Economic Research. doi:10.3386/w13697.
- Hays, Sharon. 1998. *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Hecht, Laura M. 2001. "Role Conflict and Role Overload: Different Concepts, Different Consequences." *Sociological Inquiry* 71(1):111–21.
- Hochschild, Arlie and Anne Machung. 2012. *The Second Shift: Working Families and the Revolution at Home*. Revised ed. New York: Penguin Books.
- Hsieh, Hsiu-Fang and Sarah E. Shannon. 2005. "Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis." *Qualitative Health Research* 15(9):1277–88.
- John, Daphne and Beth Anne Shelton. 1997. "The Production of Gender among Black and White Women and Men: The Case of Household Labor." *Sex Roles* 36(3):171–93.
- Karlamangla, Soumya and Rong-Gong Lin II. 2021. "How the 'California Miracle' Dissolved into a Winter Coronavirus Nightmare." *Los Angeles Times*, January 22. Retrieved May 21, 2022 (<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2021-01-22/how-winter-california-covid-19-surge-got-so-bad>).
- Kramer, Amit and Karen Z. Kramer. 2020. "The Potential Impact of the Covid-19 Pandemic on Occupational Status, Work from Home, and Occupational Mobility." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 119:103442.
- Landivar, Liana Christin, Leah Ruppner, William J. Scarborough, and Caitlyn Collins. 2020. "Early Signs Indicate That COVID-19 Is Exacerbating Gender Inequality in the Labor Force." *Socius* 6:1–3. doi:10.1177/2378023120947997.
- Lee, Emma K. and Zachary Parolin. 2021. "The Care Burden during COVID-19: A National Database of Child Care Closures in the United States." *Socius* 7:1-10. doi:10.1177/23780231211032028.
- Martin, Patricia Yancey. 2004. "Gender As Social Institution." *Social Forces* 82(4):1249–73.
- Orbuch, Terri L. 1997. "People's Accounts Count: The Sociology of Accounts." *Annual Review of Sociology* 23(1):455–78.
- Perry-Jenkins, Maureen and Karen Folk. 1994. "Class, Couples, and Conflict: Effects of the Division of Labor on Assessments of Marriage in Dual-earner Families." *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling* 56(1):165–80.

- Peters, John F. 1994. "Gender Socialization of Adolescents in the Home: Research and Discussion." *Adolescence* 29(116):913–34.
- Petts, Richard J., Daniel L. Carlson, and Joanna R. Pepin. 2021. "A Gendered Pandemic: Childcare, Homeschooling, and Parents' Employment during COVID-19." *Gender, Work, and Organization* 28(Suppl. 2):515–34.
- Pignataro, Lauren. 2015. "How a Secondary Earner Deduction Will Reduce the Gender Bias in the U.S. Tax Code." *NYU Review of Law & Social Change* 39:245–77.
- Prince Cooke, Lynn and Janeen Baxter. 2010. "'Families' in International Context: Comparing Institutional Effects across Western Societies." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 72(3):516–36.
- Rao, Aliya Hamid. 2020. *Crunch Time: How Married Couples Confront Unemployment*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2009. "Framed Before We Know It: How Gender Shapes Social Relations." *Gender & Society* 23(2):145–60.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. 2011. *Framed by Gender: How Gender Inequality Persists in the Modern World*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Ridgeway, Cecilia L. and Shelley J. Correll. 2004. "Unpacking the Gender System: A Theoretical Perspective on Gender Beliefs and Social Relations." *Gender & Society* 18(4):510–31.
- Risman, Barbara J. 1998. *Gender Vertigo: American Families in Transition*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- Sayer, Liana C. 2005. "Gender, Time and Inequality: Trends in Women's and Men's Paid Work, Unpaid Work and Free Time." *Social Forces* 84(1):285–303.
- Scott, Marvin B. and Stanford M. Lyman. 1968. "Accounts." *American Sociological Review* 33(1):46–62.
- Shelton, Beth Anne and Daphne John. 1996. "The Division of Household Labor." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22(1):299–322.
- Singleton, Andrew and Janemaree Maher. 2004. "The 'New Man' Is in the House: Young Men, Social Change, and Housework." *The Journal of Men's Studies* 12(3):227–40.
- Stevens, Daphne, Gary Kiger, and Pamela J. Riley. 2001. "Working Hard and Hardly Working: Domestic Labor and Marital Satisfaction among Dual-earner Couples." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 63(2):514–26.
- Swidler, Ann. 1986. "Culture in Action: Symbols and Strategies." *American Sociological Review* 51(2):273–86.
- Thébaud, Sarah, Sabino Kornrich, and Leah Ruppanner. 2021. "Good Housekeeping, Great Expectations: Gender and Housework Norms." *Sociological Methods & Research* 50(3):1186–214.
- Thébaud, Sarah and David S. Pedulla. 2016. "Masculinity and the Stalled Revolution: How Gender Ideologies and Norms Shape Young Men's Responses to Work-family Policies." *Gender & Society* 30(4):590–617.
- West, Candace and Don H. Zimmerman. 1987. "Doing Gender." *Gender & Society* 1(2):125–51.
- Wilkie, Jane Riblett, Myra Marx Ferree, and Kathryn Strother Ratcliff. 1998. "Gender and Fairness: Marital Satisfaction in Two-earner Couples." *Journal of Marriage and Family Counseling* 60(3):577–94.
- Williams, Joan. 2000. *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What to Do about It*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Yavorsky, Jill E., Yue Qian, and Amanda C. Sargent. 2021. "The Gendered Pandemic: The Implications of COVID-19 for Work and Family." *Sociology Compass* 15(6):e12881.
- Zamarro, Gema and María J. Prados. 2021. "Gender Differences in Couples' Division of Childcare, Work and Mental Health during COVID-19." *Review of Economics of the Household* 19:11–40.

Author Biographies

Jurgita Abromaviciute is an Assistant Professor at California State University, San Bernardino. She received her Ph.D. in Sociology from the University of Arizona in 2018. Abromaviciute's research primarily focuses on revealing status-based inequality mechanisms pertaining to gender.

Emily K. Carian is an Assistant Teaching Professor at University of California, Irvine. Her research examines the mechanisms of persistent gender inequality.