ABSTRACT

VULPIS, MINDY LARA. Do as I Say, Not as I Do? A Neo-Institutional Approach to Understanding the Pull toward Family ‘Traditionalism’ in an Age of Egalitarian Ideals. (Under the direction of Theodore N. Greenstein).

Progress toward a fully gender-equalitarian society has been slowing for decades and may have stalled completely. Scholars have long tried to make sense of this, providing compelling evidence pointing to myriad structural barriers that, among other things, have caused married women to consistently shoulder a disproportionate share of family and household responsibilities. This dissertation looks to add to our understanding of this phenomenon by offering a cultural perspective on what has enabled arguably outdated modes of thinking about the sharing of family responsibilities to linger and proliferate. Drawing on in-depth interviews with five heterosexual, married middle-class mothers, I conceptualize the family as a very small organization and develop a cultural theory borrowing from the major tenets of the neo-institutional theory of organizations. Specifically, I argue that vestiges of the breadwinner-homemaker model of the family have persisted, despite generally widespread egalitarian ideals, because there is uncertainty in the environment due to a dearth of institutional support for now-ubiquitous dual-earner family arrangements; because breadwinner-homemaker arrangements are still culturally legitimated, so they remain idealized and confer positive sanctions to those who conform to them; and because that legitimacy is based on a cultural mythology that I have labeled the “sacred mother-child bond”—the gender-essentialist notion that the relationship between mothers and their young children is biologically determined and has almost magical qualities that transcend the mundane realities of day-to-day child care. To test these arguments, I analyze data from the 2012 General Social Survey. Focusing on evidence of an inconsistent relationship between
what married couples say they believe and how their family responsibilities come to be allocated, I test the extent to which gender ideologies, measured in several different ways, predict heterosexual married couples’ division of housework and family care. Consistent with my qualitative findings and much of the prior literature, I find that gender ideology, as it has been conventionally measured in large-scale data sets, does not predict the division of family labor under most circumstances. This relationship was only marginally more robust when beliefs specifically related to mothering were tested separately from beliefs related more generally to the division of household labor. However, the specific belief that some iteration of the breadwinner-homemaker model is ideal—a view held by a large majority of married GSS respondents—did predict a substantial reduction in the percentage of housework performed by husbands, as did the belief that it is best for mothers of young children to participate in the paid labor force only in limited ways or not at all. These results suggest that culturally idealized notions of heterosexual family arrangement, particularly those related to mothers’ time with their children, not only exist, but also may be hampering progress toward full gender equality.
Do as I Say, Not as I Do? A Neo-Institutional Approach to Understanding the Pull toward Family ‘Traditionalism' in an Age of Egalitarian Ideals

by
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DEDICATION

To my late parents, Thyra Levine and Art Levine, who taught me some interesting things about the division of family labor. I share this with you both, gratefully.

And to my boys, whose passion for learning inspires me. I couldn’t be prouder of you.
BIOGRAPHY

Born and raised on Long Island, NY, Mindy Vulpis graduated from Tufts University in 1989 with a B.A. in clinical psychology. In the 18 years that followed, she worked in the social services field in Boston, as a technology-industry copy editor in New York, and as a stay-at-home mother in North Carolina. Then, in 2007, with three kids ranging from age 3 to age 8, she decided that it would be a good idea to start a sociology Ph.D. program. She has spent the last decade pursuing said Ph.D. while raising her three very busy sons. She received her master’s degree in sociology from N.C. State in 2009.
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I thank my non-sociology friends and my extended family for their unwavering support throughout this past decade. I can’t express how grateful I am for your encouragement, your excitement for me as I (slowly) progressed, your periodic help with kid duty when I needed
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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

“All of us to some degree design or tailor our worlds, but we never do this from raw cloth; indeed, for the most part we get our worlds ready to wear.” —Richard Brown, 1978

For more than two decades, family scholars have noted that the progress toward gender equality in the United States has slowed, or even ceased, following an initial decade of rapid change starting in the 1970s. Researchers have been teasing out the roots of this stall since it began. Specifically, prior literature has underscored the many ways in which structural constraints such as stubborn pay inequities, lack of family-friendly work policies, persistent job segregation by gender, and lack of universal child care in the U.S. come to frame, and ultimately limit, options available particularly to women as couples negotiate breadwinning, housework, and child care responsibilities. What has yet to be fully explored, however, is the role that culture plays in resisting what was once a strong push toward egalitarianism in both the home and the workplace. Specifically, what are the normative pressures, influenced at least in part by the structural context, to craft family structures and processes in ways that align with perceived norms and convey a sense of cultural legitimacy? And what are their larger-scale effects?

The goal of this dissertation is to develop a broad cultural perspective aimed at augmenting what we already know regarding the structural constraints that have come to frame family decision-making. To do so, I build on two large-scale qualitative works published two decades apart. In her 1989 seminal work The Second Shift, Hochschild took an in-depth look at how 50 heterosexual couples negotiated household and child-care chores amid what she calls a “speed-up” of family life, resulting at least in part from the en masse
movement of married mothers of young children into the workforce. While this transition highlighted some of the liberating changes afforded to women as a result of the Feminist movement of the 1960s and ‘70s, Hochschild ultimately concluded that the revolution had “stalled.” Most husbands, she found, were slow to adapt to the cultural and economic changes affecting their family lives, and therefore resistant to adopting their wives’ burgeoning egalitarian beliefs or participating equally in housework and child care.

A generation later, Gerson (2010) argued that the revolution was still “unfinished.” In her analysis of in-depth interviews of 120 men and women between the ages of 18 and 32—most of whom represent the generation of children born to Hochschild’s study participants—Gerson found that many young adults now hold deeply egalitarian ideals and strive to create partnerships in which neither men nor women fully shoulder paid work or family caretaking. Still, she found that they are skeptical about their ability to achieve this type of arrangement. As a result, young women are developing “fallback strategies” that prioritize economic self-sufficiency over traditional marriage, while young men, in contrast, hope to fall back on “neo-traditional” arrangements that allow them to prioritize breadwinning and rely on their partners for the bulk of the caregiving.

In this dissertation, I develop a theoretical perspective that adds to what we know about the structural barriers that shape family decision making by offering a cultural perspective that addresses the overriding questions emerging from Hochschild’s and Gerson’s research, namely why heterosexual married couples continue to create neo-traditional family arrangements despite their professed egalitarian ideals. I suggest that a cultural perspective promises not to replace, but to augment, the structural perspective in
several ways: First, it helps us understand the ways in which structure and culture interact to perpetuate symbolic ideas about family roles that come to play an important part in family decision making; Second, it aims to clarify the mechanisms through which gendered family arrangements remain ubiquitous, even as structural conditions begin to shift; And third, it promises to augment our understanding of the complex relationship between gender ideologies in the abstract and the very concrete ways in which family responsibilities ultimately come to be divided.

With an understanding that the family is, at its core, an economic organization, I will borrow from organizational theory—a neo-institutional framework, in particular—to help explain the cultural pull to design family roles and structures in neo-traditional ways, mimicking other similar “organizations in the field” regardless of the extent to which these arrangements actually maximize the efficiency of the family unit. Specifically, neo-institutional scholars (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Suddaby 2010) argue that symbolic, institutional “myths,” rather than material circumstance, are at the core of what motivates these tendencies. As such, I argue that the powerful symbolism of what I label the “sacred mother-child bond” motivates a plethora of family decisions that go largely unexamined, and that the symbolism with which the breadwinner-homemaker model of family life has generally been imbued—the persistent glorification of 1950s-era “traditionalism” as the best or ideal way to structure family roles, and especially the elevation of mothers to a prized status as uniquely suited for providing child care—exerts institutional pressures to craft family arrangements in ways that mirror the perceived ideal, even when it may be neither attainable nor aligned with the ideals professed by contemporary husbands and wives.
To make this argument, I begin by examining the existing empirical literature on the complex relationship between what heterosexual couples believe about gender and what they actually do, with the goal of understanding how and when behaviors do not follow personal ideologies in the ways that many might presume. I then examine how this discrepancy may shift once couples become parents, and the reasons that this transition is both critical and consequential when it comes to understanding the perpetuation of gendered family arrangements. To add depth to these findings, I include data from in-depth interviews I conducted with five married, middle-class mothers, who describe in great detail the processes through which their family arrangements took shape, as well as the extent to which those arrangements align with or diverge from beliefs they hold or once held about gender.

Resonating with prior qualitative findings, these interviews generally revealed two important themes that provide the foundation for the theoretical puzzle that I will then address: First, the aforementioned divergence between gender ideologies and the ways in which family roles actually become allocated; and second, a more complex and sometimes apparently conflicting constellation of ideas about gender and family roles that is not normally revealed through conventional gender ideology measurement. With an eye toward understanding these paradoxes, I draw extensively on a wide range of sociological scholarship, both theoretical and empirical and spanning decades, to piece together the ways in which the foundational concepts arising from neo-institutional theory—conditions of uncertainty, the quest for legitimacy, and underlying mythology—can be applied to the “family organization” to help illuminate the cultural mechanisms that, when coupled with the structural limitations imposed by a persistently gendered workplace that spill over into the
home, help perpetuate “traditional” family arrangements even among relatively egalitarian heterosexual couples.

In the final part of the dissertation, I will empirically test the application of a neo-institutional framework to family processes, specifically with an eye toward explaining why heterosexual couples’ beliefs and behaviors do not appear to align. Using data from the 2012 General Social Survey, I will first examine when and for whom beliefs about gender and family processes appear to diverge from their actual family roles and arrangements. Based on the neo-institutional concepts related to legitimacy and myth, I will then explore the following sets of questions: 1) Do heterosexual married couples’ beliefs differ from their behaviors? If so, does gender ideology become less aligned with division of household labor once heterosexual partners become parents? 2) How do beliefs about mothering potentially differ from more general beliefs about women’s roles? Relatedly, how do beliefs about gender as it relates the performance of family care potentially differ from beliefs about gender and the performance of housework or other family tasks? To what extent are beliefs and behaviors more or less aligned when looking at mothering/general division of labor beliefs and housework/family care separately? And lastly, are idealized notions about the “best” ways to organize family responsibilities better predictors of the division of housework and family care than conventional gender ideology indices? Similarly, based on the “myth of the sacred mother-child bond,” do beliefs specifically about the need for mothers of young children to stay home with their children (that is, not work full-time) predict the division of housework and family care? I will conclude with a synthesis of my theoretical proposition and my empirical results and will return to a neo-institutional framework to speculate as to
what shifts in the social and economic landscape might need to take place in order for these institutional pressures to diminish.

**Gender Ideology and Family Labor**

Recent trends in the relative contributions of men and women to both the labor force and the family suggest that the intersection of women’s work lives and their family responsibilities is likely at the crux of the halting progress toward gender equality. While married women’s labor force participation surged to a high of 62% in 2000, up more than 20% from 1970, most of those gains occurred prior to 1990 and then leveled off, even declining slightly by 2009 (U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Mirroring this trend, the number of married women with working husbands who were stay-at-home mothers dropped to a modern-era low of 23% in 1999, down from 43% in 1967, but that number was up by 6% by 2012 (Cohn, Livingston, and Wang 2014). Similarly, the ratio of hours women spend doing housework compared to men fell dramatically between 1965 and the early 1990s, but has leveled off since that time, with married mothers still doing nearly twice as much, on average, as married fathers in 2010 (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, and Robinson 2012). And when it comes to achieving the elusive balance between their work and family lives, 51% of working mothers say that being a working parent has made it difficult to advance their careers, compared to just 16% of working fathers (Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends 2013a). Women are still also much more likely than men to interrupt their careers for their families by reducing work hours, taking extended time off, turning down promotions, or quitting their jobs altogether (Pew Research 2013a). Perhaps relatedly, women continue to be stubbornly under-
represented in higher-paying fields such as the sciences, mathematics and engineering (Mather 2007), despite their outpacing of men in their pursuit of higher education since the mid-1990s (Pew Research Social and Demographic Trends 2013b; see also DiPrete and Buchman 2013).

Studies analyzing General Social Survey data from the 1970s forward suggest that gender ideologies have trended similarly, that is, what was once a clear trend toward widespread egalitarian beliefs has leveled off in recent decades (Brewster and Padavic 2000; Cotter, Hermsen and Vanneman 2011; Mason and Lu 1988). The long-term trend toward more liberalizing views of women’s rights was consistent and largely monotonic throughout much of the 1970s and ’80s, but shifts in beliefs have been small and inconsistent since the mid-1990s (Cotter, Hermsen and Vanneman 2011). The roots of this slowdown/reversal appear to be multifaceted. Brewster and Padavic (2000) point to a population-level shift, finding that the cohort replacement that once fueled a relatively steep rise in egalitarianism early on has predictably leveled off as egalitarian households and ideals became more ubiquitous. Brooks and Bolzendahl (2004) also find support for the cohort replacement effect, but suggest that this effect may be mediated by a process of ideological learning. Cotter et al.’s findings, meanwhile, point more toward an intra-cohort explanation, suggesting that a turn back toward more conservative ideas about gender is specifically rooted in an anti-feminist backlash in popular culture—an idea that I will return to later in this analysis.

Despite some apparent congruity in the trends related to gender ideology and the actual allocation of household and paid labor, an extensive body of research reveals a
complex relationship between gender ideology and the patterns in which gendered behaviors are enacted. Several decades of research looking at the link between women’s personal gender ideologies and both their employment patterns and their participation in household labor has, in fact, produced decidedly mixed results. For example, research has pointed to the idea that structural contexts in both the home and the workplace—such as job quality, available salary, and the number of young children in the home—have a stronger effect on women’s labor-force participation than their personal attitudes (Risman, Atkinson, and Blackwelder 1998).

Similarly, while it may seem logical to assume that individuals’ choices regarding the role gender plays in the allocation of their family responsibilities will be a result of—or at least follow in line with—a relatively fixed set of personal beliefs they have related to gender, research suggests that gender ideologies appear instead to be quite fluid over time, and influenced by a variety situational factors. For example, when there is a discrepancy between their ideologies and their family and work roles, individuals often will adjust their ideologies to match their current work or family lives (Davis 2007; Fan and Marini 2000; Kroska and Elman 2009; Vespa 2009). Taking a long-term, intersectional approach, Vespa (2009) finds that gender ideology is vulnerable to a variety of life-course events, including marriage, parenthood and work status, in more nuanced ways than previous literature had suggested. Specifically, he finds variation in how these events affect ideology across race, gender, social class and marital status categories. For example, black people—and particularly poor, black men and affluent black women—became more egalitarian and whites less egalitarian upon marriage, and parenthood exerted a less egalitarian effect on married
parents but a more egalitarian effect on unmarried parents. These variations are important to consider, given the tendency for the experiences of white, middle-class families to be considered “normative.”

Similar longitudinal research suggests a waning effect of early childhood socialization of gender ideology as young adults proceed through adulthood and instead construct ideologies based on their current family circumstances, education level, or work status (Cunningham, Beutelb, Barberc, and Thornton 2005; Davis 2007; Fan and Marini 2000). Ideologies also appear vulnerable to marital and family circumstances. Kroska and Elman (2009), for example, find that individuals’ egalitarianism is positively related to both the education level and egalitarianism of their spouses, with men’s egalitarianism, in particular, positively associated with the occupational prestige of their wives and negatively associated with the number of children in the home. They find that women’s egalitarianism, meanwhile, is positively associated with their own entry into paid employment.

The relative amount of time men and women spend doing household and paid labor is also affected by their spouses’ ideologies, though differently for husbands and wives. Evertsson (2104) finds that the time women spend doing housework is influenced by the extent of their husbands’ egalitarianism as well as their own, though wives’ egalitarianism only seems to affect the amount of time that they, and not their husbands, spend doing housework. Along these lines, Greenstein (1996) finds that the allocation of household labor is the product of an interaction between husbands’ and wives’ gender ideologies, whereby husbands’ contribution to household labor only substantially increases when both they and their wives hold egalitarian ideologies. This type of interaction appears to carry over into
women’s paid work. Cunningham (2008) finds, for example, that women’s employment patterns do follow their personal gender ideologies but are also influenced by their husbands’ participation in routine housework. Even over the long term, women whose husbands performed a relatively larger share of stereotypically female household tasks were more likely to be employed than women whose husbands performed relatively less housework.

Research also points toward myriad factors that affect the allocation of domestic labor beyond the gender ideologies of the spouses. For example, a growing body of cross-national research suggests that macro-level structural factors, in the form of egalitarian policies at the national level such as paid leave for fathers or support for female labor-force participation, influence both how couples think about gender and how they negotiate the ways in which they share domestic responsibilities (Batalova and Cohen 2002; Fuwa 2004; Fuwa and Cohen 2007; Greenstein 2009; Hook 2006; Kunovich and Kunovich 2008). This research finds not only that couples in more egalitarian countries share housework more equally than those in countries without egalitarian policies, but also that these macro-level factors can strengthen or weaken the effects that individual-level characteristics such as gender ideology have on the division of household labor (Fuwa 2004). The effects of other individual- or couple-level factors on the division of household labor, including the relative resources, economic dependency or time availability of the spouses, are also considered in cross-national and other research (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Fuwa 2004). These extensive but mixed findings generally suggest that gender ideology plays a clear role in the division of housework, but that these
other characteristics can add to or even trump the influence of gender ideology (Bianchi et al. 2000), sometimes depending in part on nation-level context (Aassve et al. 2014).

Despite what is clearly a complex relationship between gender ideology and household labor, as well as evidence of multiple levels of influence both on individuals’ gender ideology and couples’ allocation of family responsibilities over time, some evidence does suggest that gender ideology exerts independent influence on how spouses allocate their family responsibilities. Cunningham (2008) and Lendon and Silverstein (2012), for example, both find a positive relationship between women’s egalitarianism and their subsequent marriage and labor-force behavior. A recent Australian study similarly finds that as men’s and women’s housework hours converge over time, gender attitudes are emerging as the key predictor of the relative number of hours each spouse spends on housework (Chesters 2013). Recent cross-national research also hints at this trend, with Aassve et al. (2014) finding that, while time availability, relative resources and economic dependency affect the division of household labor to varying degrees among the nine countries they studied, egalitarian gender ideologies are associated with more equality in the division of household labor across all of those countries. Other findings, meanwhile, suggest a far more nuanced relationship. For example, one study finds that husbands’ early gender ideologies influence later division of labor, although wives’ early attitudes do not, and that the relationship between early attitudes and the division of household labor is mediated by a couples’ resources and time availability, but only for cohabiters (Cunningham 2005).
The Transition to Parenthood

The experience of becoming parents, perhaps more than any other role or status change throughout the life course, appears to exert substantial influence on both gender ideology and the ways in which heterosexual couples share family labor. Evidence shows that, in general, heterosexual couples’ roles tend to “traditionalize” across the transition to parenthood, that is, men take on a greater share of breadwinning responsibilities and women more household and child-care responsibilities, even when the couple previously had an egalitarian arrangement (Belsky and Kelly 1994; Katz-Wise, Priess and Hyde 2010; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Some research has suggested that this is due in part to stubborn pay differentials between mothers and fathers in the labor force, with men receiving pay “bonuses” as they become fathers and women’s pay “penalized” as they become mothers (Budig and England 2001; Glauber 2007; Hodges and Budig 2010). These differentials exert pressures to restructure family roles in ways that align with economic realities, ultimately encouraging traditional family arrangements in which men maintain or increase their market work and women reduce or abandon market work in order to assume the bulk of household and child-care responsibilities. Along these lines, what many have perceived as a widespread choice among middle-class, educated women to abandon their careers and assume a more traditional role in the past decade is, in fact, not as common as perceptions might indicate (Boushey 2005, 2008). What’s more, scholars have found that when these choices are made, they are shaped by structural constraints that many women encounter when they become mothers, namely inflexible and unmanageable work demands
that conflict with the demands of parenthood (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2004).

Though structural mechanisms such as these play an important role in channeling husbands and wives into more segregated family roles upon entering parenthood, cultural ideas about what it means to mother, in particular, also appear to exert influence. For example, mothers, more than fathers, appear more susceptible to pressures to become “ideal parents,” and are subject to the cultural mandate of “intensive motherhood”—the idea that being a good mother requires “not only large quantities of money but also professional-level skills and copious amounts of physical, moral, mental, and emotional energy” (Hays 1996:4). This expectation of unrestrained selflessness, Hays argues, is incompatible with a contradictory marketplace mandate that requires workers to fully devote themselves to their jobs in the name of rational self-interested gain and economic achievement. Similarly, Blair-Loy (2003) articulates how executive-level career women struggle to negotiate competing cultural “schema” that simultaneously require intense, single-minded devotion to both work and family. These scholars suggest that these dilemmas, rather than simply personal “choice,” can drive some new mothers’ decisions to either dramatically reduce or abandon their workplace commitments, or retreat from the labor force altogether, in order to focus their efforts on child care and housework.

Other research has uncovered interactional bases for the shift toward traditionalism that are also rooted in cultural ideals related to mothering. The transition to parenthood, arguably more than other roles, is likely distinct in the extent to which it can provide a powerful impetus to behave and relate to others according to more culturally sanctioned
gendered scripts—essentially to “do gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) —in ways that may have previously been foreign especially to dual-earner couples (Fox 2009; Walzer 1998). Based on extensive interviews with new parents, Walzer (1998) finds that men and women experience the transition in distinctly different ways that underscore their gender difference. She notes that new mothers and fathers conceptualize their roles very differently and enact changes in their lives or routines to largely different extents following this transition, well beyond what might be dictated by the biological realities of pregnancy, childbirth, and nursing. They also carry with them different sets of internalized cultural ideals regarding “good mothering” versus “good fathering,” Walzer argues, which are enacted on a relational level, affecting the negotiation of roles and responsibilities between spouses and ultimately resulting in the reproduction of many traditional ideas about family roles and structure.

In more recent qualitative research, Fox (2009) takes a similar interactional approach, arguing that gender, as a social construct, is actually created across the transition to parenthood, that is, gender differences are highlighted and accentuated in ways that lend themselves toward a differentiated and unbalanced division of household work, among other things, and the resulting inequalities that often follow. Fox adds, however, that while the negotiation and assumption of gendered roles is a relational process, it is also embedded in varying contextual factors that produce differences both within and between couples—such as the level of resources or supports couples have at their disposal or their relative labor-market positions—and, as a result, can serve to reproduce both gender and social-class inequalities.
While it is clear that the tendency of marital roles to traditionalize across the transition to parenthood has structural, cultural, and interactional roots, it is less clear the role that gender ideology plays in that shift. As is suggested by the research looking at the relationship between ideology and gendered behavior, it is unclear whether the shift is the result of changing ideologies as couples take on parenting roles, whether there is an ideological shift after the fact to match the more traditional behavior that parents ultimately come to assume, or whether ideologies do not actually shift, but rather co-exist at odds with couples’ traditionalizing behavior. Some evidence points toward the latter explanation, as research has found that the incongruity between gender ideology and the allocation of actual family and work roles, as well as the violation of expectations and perceived unfairness regarding the division of child care, are important causes of the well-documented increase in marital conflict when couples become parents (Goldberg and Perry-Jenkins 2004; Helms-Erikson 2001; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990; McHale and Crouter 1992; Milkie, Bianchi, Mattingly, and Robinson 2002).

It also appears, however, that even egalitarian men and women start to anticipate their roles differently prior to parenthood in ways that have traditionalizing consequences. For example, Bass (2014) finds that even among highly egalitarian couples, women are disproportionately likely to worry about future parenthood and adjust their career aspirations accordingly, often by downshifting their goals, while men were unlikely to engage in these thoughts or behaviors. This suggests that cultural ideals about motherhood may, in part, be driving behaviors that are at odds with the egalitarian beliefs that many couples profess to hold.
**Housework versus Child Care**

Whether they be on an ideological or behavioral level, the fact that dramatic shifts of this nature occur across the transition to parenthood calls for a more nuanced understanding about the qualitative differences between the provision of housework and child care, and specifically how they relate to gender, as well as attitudes about gender roles. In other words, why does it appear to be easier to maintain egalitarian partnerships when there is only housework, but not child care, to be shared?

Only a limited amount of published research has addressed housework and child care as separate constructs, particularly for the purpose of understanding differences in each when it comes to both ideology and behavior. This is a surprising omission, given the extent to which we know that both ideology and behavior traditionalize when child care is introduced into a relationship, and the questions this raises about the qualitative difference between parenting labor and other family-related tasks. Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane (1992) address this most directly, taking on the task of unpacking some of the differences in husbands’ performance of child care versus housework. They note, first, that this task is challenging for several reasons, among them the difficulty in drawing a distinction between where one ends and the other begins. For example, they note that a proportion of tasks considered to be “housework”—cooking, cleaning, or laundry, for example—are actually child care, or at the very least, increase substantially in volume as a result of having children in the home. Thus, it’s important to note that the overall amount of domestic work increases substantially with the birth of each child, even when particular tasks may not be conceived specifically as “child care.” In addition, conventional measures of child care do not include more subtle, but
often distress-producing, aspects of parenting, such as the overall responsibility and planning for child care and children’s activities, or leisure time spent with them.

Still, even when limiting their child care measure only to the time spent tending to children’s physical needs, such as feeding, bathing and dressing children, notable differences in husbands’ performances of housework and child care emerge. Specifically, Ishii-Kuntz and Coltrane find that while men who perform more housework also perform more child care, and, predictably, husbands’ and wives’ respective employment hours affect both, other family circumstances affect the performance of housework and child care differently. For example, men perform more housework if their wives earn a greater share of the household income, but they do not perform a greater share of the child care. In addition, men perform a greater proportional share of child care if there are more children in the home, but this does not increase their proportional share of housework. The same holds true relative to the age of the youngest child, with men increasing their share of child care, but not housework, as children age.

These nuanced findings also point toward cultural influences on family processes, and specifically on ideas related to motherhood. For example, if spouses’ relative incomes—a structural condition—affect the provision of housework but don’t exert influence on child care, it suggests that mothers may be considered to be particularly suited for parenting in ways that fathers are not, even to the extent that it “overrides” the structural influences. Similarly, if husbands increase their child care activity but not their housework as children age, it suggests that babies or toddlers, who are likely considered more in need of parental “nurturing,” may be thought to require greater attention from their mothers as opposed to
their fathers. At the very least, findings like these suggest that there is something unique about the gendered provision of child care, specifically, that is not fully explained by structural conditions.

These subtle differences in gendered ideas or norms regarding housework versus child care can have large-scale consequences. Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, and Robinson (2012) argue that housework and child care are qualitatively different in ways that may seem minimal but can ultimately lead to substantial differences when it comes to gender equality. For example, while housework can be “fit in” around couples’ work schedules, thus not interfering with the paid work of either partner, young children must be cared for 24x7—a condition that is incompatible with paid work unless alternate arrangements are made. To accommodate this inflexibility, Bianchi et al. (2012:60) articulate, “Women reduce their paid work to care for children; men tend not to do this. Thus, gendered caregiving retards movement toward gender equality in the labor market, perhaps far more so than gender differences in housework.” This suggests that measuring the number of hours parents spend on care-related tasks—a measure used in the analysis chapter of this dissertation and also commonly used in studies analyzing husbands’ and wives’ relative contributions to domestic chores—does not fully account for the extent of its inflexibility relative to housework. As a result, even research that analyzes time commitments to housework and/or child care, especially when those two measures are combined into a single variable, may obscure meaningful and perhaps more fundamental inequities within marriages, as well as their larger-scale consequences.
Ultimately, Bianchi et al. conclude that the large body of previous scholarship that primarily used the division of housework to gauge gender inequality was insufficient because it did not pay enough attention specifically to child care, and particularly its potentially unique contribution to the reproduction of gender inequality in both the home and the workplace. Given what we know about the complex nature of the relationship between gender ideology and gendered family behavior, as well as the extent to which dramatic shifts appear to occur when heterosexual couples become parents, it is critical to gain a deeper understanding of the unique ways in which the particular acts and demands of child care—as well as the cultural ideals that may be fueling gendered assumptions about its provision—contribute to the halting progress toward gender equality noted in recent decades.
CHAPTER 2: EXPLORATORY QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

To further develop the theoretical and empirical questions related to whether and how gendered beliefs and behaviors are negotiated and enacted among heterosexual married parents—and how these beliefs and behaviors both have become situated in and potentially contributed to the “stalled gender revolution”—I conducted in-depth interviews with five heterosexual, middle class, married mothers ranging in age from late 30s to early 50s. I chose this “generation” of women in particular for two reasons. The first is historical. This generation was the first to come of age fully after a host of gains in women’s rights had already been won, and as such, did not experience a time where the mandate to adhere to strict “gender roles” was universally accepted, or at least largely unchallenged. At the same time, however, the path toward fully egalitarian marital partnerships had yet to be blazed, thus leaving couples “normless” when it came to negotiating how such a partnership might look or work.

The second reason this generation is of unique interest is where it fits into related large-scale qualitative scholarship. As early as 1989, Hochschild reasoned that the gender revolution had already “stalled,” owing to married couples’ difficulty negotiating egalitarian partnerships, and particularly husbands’ inflexibility in adapting family routines to accommodate their wives’—and the larger society’s—burgeoning egalitarianism. For working wives and mothers, Hochschild argued, this necessitated a variety of cognitive strategies aimed at reconciling their beliefs with actual household arrangements that remained largely rigid and “traditional,” and to negotiate the stubborn incongruence between the marital “bargains” they had struck and the ideals emerging from a changing society.
Gerson’s (2010) much more recent work suggests that today’s young adults face a similar predicament amid a revolution that is still “unfinished.” Representing the generation of children born to the generation Hochschild studied, Gerson’s participants, men and women alike, are far more well-versed in and comfortable with the idea of gender equality, and largely express a strong desire to adopt egalitarian partnerships. However, having witnessed their parents’ generation struggling with still-rigid social and economic barriers in both the home and the workplace, and daunted by the conflicts and challenges inherent in negotiating an egalitarian marriage, these young men and women were highly skeptical that this type of arrangement is feasible, or even possible, and are instead contemplating what they might settle for in its place.

The five women I interviewed are among the generation that has come of age between those in Hochschild’s and Gerson’s studies. All resided in suburban areas close to a midsize Southeastern city, and all were mothers to either two or three children ranging in age from 4 to 19. In keeping with this area’s reputation for attracting families from different U.S. regions, the women I interviewed were raised in the Northeast, Mid-Atlantic, Midwest, or the Caribbean. All of the women identified as middle or upper middle class, and all but one came from working-class backgrounds. Of the five, three identified as white, one as white/Hispanic, and one as black. Unlike Gerson’s participants, they have already entered (and, in some cases, exited) the labor force, gotten married, and become parents. Unlike Hochschild’s participants, these women were negotiating work-family strategies at a time when women’s workforce participation has become more institutionalized and the pressure to adopt egalitarian ideals is perhaps more cemented. Of the five women, two are employed
full-time, one is employed part-time, and two left careers to become stay-at-home parents. My goal was to gain a nuanced understanding of what they believe about the role gender should play in family life, how their beliefs originated and developed both over time and across various family transitions, and how their beliefs either guide or collide with their actual work-family-related negotiations, decisions, and marital arrangements.

**Egalitarian Ideals, Neo-Traditional Marriages**

Consistent with the literature revealing a complex relationship between beliefs and practices related to the role of gender in allocating family responsibilities, one important theme that emerged from my analysis was what appeared, at least from an outward perspective, to be a “mismatch” between these women’s ideological viewpoints in relation to gender and the ways in which their family responsibilities have come to be allocated. With only little exception, the women articulated generally egalitarian ideals regarding the division of family responsibilities, relating their belief that gender should not be the determining factor in who stays home and who goes to work, nor in how breadwinning, household, and child-care chores are shared. In most cases, these ideals were firmly rooted in a rejection of the more traditional arrangements of their parents, which they perceived to be unfair and excessively burdensome on their mothers. Tina, a stay-at-home mother of three, shared her frustration with the idea that her mother was expected to shoulder complete responsibility for the home and children despite also working full-time at her “husband’s” business:

> My mom did everything. My mom and dad had an equal day because they worked together, and then my dad sat down when he got home, for a cocktail and to watch the
news, and basically when he walked in the door, that was the end of his day. And my mom’s day began again. It was a stress, too, because she had to catch up, and I didn’t quite have her attention because she was always trying to catch up. So actually, it bugged me that he would sit down in the evening. … And he would demand. He was demanding. … It was totally unfair. The woman was exhausted!

Still, in varying degrees, the women I interviewed also have crafted for themselves neo-traditional arrangements—those in which husbands and wives, while not adhering rigidly to a 1950s-era breadwinner-homemaker model, still assume many “traditionally female” or “traditionally male” household and child-rearing responsibilities regardless of the extent to which the wives contribute to breadwinning. Often, they reconciled this discrepancy by attributing it to simple “preferences” of the partners. For example, Rita, a full-time working mother of two, relates that she “enjoys” doing laundry, and her husband’s desires lie elsewhere:

I think in terms of the things that he does, are probably the things that he probably would want to do. Like, you know, he’ll handle the maintenance of the cars, and check on the house, and stuff like that. I don’t think he would want to do laundry. (laughs)

A few of the women instead suggested that their husbands were less capable of handling household tasks, especially those that involved management or multitasking. Amanda, a full-time working mother of two, relates that her husband is very helpful with their children but may be easily overwhelmed by the scheduling demands related to their daughter’s activities:
I get her schedule, compare it to my schedule, and I compare it to her schedule now, because she’s cheerleading, and I’m like, “OK.” I wait till it gets closer in time, because I can’t tell my husband to do things four days out. It’s just not possible. So the day before the morning of, I’ll say, “Tonight when she gets home, I’m not gonna be home, I need you to focus on …”

When Rita says, “I don’t think he would want to do the laundry,” and Amanda says, “It’s just not possible” to give her husband scheduling information in advance, these women are intimating that their husbands’ inherent desires or abilities are at odds with tasks that have traditionally been performed by women. Thus, they are suggesting, albeit subtly, that they assume these tasks not directly because they are women, per se, but rather because they, and not their husbands, are theoretically equipped with a set of desires or proclivities that lend themselves toward these particular tasks. They don’t make any overarching assumptions or proclamations regarding gender and its traditional association with particular family responsibilities; rather, they experience and relate their arrangements as based simply on individual preferences and tendencies that exist within their own marriages.

Beth, a part-time working mother of two, acknowledged that her neo-traditional division of family responsibilities outwardly appears to betray her egalitarian ideals. When asked about discrepancies between her beliefs and her behaviors, Beth replied, “I guess, looking at it from the outside, you’d say it’s a very traditional setup. … And some of it’s very traditional, some of it’s not, I guess. It’s kind of a mix. But [gender is] not the reason.” Instead, Beth suggests that her arrangement was arrived at because it “makes sense” in light
of time and space considerations—specifically that she is able to do more because she works part-time and spends more time at home:

Once we had kids and I went down to half time, then I definitely took on more of the responsibilities because it made sense. … He gets home at 6:30 or 7:00 most nights.

For him to start dinner then, when I’ve been home for hours, just doesn’t make sense. However, Beth also relates that she was the parent chosen to work part-time, and thus assume a greater share of the household chores, due to discrepancies in her and her husband’s earning potentials:

When we were first married, we both worked full-time, but even then, my career is not a high-paying career, whereas his is. So, we decided from early on that he would be the main breadwinner no matter what. … You know, some families the husband will go part-time, but in our situation, you know, it wouldn’t have made any sense at all. We couldn’t have survived on my salary because I just would never make that much.

Although their arrangement certainly makes practical sense in terms of very real economic considerations, Beth acknowledges that her desire to work part-time and blend career and motherhood in this particular fashion predated even her marriage. She recalls a conversation she had with her husband when they were dating:

Even at that point I decided, when I have children I want to work part-time so I can be home with them. … I’d figured this all out already, and, you know, talking about it, he said, “Well, that makes sense.” He kind of grew into the idea. Then we got married and it all worked out.
Though Beth was notably satisfied with her current arrangement, her description of her negotiations with her husband regarding the allocation of their family responsibilities underscores the cocktail of conflicting pressures that has resulted from the erosion of strict gender roles combined with persistent structural inequities between men and women in the workplace and lingering cultural ideals about mothering (Hays 1996). Beth describes her current arrangement as pragmatic rather than gendered—her husband had the potential to make more money in his career, so it made the most sense for her to switch to part-time once they had children and for her husband to be the primary breadwinner. As many scholars have argued, this kind of pragmatism, on a large scale, can evolve into more systematic gender inequality because there is a “feedback loop” (Hartmann 1976) between the home and the workplace, whereby the husband continues to shoulder the bulk of market work due to salary discrepancies, leaving the wife to assume the bulk of family care, in turn limiting her opportunities for higher-paying market work. Additionally, husbands’ resulting higher earning power offers them leverage in negotiating family arrangements that most benefit them, perhaps enabling them to “buy their way out of” less desirable tasks. Thus, what appear to be very personal, pragmatic choices related only to individual family arrangements can have substantial large-scale implications when it comes to the push toward gender equality.

Still, Beth’s follow-up statements reveal that her decisions are more than simply pragmatic or power-driven, at least beyond the abstract. Although she describes her arrangement as due to salary discrepancies, she also suggests that she had already predetermined her plans to work outside the home only part-time once she became a mother.
She even went so far as to say that this was something she had to convince her husband of, suggesting that he may have initially preferred a fully egalitarian arrangement. Thus, Beth’s statements are consistent with Bass’ (2014) findings that women tend to downshift their career aspirations even before there is a pragmatic reason to do so. What’s more, Beth’s rendering of this decision originated within herself, not as the result of a capitulation to her husband’s desires, or of his ability to wield power in the relationship due to his greater earning potential. Despite professing strongly egalitarian viewpoints in the abstract, Beth preferred a neo-traditional arrangement even prior to marriage and children, before she had pragmatic considerations to weigh.

**Do As I Say, Not As I Do**

Beth and the four other women all expressed a comfort with their neo-traditional marital arrangements that notably co-exists with strongly held beliefs about women’s independence. They referred often to their mother’s experiences, articulating a desire to avoid the predicaments their mothers faced as a result of their economic dependence on their fathers. In most cases, they saw dependence as the root of their mothers’ problems, essentially robbing them of their ability to participate in important family decisions and often forcing them to tolerate poor or inequitable treatment. Thus, while they certainly perceived their mothers’ arrangements as “unfair,” their own egalitarian ideologies were less rooted in a sense of justice and more driven by the high value they place on maintaining power over their lives by achieving financial independence. Maggi, who worked full-time when her children were younger but is now a stay-at-home parent, identified her desire to avoid the vulnerability that
comes with dependence as the most salient take-away from her parents’ marriage, and critical to her decisions regarding her own:

The one specific thing that I think came from what I saw growing up was that I did not want to rely—which is kind of interesting where I’m at now—but I always felt like I never wanted to have to rely on a man to take care of me. I always said that I wanted to be, to do what I had to do to be able to take care of myself. In the event that something happened, I was gonna be OK. … But now I’m home, without a job! (laughs) Which I find to be very ironic, but I guess now I’m ok with where I’m at, because …you know, my husband and I have a great relationship and it’s OK to be where I’m at.

These beliefs were even more apparent when it came to the lessons they wanted to teach their children, especially their daughters. In regard to their own future careers, Beth, who says she currently earns about 15% of her family’s income, related that she tells her teenage daughters that they “need to think of something … that you’ll enjoy that will also pay your bills.” She goes on to explain: “We have that discussion a lot. A lot. Because I don’t want them thinking, you know, I’ll just marry somebody rich.” Beth also related the advice she gives young women she has mentored in her job, who are embarking careers in her field but also contemplating traditional marriages:

I can’t tell you the number of women who have said, “Well, yeah, I’m gonna find something, but once I get married, that’s it. I’m not gonna work anymore.” And I sit them down and say, “Do you realize how many people get divorced? Things happen that you never would expect to happen. And you’re gonna be on your own and do you
want to go work in Wal-Mart? Because that’s what you’re gonna be doing if you let all this work you’ve done go to waste.”

These comments about their mothers’ predicaments and their resulting stern warnings for their daughters or other younger women highlight some apparent inconsistencies that arise as they grapple with changing social conditions. Specifically, if they believe that both their mothers and the younger generation are potentially endangered by a loss of power brought on by economic vulnerability, how do they make sense of their contentment with their own neo-traditional arrangements?

Maggi and others suggested that they come to terms with this incongruence because fears of economic dependence in the abstract have not translated into actual problems, given the nature of their particular relationship. Generally, the women describe this as feeling “lucky” that they married men who are devoted fathers and share their egalitarian ideals. Amanda, for example, says, “I’m so lucky that way. I mean, he’s so involved.” Beth suggests that her husband goes beyond what should be expected in an egalitarian arrangement:

He offers too much sometimes. I mean, he’s … I’m really lucky. I’m very, very lucky. Because he’s, I mean, he’ll kill himself. He works so many hours, and he comes home and he works some more. And if the kids have to go somewhere, he’ll say, “I’ll take them.” Well, you know, I’ve been home all day. I can take them. And he’ll say, “No, no. That’s okay. You relax.”

While not describing herself as “lucky,” Tina also routinely minimized her own contributions to her family and maximized those of her husband. When asked if she considers her division of family responsibilities to be fair, Tina responds, “Yeah. I think he has more discipline. He
works really long hours. The fact that he even pitches in, I’m sort of amazed at, because I have more downtime during the day. So I’m very happy.” Still, after a pause, Tina adds, “I don’t think he pitches in enough with making decisions on the kids.”

Like Tina, most of the women’s feelings about their husbands’ shortcomings take a backseat to their overriding belief that they have struck good “marital bargains.” In other words, they believe that have avoided the pitfalls of their mothers’ dependence by crafting marital arrangements that compare very favorably to those of their mothers. They believe that, if anything, they are coming out the “better end” of the marriage bargain—an idea that is reinforced by comparing their marriages to others. Amanda, for example, talks about how she has avoided the inequities present both in her sister’s marriage and in the larger society:

> It’s definitely still prominent that the man feels like the woman should do everything. I am extremely fortunate that I married the man that I married, and he’s the kind of dad that he is. Would I expect anything or accept anything less? Absolutely not, because that’s my personality. My sister, on the other hand, has the most extremely lazy husband, and my heart goes out to her because she busts her tail every day, day in and day out, and when they get in the heat of the moment, he’ll say, “Well, you’re just doing what you’re supposed to be doing.” … He’s just completely different than my husband is.

Beth similarly compares her marriage to others, highlighting her frustration with friends who accept relationships characterized not only by unfairness, but also by the husband’s dominance:
I look at friends and neighbors and see, you know, the women are doing everything with the kids. The father barely looks at the kids. I mean, it’s amazing. I have another friend who I used to work with and left the field because she had children … because her husband didn’t want her to work. She lives out of state now, and she comes to visit every so often, and, it’s always, “Well, I’ll have to ask John if I can come.” Oh, really! And it just, it just grates on me that that would be, you would ever even say that. “I have to ask my husband if I can come?” You know, not, “I have to check with my husband to see if the schedule will work out,” but “I’ll have to see if he’ll allow me to come.”

By believing that they have extracted advantage within their own relationships—at least compared to their mothers and others around them—these women are able to maintain abstract ideals related to the critical importance of independence while also remaining comfortable in marriages in which their husbands are the primary or sole breadwinners. Thus, the “rule” regarding financial independence does not change; it merely does not apply to them.

The Problem with Egalitarian Mothering?

One clue into the discrepancy between what these women believe, and even teach others, about the gendered nature of family roles and how their family responsibilities ultimately came to be shared with their husbands mirrors the research about the traditionalizing effects of parenthood. While most described generally egalitarian partnerships prior to becoming parents, they also describe how their behaviors, and often their allocation of responsibilities,
shifted as the inflexible demands of child care presented themselves. Notably, the shift was often subtle and not overtly discussed or even acknowledged:

Well I don’t think we ever really discussed, when we met and we were dating, we never really discussed, you know, as far as who was gonna do what and how … we pretty much were 50-50 because I was working, you know, and I was putting in a lot of hours, as was he, and I was doing a lot of traveling at that time. … So, it changed when the kids started coming, because when I found out I was pregnant with my first child, I chose to leave my job as a consultant and doing a lot of traveling and I took a permanent position with a company so that I didn’t have to be in hotels and everywhere else and I could be home every night. … After my youngest was about two, I decided it just wasn’t worth it anymore. My kids were being raised by a nanny, you know, I was not home for them as much as I wanted to be. ... And that became a struggle for me as well as my husband because I think that caused a little bit of friction, and I felt like I wasn’t doing 110% at work and I wasn’t being a great mom either. So we decided that, you know, something had to change. And that’s when we talked about my staying home. … Now that I’m home, you know, I was able to take responsibility for the girls and, you know, taking care of the house. (Maggi)

Here, Maggi describes a dilemma that many middle-class parents would likely find familiar—the need to make a pragmatic shift in strategy to deal with the increasing responsibility of parenthood colliding with an “ideal worker” mandate that causes parents, particularly those with careers, to believe they must “give 110%” to be viewed as committed to their jobs (Blair-Loy 2003). Even more interestingly, gender appears to play a powerful
role in Maggi’s decision, yet goes unnoticed. Despite her stated fierce objection to financial
dependence, Maggi and her husband do not consider the possibility that her husband could
“stay home,” nor does Maggi think of her husband “not being a great dad” despite having a
demanding full-time job.

This omission speaks to the questions that the research on the transition to parenthood
points to about the qualitative differences between general household labor and child care.
While most of the women stated that gender was not the basis for any of their decisions about
family responsibilities, most expressed ambivalence about men’s and women’s relative
natural suitability for tasks specifically related to parenting:

RITA: I think, you know, women perhaps may be a little bit more nurturing, you
know. But, yeah, I’ve seen men who, they’ve really, you know, done a great job
raising kids on their own. So, I … yeah, I think, as a society we perhaps would
expect a mom to be always around, and to be there for her … I think we’re expected
to be there for our children and to understand most of what’s going on with them, but
I think there are dads who are capable and also take that responsibility.

MV: So is part of it, you think, that women seem more nurturing because they do
things that are expected of them societally, or is it something that they come by
naturally?

RITA: Um, I would say … I think it’s naturally. I think it’s a combination of both, but
I think I would say more naturally.
Tina similarly equivocated, also seeming to wrestle back and forth between her open-mindedness about general differences between people, regardless of gender, and basic ideas about women’s predisposition for nurturing:

MV: How critical is gender in terms of understanding differences between people?
TINA: I think [gender is] really important, but I don’t always know that it makes a difference. You know what I mean? Like my brother and sister-in-law, they’d be a great one to interview … he’s more interested in the kids’ stuff. He has a great job, but she’s definitely more of a career … she’s taken that interest, they’ve sort of swapped. He’s more interested in going to the kids’ activities; he’s the one labeling the camp clothes … so I don’t think that in that case the gender made a difference? Does that make sense? Because they just had different interests. … It’s more of a personality thing. And I don’t think some people are suited to stay at home versus … I don’t know. … I think a lot of times [gender] lends itself better to particular things, but not in all cases? I think women tend to be, in my opinion, more nurturing … but not in all cases.

These findings reveal subtleties in the way individuals perceive and process ideas about gender that are glossed over when under a larger umbrella of professed egalitarianism. While all of the women expressed a belief that gender should not dictate any family responsibilities—Amanda even went so far as to state that, in her opinion, “there is no gender” when it comes to determining who does what—most, at the same time, struggled with conflicting ideas about mothers’ natural propensity for nurturing children or managing their lives. Thus, my qualitative interviews suggest that the constellation of ideas women
hold about gender may be more complex than what is normally revealed on conventional gender ideology indices and therefore may go beyond what a label of “egalitarian” or “traditional” might suggest. What’s more, while these women professed little conflict with processing any discrepancies between their beliefs and practices, they reveal a more subtle incompatibility between their strong aversion to economic dependence and their less-examined views related to their own uniquely female suitability for child care.

Taken together, the revelations gleaned from my qualitative interviews lend credibility to existing research and theory about the complex relationship between ideology and behavior, and to the idea that much of this discrepancy is rooted in structural constraints that bring about both pragmatic and power-rooted decisions about women assuming the bulk of family caregiving. That said, they also point to some interesting questions that are left unanswered by the current body of theory and research looking at the division of family labor specifically, as well as at the slowing of the “gender revolution” more broadly:

- First, why do some women make assumptions about their central role in family caregiving even prior to having children, and how do these assumptions, even when left unspoken, guide couples’ decisions?
- Second, why do some women hold views about women’s particular skills or aptitude for certain types of tasks even while simultaneously holding fully egalitarian views about men’s and women’s roles more generally?
- Third, why do some women appear comfortable remaining financially vulnerable to their husbands even when articulating fears of financial
dependence gleaned from their mothers and passing those concerns on to their daughters?

- And lastly, what is different about the provision of child care, as opposed to housework, that makes heterosexual couples’ arrangements shift, often substantially, once they have children?

Generally speaking, these questions suggest that it would be useful to build on structural/pragmatic/power explanations to consider other social mechanisms that may underlie the adoption of practices that may run counter to professed ideologies. I offer a cultural consideration, in particular, in the following chapters.
CHAPTER 3: NEO-INSTITUTIONALISM AND THE FAMILY ORGANIZATION

The in-depth interviews I conducted touched on structural barriers that, while considerably diminished since the pre-feminist-movement era, still often come to guide what end up being practical decisions about the sharing of family responsibilities. In some cases, couples’ decisions came to reflect basic salary inequities, or at least the channeling of men and women into predominantly male or predominantly female career tracks that often carry with them substantial salary discrepancies (Charles and Grusky 2004; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009; Mandel 2013). And while not overtly cited by most, the lack of access to family-friendly workplaces or universal child care in the United States certainly limited couples’ flexibility in adapting their work lives to accommodate the demands of parenthood, and as such, came to underlie the very decisions and compromises couples made to ensure that their family obligations were met.

Still, the economic and other structural obstacles these families faced did not tell the whole story. The decisions these women and their husbands made to assume more traditional roles when they became parents, sometimes consciously but often not, also reflect pervasive cultural ideals about “good mothering” (Hays 1996). For example, while they certainly credited their husbands for their dedication to family breadwinning, as well as their contributions toward housework and particularly child care, they also wrestled with ideas about women’s “natural” ability to nurture children while not relating similar ideas about men’s inherent ability to perform particular family tasks. Similarly, several women related a desire to spend more time at home so their children were not “raised by a nanny,” yet either did not contemplate or readily dismissed ideas about their husbands spending more time at
home instead, even in cases in which the couples’ salaries were more equal. At the very least, there appeared to be something taken for granted about the path that their division of family labor would take, particularly when they became parents. Thus, even now several decades past the era in which the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization was the norm across white, middle-class America—and at a time when both women and men express egalitarian ideals and profess to support and appreciate women’s financial contributions—there still appears to be a strong cultural “pull” toward re-creating certain aspects of family traditionalism. As long as this remains the case, the “gender revolution” cannot fully come to fruition.

The conflicting body of scholarly literature about the relationship between people’s beliefs and behaviors when it comes to gender also suggests that there are strong cultural undercurrents that coexist with—or perhaps grow out of—the structural barriers women and families face. Taken as a whole, this body of research, along with my qualitative interviews, point to the idea that, rather than being guided by strong personal beliefs about the role gender should or should not play in determining family responsibilities, there is instead a more reflexive character to the way heterosexual couples arrive at their arrangements. In many cases, the research suggests that even when individuals’ beliefs and behaviors are aligned, this can often be because beliefs have been amended after-the-fact to accommodate family arrangements that had already been established, often without premeditation. The women I interviewed generally seemed comfortable with arrangements that did not necessarily align with their views, yet several did suggest that, while they considered themselves far better off than their mothers, they were surprised to find themselves in
situations much more similar to those of their mothers’ generation than they would have previously anticipated.

The prior research on the decrease in marital satisfaction across the transition to parenthood indicates that many women, in particular, struggle at this time to reconcile their expectations of gender equity with their disappointment in the more gender-differentiated family form that seemed to spontaneously take hold once they had their first child (Fox 2009; Goldberg and Perry-Jenkins 2004; Helms-Erikson 2001; McHale and Crouter 1992; Walzer 1998). Indeed, the qualitative research on the transition to parenthood suggests that this is a time not only when demands on a couple’s time increase substantially, but when both individuals’ identities and couples’ relationships become entirely re-created, most often lending themselves toward “traditional” gendered patterns of some sort (Fox 2009; Walzer 1998). This suggests that the ways in which the parenting role, in particular, is negotiated between spouses is likely more deeply entrenched in gender-related cultural ideals and processes than, say, the role of “worker” or even “homemaker.” These other family roles are arguably still subject to spousal negotiation and division in addition to being entrenched in a history of gender segregation, yet, as Fox (2009) notes, there is something unique about parenthood that accentuates gender distinctions within heterosexual couples—through a social, interactional process—in ways that often don’t surface prior to this transition. This phenomenon is underscored by research that illuminates what are often entirely different, and notably more equitable and less specialized, patterns of negotiation of family responsibilities among same-sex couples (Goldberg 2013; Goldberg and Jenkins 2007; Sullivan 2004). As such, it appears that the parenting role among heterosexual couples may be subject to a
unique set of gender-related normative pressures, in addition to structural and logistic obstacles, and is therefore at the cornerstone of the incongruence between what individuals believe about gender and what they actually do. Thus, it is this role in particular that offers important clues into the stagnation of progress toward both widespread egalitarianism and gender equality.

**Neo-Institutionalism and the Gendered Family**

If cultural forces related to parenting are playing a role in slowing the progress toward gender equality, what are the processes through which the pull back to more traditional ideas or arrangements is perpetuated? And how do these ideas become strong or pervasive enough to push back against what appear to be widespread egalitarian-leaning beliefs? Even more strikingly, how or why do these ideas and arrangements persist when they are not necessarily either efficient or effective at maximizing the goals of the family unit or its members? To answer these questions, it is helpful to conceptualize the family for what it is, at its core: an economic organization. As Coontz (2005) widely notes, marriages, for many millennia and across regions and cultures, were not based on love, or even personal desire, but rather arranged as a way to forge critical alliances between families as a matter of economic or political necessity. As such, Coontz relates, marriages were arranged with the goal of accumulating or hoarding resources, pooling needed labor, or developing relationships mutually beneficial to the spouses’ families. On a larger scale, families served as the critical mechanism for organizing a society. Coontz (2005:9) notes:

> For centuries, marriage did much of the work that markets and governments do today. It organized the production and distribution of goods and people. It set up political,
economic, and military alliances. It coordinated the division of labor by gender and age. It orchestrated people’s personal rights and obligations in everything from sexual relations to the inheritance of property. Most societies had very specific rules about how people should arrange their marriages to accomplish these tasks.

In more recent history, when marriages became based more on personal desires and less according to family or community obligation, they shed some, but not all, of these societal functions yet remained predicated on an economic model based on an exchange of resources and services. For example, when the breadwinner-homemaker model of marriage and family became commonplace among white, middle-class families in the mid-20th century, wives specialized in domestic services such as housework and child care and traded those services in return for their husbands’ market work and financial support (Becker 1981). Children have also been critical players in the economics of the family, with their roles historically both as contributors to family labor and as consumers of parents’ resources. While contemporary marriages and families may not outwardly resemble many aspects of their historical iterations, many of their basic forms and functions remain intact. Still a critical unit of organization in U.S. society, families must contribute vital goods and services to the larger society, accumulate and distribute needed resources, establish and maintain a physical residence and, perhaps most critically, execute the work of caring for and raising the next generation. As such, spouses still maintain an economic relationship—albeit perhaps a more subtle one—in which both resources and labor must be shared and exchanged in such a way that maintains the family’s ability to efficiently fulfill its duties to its members, as well as its societal obligations.
In this respect, the family is not unlike larger economic organizations, which also serve to both produce and consume needed goods and services from the larger society. Bureaucratic organizations, also like families, are internally structured to facilitate the exchange of services and resources among members in a manner that at least theoretically allows them to best perform their specific functions. Although arguably different in size, scope, and scale, these critical similarities between families and larger bureaucratic organizations suggest that the considerable body of theoretical scholarship related to the study of organizations may be useful in untangling some of the more difficult, persistent questions we have about the form and function of contemporary families.

In this vein, I turn to theories about how organizational structures are created and perpetuated, and specifically how these frameworks may be useful in addressing the persistence of certain aspects of family “traditionalism” and its relation to the larger halt in progress toward gender equality. Neo-institutional theory addresses this process in bureaucratic organizations, namely their tendency to replicate other similar organizations across an “organizational field” in structure, function, and output. Early neo-institutionalist scholars (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977; Zucker 1977, 1987) argued that these decisions were often made not as a result of rational calculus related to economic or strategic goals, but instead based on responses that stem from normative patterns of action. As such, these scholars argue, the forms, structures, and functions that organizations take on are wholly influenced by their institutional environments, that is, they become based on sets of “institutional rules” that are neither natural nor inevitable, but rather social constructs that have evolved into taken-for-granted social routines. Once they are adopted on a large scale,
these structures and routines come to reflect and ultimately conform to what amount to institutionalized “myths,” derived from culturally legitimated organizational behavior, rather than economic considerations or the technical demands of the work they set out to accomplish (Meyer and Rowan 1977). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) note the resulting homogeneity in structure and function across organizations, adopting the term “institutional isomorphism” to describe the process through which organizations come to replicate other organizations in the field in their quest to increase their survival prospects by reducing uncertainty and gaining instant legitimacy.

Before we further explore the implications of this “new institutionalism” for the family organization, it is important to consider how institutions operate, how we understand the process of “institutionalization,” and how these concepts have historically been applied to families and family structure. Meyer and Rowan (1977:341) define institutionalization as “the process by which social processes, obligations, or actualities come to take on rulelike status in social thought and action.” In relation to the family, Cherlin (1978; 2004) more loosely conceptualizes institutions as patterns of norms, whether they be formal or informal, that come to provide stable guidelines for behavior. Thus, in Cherlin’s view, family institutions can be “incomplete,” that is, lacking a full set of norms that govern the conduct of family members, as he once argued was the case for stepfamilies (Cherlin 1978), and family processes can also become deinstitutionalized as those norms begin to fall away, as he later argued is the case with modern marriage (Cherlin 2004). Gerth and Mills (1953:173) stress the extent to which institutions permeate both the psyche and the behavior of individuals, arguing that institutions “imprint their stamps upon the individual, modifying his external
conduct as well as his inner life.” Thus, social institutions are as much about how social roles, behaviors, relationships, and even beliefs are adopted, internalized, and patterned as they are about more formal social structures.

**Isomorphism, Organizational Fields, and Family Behavior**

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) argue that “institutional isomorphism”—the process through which organizational fields become homogenized, consisting of organizations that are highly similar to one another—occurs as a result of pressures to conform to established organizational structures and practices. Organizations accomplish this by appearing, behaving, and structuring themselves to resemble organizational forms that have been widely deemed legitimate. Neo-institutional scholars note that this process is not guided by the technical, or even strategic, goals of the organization, but rather occurs because a given structure or structures have emerged as a taken-for-granted organizational form. At its core, then, DiMaggio and Powell suggest that the adoption of particular organizational structures or practices is cultural rather than economic, in that it is largely a product of normative considerations rather than based on rational calculations aimed at maximizing utility.

More contemporary economic theorists have built on this idea, suggesting that these actions can be so deeply legitimated that they become largely habitual rather than reflective of rational forethought. For example, in his argument that actors are not rational, per se, but in fact “predictably irrational,” Ariely (2008) argues, among other things, that actors behave according to “routinized action” much of the time, rather than according to a careful weighing of options. Similarly, Beckert (2003) suggests that economic action, while often
intendedly rational, is instead often based on reflexive habits or routines that stem from socially legitimized patterns of behavior. That said, it is important to note that a neo-institutional understanding of the process of isomorphism does not necessarily require, nor does it preclude, the idea that these arrangements are arrived at reflexively. Although my qualitative interviewees mostly described “finding themselves” in more gendered arrangements after the birth of their children, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) describe the process of modeling an organization after other organizations in the field as largely intentional, usually the result either of external pressures to appear legitimate to other organizations on which they may be dependent, such as funding sources or regulatory bodies, or internal pressures to reduce uncertainty. In the latter case, DiMaggio and Powell (1983:152) argue, “managers actively seek models on which to build,” intentionally selecting models that are “similar organizations that they perceive to be more successful or legitimate.”

The social mechanism that Tilly (1998) identifies as “emulation” articulates the ways in which the process of organizational modeling can relate to the persistence of gender inequalities in marriages and families. Specifically, Tilly suggests that emulation, which he defines as “the copying of established organizational models and/or the transplanting of existing social relations from one setting to another” (10), is responsible for the perpetuation of categorical inequalities. From this view, institutional isomorphism is not innocuous, but rather subject to existing systems of power and inequality whose influence becomes generalized through concrete social mechanisms. These ideas are useful in understanding how and why gendered family structures and routines endure, and how that endurance brings about a stall in the progress toward gender equality despite individuals’ more egalitarian
ideals. Specifically, while the ubiquity of the 1950s-era breadwinner-homemaker model of the family began to diminish in the latter part of the 20th century, decades of research indicates that important, yet perhaps more subtle, aspects of this model of family life persist, contributing substantially to gender inequality’s intransigence. Among some of the more pertinent remnants of this era are persistent pay inequities between men and women, an over-representation of men in high-power, high-prestige positions and occupations, and the stubborn lack of parity between married men and women in the performance of housework and child care, even among dual-earner couples. Notably, substantial strides toward equity have been made in each of these arenas, particularly through the 1970s and early 1980s, but just as notable is the evidence that those gains have leveled off considerably shy of achieving full equality (Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, and Robinson 2012; Cohn, Livingston, and Wang 2014; U.S. Census Bureau 2012).

Borrowing from DiMaggio and Powell’s (1983) concept of institutional isomorphism, I argue that these remnants of the breadwinner-homemaker model are emulated and replicated across families in much the same way, and for similar reasons, that they are across bureaucratic organizations—in this case because a gender-based organization of family roles, an idea that is rooted in and perpetuated by a lingering patriarchal power structure and has not fully eroded over decades, is still not only considered “legitimate,” but widely considered to be the legitimate framework for heterosexual family organization. As my qualitative interviews suggest, even women who profess to fiercely reject a prescribed differentiation of family roles according to gender also consider some gender-related differentiation of skills to be “natural” or inherent. Perhaps stemming from this, they describe arriving at gender-based
family arrangements often without premeditation, yet those arrangements emerge in ways that align meaningfully with those of other families in their surrounding “institutional environments,” as well as with the larger institutionalized norms that are embodied within them.

According to DiMaggio and Powell, the idea of institutional isomorphism is predicated on the existence of this type of institutional environment, in their case an “organizational field,” by which “we mean those organizations that, in the aggregate, constitute a recognized area of institutional life: key suppliers, resource and product consumers, regulatory agencies, and other organizations that produce similar services or products.” (148) DiMaggio and Powell argue that this field must be institutionally defined, a process consisting of four parts:

An increase in the extent of interaction among organizations in the field; the emergence of sharply defined inter-organizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition; an increase in the information load with which organizations in a field must contend; and the development of a mutual awareness among participants in a set of organizations that they are involved in a common enterprise. (148)

“Family organizations,” at least those within a defined social or geographical location, indeed exist in similarly defined fields, as outlined by these criteria. They interact with one another, and form coalitions, routinely through “inter-organizational” structures such as schools, play groups, sports and other children’s organizations, and community activities and events. Extended families consisting of multiple nuclear families often of different generations also routinely interact, with older families lending expertise to issues that younger families experience. These nuclear family organizations also often relate through systems of domination in the form of “experts” such as parents, teachers, counselors, medical
professionals, and the various experts as presented in the media in the form of countless books and magazine articles related to parenting and other family matters. And while interacting with friends and relatives in these settings, families are well aware, as my qualitative participants’ comparisons other families suggest, that they are involved in the common enterprises of child rearing and family management.

DiMaggio and Powell’s criteria for an organizational field also lend support to the idea that families’ transition from a couple to a family with children is particularly vulnerable to isomorphism, or at least to the establishment of its precursor, a defined organizational field. This is evident in their identification of an “increase in the extent of interaction among organizations,” and an “increase in the information load with which organizations in a field must contend.” The transition to parenthood implies precisely these types of “increases,” given that a multitude of social organizations exist primarily or solely for families with children, and that the entrée into parenthood indeed carries with it a tremendous increase in “information load” and accompanying uncertainty on multiple fronts, some of which may be alleviated by participation in social activities and organizations that augment the frequency of inter-family activity. Further, an increase in participation in these social organizations upon the transition to parenthood can also be responsible for the “emergence of sharply defined inter-organizational structures of domination and patterns of coalition” in the life of the family, as this is often the mechanism through which families gain access to authorities on family practices and to other organizations on which they become dependent, such as schools or medical practices, as well as to other families from whom parents may garner support.
Despite this, the predominance of nuclear family structure in Western cultures suggests a level of autonomy that, almost by definition, belies the influence of its surrounding organizational environment. While it is true that Western parents most often neither reside with nor garner as much support from more distant relatives as their counterparts in cultures in which an extended-family model is prevalent, it is also the case that more distant and especially intergenerational relatives, as well as a plethora of friends, neighbors and acquaintances also engaged in the common enterprises of child-rearing and family management, still exert subtle yet profound influence on seemingly private family practices through the transmission of cultural messages and the conveyance of powerful social norms guiding family roles, decisions, and behaviors (see Bengston 2001; Booth and Crouter 2001; Heisler and Ellis 2008). This suggests a cultural paradox: a set of organizations that exists in an institutionally defined field, while at the same time deemed private and autonomous to the extent that the influence of the surrounding field is conceptually minimized, if not ignored. This suggests that spouses may arrive at “individual” family-management arrangements that are rooted in very concrete social mechanisms, albeit often unwittingly.

Recognized or not, families do indeed exist in an institutionally defined organizational field as defined by DiMaggio and Powell. As such, I argue that the perpetuation of a gendered basis for family roles—and the family structures and routines that evolve from it—operates through a resulting isomorphic process rooted in the conveyance of normative ideas and practices that are adopted in an effort to reduce uncertainty and gain legitimacy as couples transition into parenthood. What’s more, I suggest, as neo-institutional
organizational scholars have argued, that this process is not based on economic calculations related to the technical tasks and goals of a given family, but rather operates according to taken-for-granted assumptions about the best way to manage the family organization due to Western notions of individualism, particularly as applied to the concept of the nuclear family. Thus, I argue that the lingering remnants of 1950s-era “traditionalism” indeed stem from cultural, in addition to structural, considerations, and that those cultural processes are rooted in some of the core ideas emerging from the neo-institutional theory of organizations: *uncertainty, legitimacy, and myth.*

**Uncertainty**

Scholars examining organizations from a variety of theoretical perspectives consider the concept of uncertainty central to understanding organizational processes and decisions, as well as their successes or failures. Specifically, efforts to cope with or reduce uncertainty related to conditions both within an organization and within the external environment are considered critical both at the individual and population levels—that is, efforts to reduce uncertainty may be strategic attempts on the part of individual organizations to structure themselves to best align with environmental uncertainties (Hickson, Hinings, Schneck, and Pennings 1971; Lawrence and Lorsch 1967; Pfeffer and Salancik 1978), and successful adaptation to environmental uncertainty has also been viewed as a primary justification for the survival of one organization over another within a given organizational field (Hannan and Freeman 1984).
The concept of uncertainty plays an important role in a neo-institutional theory of organizations, especially when it comes to fledgling organizations’ attempt to establish themselves within an existing field (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Specifically, DiMaggio and Powell hypothesize that what they label “mimetic” isomorphism is likely to result directly or indirectly from uncertainty, arguing that “in fields characterized by a high degree of uncertainty, new entrants, which could serve as sources of innovation and variation, will seek to overcome the liability of newness by imitating established practices within the field.” (156) What distinguishes neo-institutional scholars’ view of the role of uncertainty from the perspective of other organizational theorists, then, is that it is thought to bring about a modeling of existing organizational forms simply because those forms are familiar and have been culturally legitimated, rather than as the result of a more strategic maneuvering based on an organization’s actual internal or environmental conditions. From a neo-institutional perspective, the role of uncertainty has cultural, rather than economic, implications.

The “family organization” enters a period of heightened uncertainty upon the birth of the first child. Roles, responsibilities, and family processes are all thrown into flux as the burdens of the family organization grow instantly and considerably, altering not only family relationships and patterns, but substantially adding to, if not shifting, the organization’s fundamental goals. While not articulated in organizational terms, the extensive literature on the transition to parenthood suggests that this period of uncertainty has profound ramifications for couples and their family lives (Belsky and Kelly 1994; Belsky and Rovine 1990; Cox, Paley, Burchinal and Payne 1999; Cowan and Cowan 1992; Katz-Wise, Priess and Hyde 2010; Fox 2009; Sanchez and Thomson 1997; Walzer 1998), and that when the
initial period of uncertainty begins to resolve, family roles and processes are often misaligned with the expectations or intentions of the new parents (Goldberg and Perry-Jenkins 2004; Helms-Erikson 2001; McHale and Crouter 1992).

This shift in cultural ideals related to both individual and parental “success” point toward the idea that the heightened uncertainty that accompanies the transition from “couplehood” to parenthood is augmented by what has also been a period of particular uncertainty in the larger society when it comes to couples’ management of their family responsibilities, especially when viewed across the latter half of the 20th century. The erosion of strict “gender-role” norms offered by the breadwinner-homemaker model of the family, which was ubiquitous at least across white, middle-class America mid-century, resulted in an increase of freedom when it comes to crafting family arrangements, but also a “side effect” of increased uncertainty. In keeping with a neo-institutional approach, I suggest that to mitigate this uncertainty, a pattern of mimetic isomorphism emerged on a large scale, that is, heterosexual couples have resisted fully exercising the freedom to develop individualized strategies to maximize their individual family’s functioning and utility, and instead have, to varying extents, fallen back on familiar, legitimated patterns of family management—in this case, some form of gender-based division of labor that mimics family processes in the surrounding institutional environment.

The uncertainty in the environment results from a dearth of institutionalized norms that guide behavior. Cherlin (1978, 2004) has most notably theorized about the effects of these types of shifts in normative patterns in the environment on individual family processes. Specifically, Cherlin (1978) argued that the process of remarriage after divorce, and the
stepfamilies that resulted from it, had amounted to an “incomplete institution” due to a lack of institutionalized guidelines that governed how stepfamily members should relate to one another or approach common problems that they faced. Cherlin suggested that post-divorce remarriages encountered unique difficulties because “family members face problems quite unlike those in first marriages—problems for which institutionalized solutions do not exist. And without accepted solutions to their problems, families of remarriages must resolve difficult issues by themselves” (642). He contrasted this with families in first marriages, for whom conduct was largely institutionally supported with well-established norms that guided the behavior of their members, and argued that this distinction played an important role in the relative success of first marriages as compared to higher-order marriages, particularly those that resulted from divorce.

Much later, Cherlin (2004) suggested that the relative success of first marriages began to wane because the institution of marriage itself was becoming “deinstitutionalized,” meaning that the social norms that defined couples’ behavior began to weaken:

In times of social stability, the taken-for-granted nature of norms allows people to go about their lives without having to question their actions or the actions of others. But when social change produces situations outside the reach of established norms, individuals can no longer rely on shared understandings of how to act. Rather, they must negotiate new ways of acting, a process that is a potential source of conflict and opportunity. (848)

While I reserve comment on whether the institution of marriage has indeed become deinstitutionalized, I argue that the process of deinstitutionalization, as Cherlin describes it, is precisely what has occurred within marriages when it comes to the allocation of family responsibilities, in turn creating an environment of substantial uncertainty. Notably, social
theorists as early as the 1940s became concerned, as Cherlin notes, about what shifts from an “institutional” to “companionate” family would mean in terms of threats to family unity and ultimately the longevity of nuclear, heterosexual family organization (Burgess and Locke 1945). For several decades, these concerns were often related to a loosening of norms that these theorists believed might stem from the loss of patriarchal authority and power within families—the erosion of the husband as “head of household” or, at the very least, the relaxation of strictly prescribed gender roles that dictated the division of family labor consistently across families (Burgess and Locke 1945; Parsons and Bales 1955; Becker 1981).

While many of the concerns about the threat that these changes and related institutional shifts posed to the very existence of heterosexual marriage have not materialized, it is also true that heterosexual couples with children—whether legally married or not—have to some extent lost a socially defined “shared understanding of how to act” when it comes to meeting family responsibilities. In other words, the strict, gender-based family roles dictated by the breadwinner-homemaker model of the family have weakened without a patterned set of norms to replace them. The resulting uncertainty becomes far more pronounced upon the birth of the first child due to, among other things, the dramatic increase in the couple’s shared responsibility, especially amid an era of burgeoning “intensive mothering” (Hays 1996) and “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003) ideologies among the middle class that began to require that far more parental resources—in the form of time, energy, and money—be directed to children’s well-being on a variety of fronts. As DiMaggio and Powell argue is the case with organizational entrants into an established organizational
field, this uncertainty can bring about the desire to mimic the form and function of other, already-legitimate organizations (families) in the field in an effort to reduce uncertainty.

DiMaggio and Powell (1983) similarly argue that isomorphic practices are likely to increase when the organization’s goals, and the means to achieve them, are ambiguous. They hypothesize, specifically, that “The more ambiguous the goals of an organization, the greater the extent to which the organization will model itself after organizations that it perceives to be successful.” (155) When a couple has their first child, the goals of the family unit shift considerably. A married couple without children generally has well-understood goals and normative expectations that have transcended the large-scale changes to the family that occurred in the latter half of the 20th century as a result of the migration of married women into the work force. Regardless of whether wives worked outside of the home, until such time that a child arrives, normative, middle-class goals were and continue to be that the couple support themselves, pursue employment for one or both partners, establish and maintain an independent residence, be productive members of society, etc. Although the processes through which couples achieve these goals may have shifted (with, for example, far more women pursuing higher levels of education and paid employment), the goals of the couple as a unit have remained relatively constant.

The goals of a family unit with children, however, have changed dramatically over the same time period, arguably becoming far more ambiguous with a noted spike in cultural mandates related to “good parenting” (mothering especially) that coincide with competing messages about highly individualized notions of success rooted in an increasingly demanding capitalist framework (Hays 1996). What’s more, Coontz (2000) points to ongoing changes in
child-rearing values across historical transitions, making particular mention of the rising worry over contemporary middle-class working motherhood that resulted in decades of scholarship related to the association between particular family characteristics and child outcomes, perhaps most notably the effects of maternal employment on children (Bianchi 2000; Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael 1989; Greenstein 1995; Parcel and Menaghan 1994; Zick, Bryant, and Osterbacka 2001) and the potential harms or benefits of formal child care (Belsky, Vandell, Burchinal, Clarke-Stewart, McCartney, Owen, and NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2007; Brooks-Gunn, Han, and Waldfogel 2003; Lamb and Ahnert 2007; Vandell, Belsky, Burchinal, Steinberg, Vandergrift and NICHD Early Child Care Research Network 2010). Coontz also points out that this, not surprisingly, has occurred amid a simultaneous rise attributing “every personal and social problem in modern America back to parental failure,” (208) accompanied by an abundance of often-competing analyses as to how exactly parents brought about, or might attempt to alleviate, their children’s psychological, emotional, or physical woes.

While the uncertainty brought about by an ambiguous set of goals is in itself considered a direct cause of isomorphic behavior, DiMaggio and Powell (1983) suggest an alternate mechanism as well—that this type of ambiguity could result in conflict that couples may try to alleviate by modeling themselves after other families:

A second reason for modeling behavior is found in situations where conflict over organizational goals is repressed in the interest of harmony; thus participants find it easier to mimic other organizations than to make decisions on the basis of systematic analyses of goals since such analyses would prove painful or disruptive. (155)
Turning again to the extensive body of scholarship related to couples’ transition to parenthood, we do indeed see an increase in conflict over how the new “organizational goals” should best be met, as well as a resolution to these conflicts that often aligns more with normative patterns in the institutional environment than with the original goals professed by one or both of the parents (Belsky and Kelly 1994; Hochschild 1989; Katz-Wise, Priess and Hyde 2010; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990; Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Thus, the type of mimicking, while perhaps not fully meeting the needs of one or both of the parents, can be undertaken to reduce or eliminate the stress or disruption that would likely come about from a more persistent, individualized, drawn-out negotiation aimed at more strategically meeting the needs of the family or the likely competing needs of its individual members.

Also borrowing from Cherlin, I argue that, when it comes to the allocation of family roles, the “dual-earner family” model that now characterizes the majority of heterosexual families in the U.S. is an “incomplete institution.” When white, middle class married women began to enter the work force *en masse* in the U.S. starting in the 1970s, dual-earner families became prominent, and eventually the majority, but were still required to seamlessly manage their family obligations, despite the absence of what was once, in many cases, a full-time homemaker. At the same time, the responsibilities of child-rearing arguably increased for middle-class families, amid the aforementioned middle-class norms that also dictated an increasingly child-focused parenting style and goals. What resulted from these simultaneous shifts was a spike in demands on couples’ time, energy, and resources on both the work and home fronts that was met with little to no institutional support, creating a sharp increase in
uncertainty as to how parental obligations, in particular, should be met. In Cherlin’s words, families were facing “problems for which institutionalized solutions do not exist” and were “left to resolve difficult issues by themselves.” (1978:642)

Throughout recent decades, dual-earner families in the U.S. did and continue to resolve these dilemmas independently, often through a patchwork of formal and informal child care arrangements, relatives’ support, spouses’ split shifts, etc. (Hertz 1997; Morrissey 2008; Phillips and Lowenstein 2011). In other words, child care in the U.S. remains a largely private undertaking, despite the unavailability of a full-time “private” caregiver in the majority of homes. Unlike many European countries, the United States has not stepped forward to accommodate the needs of dual-earner families by establishing any formal means of child care provision (Bettio and Plantenga 2004; Saraceno 2011; Waldfogel 2001), nor do there appear to be informal norms established as “taken-for-granted” ways of managing the widely noted simultaneous, and often competing, workplace and family demands. What has resulted is a normative family form without normative solutions to meet its common challenges—to use Cherlin’s words, an incomplete institution.

To cope, some families who are financially able have abandoned the dual-earner model, with one parent—the mother in the vast majority of cases—either dramatically reducing work hours or leaving the workplace altogether to care for the home and children (Boushey 2008; Kaufman and Uhlenberg 2000; Landivar 2015; Stone 2007; Stone and Lovejoy 2004). In families in which both spouses continue to work full-time, research shows that wives continue to assume the bulk of the “traditionally female” roles, such as housework and child care, putting nearly twice as much time into these activities than their husbands
(Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, and Robinson 2012; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010), often despite the couple’s professed egalitarian gender ideologies (Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1989; Katz-Wise, Priess and Hyde 2010; MacDermid, Huston, and McHale 1990; Sanchez and Thomson 1997; Stone 2007). In other words, couples tend to adopt some remnants of the breadwinner-homemaker model when it comes to allocating family responsibilities regardless of their personal beliefs or the extent to which the wife participates in the paid labor force.

I argue that this particular family-management strategy results from efforts to reduce the heightened sense of uncertainty stemming from a dramatic and sudden shift in organizational form, roles, and needs upon the birth of the first child, combined with a normless, or at least undernormed, environment (incomplete institution) in which family goals, and the means to achieve them, have become increasingly ambiguous, while also increasingly high-stakes. Thus far, and now over the course of decades, this condition has yet to be met with any sort of patterned, formal or informal institutional support. Further, I suggest that this particular adaptation—some iteration of a gender-based allocation of family labor—has become a “go-to” response due in part to the idea that this particular allocation of roles has been and continues to be the most culturally legitimated strategy, for reasons on which I will elaborate further in the next section.

Legitimacy

The concept of legitimacy is central to any discussion of culture as it relates to individual or organizational behavior. Arguably, social norms and values are able to exert the
power that they have over individuals and groups primarily through the mechanism of legitimation—the process of motivating particular actions or institutional arrangements that can be located within a “comprehensible, meaningful world.” (Wuthnow, Hunter, Bergson and Kurzweil 1984:50). Organizational legitimacy, according to Meyer and Scott (1983:201), refers to the extent to which an organization is culturally supported, and specifically “the array of established cultural accounts provide explanations for its existence.” Thus, neo-institutional scholars argue, an organization’s very survival can depend on becoming, or at least appearing, legitimate (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). The appearance of legitimacy holds valuable currency because it confers social, or even economic, privileges and benefits that operate as “rewards” for adherence to norms. In other words, when the goals and values pursued by an organization become congruent with those of the larger society, that is, they become legitimated, the organization instantly lays claim to societal resources and becomes less vulnerable to attacks on its plausibility (Scott 1991; Zimmerman and Zeitz 2002).

In the context of formal organizations, neo-institutional scholars generally consider some type of highly rationalized, bureaucratic arrangement as deemed most “legitimate,” thus explaining the institutionalized nature and isomorphic tendency of this particular organizational form across a wide variety of organization types. Organizations that adhere to the practices and procedures dictated by these rationalized concepts, scholars argue, increase their legitimacy, and in turn their survival prospects, without regard to the efficiency of this particular form when it comes to the technical goals of any given organization’s work (Meyer and Rowan 1977). Thus, as Meyer and Rowan suggest, the achievement of legitimacy may
come at the expense of efficiency and, conversely, to solely promote efficiency will often mean undermining “ceremonial conformity,” and with it the social or economic benefits of legitimacy (341).

With its vastly smaller size and scope, the family organization appears to bear little resemblance to a highly rationalized, bureaucratic formal organization. However, I argue that the role and rewards of legitimation are equally powerful. In the case of the family organization, it is not a particular bureaucratic structure, but rather a heteronormative structure, that remains the hegemonic, culturally legitimated “ideal type” even despite the large and growing number of families taking on a wide variety of other forms (Livingston 2014). From a cultural perspective, the heteronormative nuclear family, like the rationalized bureaucratic organization, remains prized above all other forms in Western society and thus widely considered the best structure for accomplishing the goals of the family organization, with other forms historically considered inferior based on their structure alone, regardless of their other individual characteristics (Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman 2010; Smith 1993; Zartler 2014). That said, in this section I argue that the “ideal type” extends beyond the heteronormative structure itself to the roles assumed by family members, particularly heterosexual parents. Specifically, I suggest that the structuring of parental and household responsibilities according to gender—in ways that mirror certain aspects of the breadwinner-homemaker model of the family—has remained stubbornly institutionalized, despite the sizable gains of the feminist movement particularly in the workplace, not only due to lingering structural barriers, which are admittedly substantial, but also because a gendered
allocation of roles has remained culturally legitimated. As such, allocating roles in this fashion carries with it social and economic benefits.

To understand the processes through which the breadwinner-homemaker family form has remained legitimized amid such dramatic changes in the gender-related landscape over the past half-century, it is important to first examine some key aspects of the evolution of women’s roles in the workforce. Married women’s workforce participation surged in the 1970s and ’80s, at the same time that the percentage of mothers with working husbands who stayed at home full-time dramatically fell, affording women some increases in their economic rights and freedoms. However, these trends leveled off or even reversed slightly in recent decades, considerably short of full gender equality in the workplace or at home (Cohn, Livingston, and Wang 2014; U.S. Census Bureau 2012). Even more compelling is the fact that even as their representation in the workplace grew dramatically, women remained largely marginalized in both the economy and polity. The clearest evidence of this is in relation to wages. In 2015, women still earned 79 cents for every dollar men earned, with a substantially greater gap for women of color (National Partnership for Women & Families 2015). Women remain similarly underrepresented in higher-paying fields such as the sciences, mathematics and engineering (Mather 2007; Nimmesgern 2016), as well as in higher-status, higher-paying positions across fields, in boardrooms, and in high-power political positions (Labelle, Francoeur, and Lakhal 2015; Paxton and Hughes 2014). And even beyond these direct comparisons, women continue to be disproportionately represented in traditionally “feminine” occupations, such as nursing or teaching, that carry lower salaries than “masculine” jobs requiring comparable amounts of education or experience, perhaps
only because they tend to be filled by women (Charles and Grusky 2004; Mandel 2013; Murphy and Oesch 2016; Levanon, England, and Allison 2009). Even within more feminized occupations, men have tended to rise more quickly and frequently to higher-status, higher-paying positions of authority (Williams 1992), though more recent work suggests that this privilege may be confined to white men (Wingfield 2009). And when it comes specifically to their role as mothers, women continue to be financially penalized in the workplace when they have children, while men are often financially rewarded (Anderson, Binder, and Krause 2003; Avelar and Smock 2003; Budig and England 2001; Correll, Benard, and Paik 2007; Glauber 2007; Gough and Noonan 2013; Lundberg and Rose 2002).

Though these financial inequities can, in and of themselves, ultimately drive married mothers’ decisions to “opt out” of the workforce (Stone 2007), sociological scholarship has unearthed deeper and more subtle, yet perhaps more pervasive, bases for the persistent marginalization of women in the workforce. Specifically, as married women’s workforce participation began to ramp up in the 1970s, feminist scholars at that time began to note various mechanisms that maintained patriarchal systems in the workplace even as women’s presence began to increase. Outlining the evolution of women in the economy over centuries, Hartmann (1976), for example, notes the remarkable persistence of men’s efforts to exclude women from workplace opportunity. Upon the industrialization age, Hartmann outlines ongoing, deliberate, concerted attempts on the part of “ordinary” male workers to remove women from the workplace altogether, or at the very least restrict their sphere of influence by keeping them relegated to subordinate, unskilled, low-paying positions. In more recent history, Hartmann argues that this was accomplished more formally through the development
of gender-specific trade unions that allowed male workers to hoard opportunities, often by allying with the legal system to enact protective legislation designed to limit or eliminate the “social evil” that was married women’s work. (164)

In her in-depth analysis of a large corporation, Kanter (1977) similarly noted that women were systematically excluded from management positions due to male managers’ desire to reduce the perception of uncertainty, increase ease of communication, and achieve instantaneous “trust” by hiring or promoting only those who shared their social backgrounds and characteristics. What resulted was a systematic reproduction of homogenous groups of white, male workers within the ranks of management. What’s more, Kanter noted that women’s minority status particularly within the upper echelons of the corporate workplace caused them to be treated more like “tokens” of their gender rather than as actual workers, thus generating a separate set of social pressures for women and increasing their symbolic importance while minimizing their individual value. Acker (1990) took these ideas further, arguing that bureaucratic organizations and organizational structures themselves are not gender-neutral or asexual, but rather inherently gendered. She argues that the abstract, presumed “disembodied” nature of bureaucratic jobs enables the persistent marginalization of women through various mechanisms, including job evaluations, which allow managers to systematically rationalize pay and job classifications, serving to create and reinforce gendered organizational structures; hierarchical systems, which reflect managerial values such as the unencumbered, devoted (male) worker as an ideal type, ultimately keeping women segregated at the bottom in tasks considered, often erroneously, to require less complexity or responsibility; and women’s physical bodies, which are considered
inextricably intertwined with their childbearing function, as well as treated as suspect, stigmatized, and used as grounds for control and exclusion.

The historical and lingering marginalization of women in the workplace has cultural ramifications that extend beyond the workplace. Hartmann (1976) notes the ways in which structural inequality in the economic sphere has a reciprocal relationship with pervasive inequality in the home sphere (see also Ferree 1990), but this also means that the de-legitimization of women in the work sphere also serves to simultaneously elevate women’s legitimacy in the home sphere. In other words, if women’s legitimate place is in the periphery of a “man’s” work world, her role is simultaneously deemed central to domestic work. Similarly, when Acker argues that the “gender-neutral” bureaucratic “bodies” are, in reality, men’s bodies, with images of masculinity intertwined with organizational processes, we can similarly surmise that “female bodies” are placeholders for family and household work. This is particularly the case when it comes to parenting, due to ideas about the presumed centrality of female bodies to child care and nurturance. As a result, even when most of the actual tasks of child care are consciously presumed to be gender-neutral, they continue to exist in a feminized realm. Thus, the male gendering of the workplace and female gendering of the home are simultaneous, concurrent processes and, as such, to be legitimized in one realm is to be de-legitimized in the other and vice versa. Hartmann (1976), in fact, notes that the elevation of the cultural “sanctity” of married women’s role in the home was specifically used by men as an argument in favor of restricting women’s influence in the workplace. Thus, it is plausible that many white, middle-class women ultimately support their “traditional” role in the breadwinner-homemaker scheme because, while often
marginalized in the economic realm, they receive the rewards of legitimacy for performing their central role at home. This is likely most often the case when these women become mothers, given the ideas about women’s natural suitability for nurturing that have permeated the dominant culture. The mothering role, perhaps more than any other role even among other domestic responsibilities, is the role in which the centrality of white, middle class women is effortlessly legitimate.

Empirical literature supports the idea. A growing body of research points to the idea that the basis for women’s feminine identity is largely constructed around motherhood (Gillespie 2003). As a result, becoming a mother is culturally valued as the linchpin of femininity and, in turn, of feminine fulfillment and achievement (Gillespie 2000). In other words, to become a mother is to become legitimated as a woman. This idea is reinforced through social sanctions in the form of stigma aimed at women who deliberately decide against having children. Research has revealed that women who are child-free by choice, as opposed those who are infertile, feel stigmatized as deviant, and are thus perceived as strange, crazy, or selfish (Gillespie 2000; Park 2002). This notion is considered so counter toward the “natural” proclivities of a woman that those who chose to be child-free report using “revealing and concealing” strategies, such as acting like they can’t have children or simply aren’t ready for them yet, to avoid judgment (Park 2002). This mandate may be fueled by what scholars have noted is a persistent overstatement of the ubiquity of college-educated women’s opting out of the workforce (Boushey 2005, 2008) and, more specifically, by media accounts that create an “opting out imagery” that consistently stresses motherhood as women’s defining role (Kuperberg and Stone 2008).
It bears noting that the cultural mandate of motherhood is fraught with paradoxes that have substantial implications when it comes to women’s legitimacy and, in turn, their status. While motherhood may indeed represent the pinnacle of feminine achievement, at least for married, white, middle-class women, the task of being a primary caregiver is, at the same time, inherently devalued, in this case across races and classes. Those who substitute the work of mothers—that is, provide primary caregiving—are historically poorly paid, even when compared to occupations that may require less or similar skill and when taking into account education, experience and training (Ridgeway and Correll 2004; Steinberg 1989). As such, motherhood, more than gender alone, downwardly biases workplace evaluations and perceptions of mothers’ suitability for positions of authority (Heilman and Okimoto 2008; Ridgeway and Correll 2004). Similarly, scholars have noted the bind created by the incompatibility between simultaneous “good mother” and “good worker” mandates, and the idea that contemporary expectations that middle-class mothers show unfettered devotion to their children have surged at a time when individualistic notions of self-interested gain are also culturally pervasive, particularly in the economy and workplace (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996).

As many scholars have argued, these contradictions leave contemporary women in a bind when it comes to status. Motherhood remains a heightened status achievement at the same time that that very role reduces status—and, in turn, legitimacy—in realms that have more substantial ramifications when it comes to control over material resources or power. One way to better understand this is that, through the legitimation of the motherhood mandate, women’s status is to be achieved in relational terms; her success is measured in
terms of outcomes that involve the success and well-being of others—most often her children but often also her husband in the case of heterosexual marriages—rather than on individual terms. From a cultural perspective, mothers’ legitimacy is often derived from being the enablers of others’ achievement.

Returning to a neo-institutional perspective, the complexity surrounding women’s legitimacy and status has implications when it comes to the enduring legacy of the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization. Neo-institutional scholars argue that legitimacy is the currency that drives isomorphic tendencies (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Meyer and Rowan 1977). To assume the structure or behavior of already-legitimated organizations is to be automatically deemed legitimate and thereby eligible for the social or economic benefits and rewards that accompany an organization whose norms and values are in line with those of the larger society. This helps explain the reproduction of a family model that in many ways is at odds with women’s own economic self-interest, or with the professed egalitarian gender ideologies of a generation of both women and men. I suggest that the persistent, historical de-legitimization of women in the workplace, as well as the ongoing gendered nature of male-dominated bureaucratic structures, gives even the most egalitarian women, upon the birth of their children, incentive to become primary caregivers because they are automatically legitimated in that role.

When it comes to understanding how this relates to the persistence of gender inequality in general, it is useful to note that, as Tilly (1998) argues, this process of emulation as it relates to family function reinforces the categorical differentiation between males and females and, in turn, serves to perpetuate and solidify the patriarchal structures that underlie
it. (This cyclical relationship between culture and structure will be elaborated on more fully later.) Additionally, when women’s assumption of the homemaker role is framed as a personal choice—which is inevitable in a society predicated on individualism in which the provision of child care is neither formally nor informally institutionalized—it implies that women are empowered as individuals to freely design their lives, and the substantial implications of both patriarchal structures and powerful notions of cultural legitimacy related to women’s roles are simultaneously absolved of their influence (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007).

As the literature related to voluntary childlessness shows, the act of mothering still carries with it certain core ideas about feminine achievement that are reinforced by a strong sense of cultural legitimacy and therefore hold great allure despite what is often an accompanying lack of status in other sectors. Still, I argue that otherwise-equalitarian women often do not challenge these gendered ideas related to their unique and central role in the family because they have historically been marginalized, or delegitimized, in other sectors, particularly the economy. Thus, women have rational incentive to uncritically accept and contribute to the perpetuation of neo-traditional family arrangements—or at least of the assumption that they should primarily shoulder housework and child care—despite the myriad ways in which it may disadvantage them. In this respect, the process of achieving status and legitimacy is stubbornly cyclical in that women have motivation to seek in the home sphere the legitimacy they lack in the economic sphere, and this in turn leads to their subsequent reduction in status and marginalization in the workplace. Of course, this is not to absolve the persistently patriarchal economic, political and other structures from their
responsibility for the marginalization of women, nor is it to suggest that many men, either knowingly or unwittingly, play a critical role in the perpetuation of family or workplace models that systematically advantage them over women, as Hartmann (1976) depicts. Rather, underscoring the power that the quest for legitimation holds promises to further our understanding of why or how the gains of the feminist movement—which was fueled primarily by women’s widespread embrace of an egalitarian gender ideology that itself appears undiminished—have leveled off or even abated in recent history.

*Myth*

An often-overlooked but central premise of a neo-institutional analysis of organizations is that the legitimacy of a given organizational form is largely symbolic, rather than based on any actual utility (Meyer and Rowan 1977; Suddaby 2010). According to the theory, organizations’ legitimacy, and the isomorphism that often results from it, are cultural byproducts of the meanings widely attached to an organization’s particular structures, practices or routines and thus do not stem from, and may be at odds with, the achievement of the most efficient outcomes or specific economic goals. One of the key foundations of neo-institutional theory—in fact, the thesis of Meyer and Rowan’s 1977 foundational paper introducing these concepts—was that “the formal structures of many organizations … dramatically reflect the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities.” (341) What’s more, Meyer and Rowan argue, organizational myths are taken for granted as legitimate and, as such, override the characteristics of particular
individuals or organizations. Based on this, Suddaby (2010:15) argues that the core puzzle that institutional theory has historically sought to define is

why organizations engage in activities that are legitimate in the symbolic realm rather than the material one; why organizations adopt behaviors that conform to normative demands but conflict with the rational attainment of economic goals or how purely technical or productive objects becomes infused with meaning and significance far beyond their utility value.

Thus, advancing a neo-institutional theory requires a two-fold understanding: first, that organizations are fundamentally byproducts of the “rules” of their institutional environments (i.e., organizational fields) and, just as critically, that this influence is channeled through a socially constructed set of meanings attached to particular structures or routines. Once these meanings become normatively sanctioned, the likelihood of their future adoption becomes greater for this reason alone (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

What is the institutional mythology at the crux of the intransigence of certain remnants of the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization? I suggest that, just as many bureaucratic organizations adhere to and replicate rationalized concepts and structures due to their symbolic, if not utilitarian, legitimacy, the family organization has adhered to and replicated gendered concepts based on the same type of socially constructed symbolisms. Scholarly work spanning more than a century that focuses on “gender roles” and their effects—even though largely aimed in recent decades at deconstructing ideas related to a gendered basis for assuming particular tasks—lends meaning to, and in turn reinforces and even reifies, a gendered, heteronormative basis for family organization. These ideas are deeply entrenched in what were once longstanding functionalist perspectives on the economic relationship between spouses (Becker 1981; Durkheim [1893] 1984; Parsons and
Bales 1955), namely the idea that women were best suited for domestic tasks and men for market work—and that the survival of a given marriage, and even the institution of marriage itself, was dependent on this particular differentiation. While these ideas have been largely challenged in the past half century both in the scholarly community and in the public, as evidenced by the widespread adoption of more gender-egalitarian ideals and the growing ubiquity of non-heteronormative family structures, the social norms that resulted from these socially constructed “gender myths” have been powerful enough to persist despite many changes brought about in a modern era that no longer accommodate them, most notably the rise of married mothers in the workforce.

Historical and cross-cultural accounts support the idea that a mythology related to gendered family organization is rooted in evolving societal characteristics, which is to say that the meanings attached to what it means to “mother” or “father,” for example, stem from social processes and are therefore situated within time and place. In her anthropological analysis of evolving professional advice given to women over decades regarding their “proper” role in society, Margolis (1984) notes stark changes in both the tone and content of books and articles dealing with motherhood across historical periods, highlighting the idea that beliefs about women’s “natural” propensities differ across cultures. Most notable, perhaps, is her argument relating to the ongoing construction and re-construction of what it means to mother in the U.S.:

Ideas about the “correct” maternal role have often changed over the last 250 years in the United States. Not until the 19th century, for example, did a child’s development and well-being come to be viewed as the major, if not the sole responsibility of his or her mother, who was then urged to devote herself full-time to her parental duties. In contrast, during the 18th century child-rearing was neither a discrete nor an
exclusively female task. There was little emphasis on motherhood per se and both parents were simply advised to “raise up” their children together. (12)

Coontz (2005) similarly depicts how the institution of marriage has seen dramatic shifts in the meanings attributed to it over centuries. Many of those shifts, she argues, relate to the roles assumed by husbands and wives. For example, Coontz notes that the 18th century saw the foundations of the breadwinner and homemaker roles, when “the husband, once the supervisor of the family labor force, came to be seen as the person who, by himself, provided for the family. The wife’s role was redefined to focus on her emotional and moral contributions to family life rather than her economic inputs.” (146) This shift was one of many in which a heteronormative, gendered basis for the assumption of family roles remained constant, but the fact that the prescriptions for what these roles entailed changed so dramatically underscores that the meanings attached to the roles of “husband,” “wife,” “mother,” or “father” are fluid and, as such, socially defined rather than prescribed by any inherent, gender-defined utility. While both Coontz and Margolis note that these shifts were indeed likely rooted in the material conditions unique to the time period (most notably, in this case, the shift from an agricultural to industrialized economy), and therefore undeniably utilitarian in that regard, they were also situated in a male-dominant hierarchical social structure that ultimately benefited from a model of family organization that remained predicated on the gender of the spouses, rather than on each individual partner’s particular skills or abilities, even as the economic circumstances changed so dramatically. As such, the shift away from an agricultural economy, as one example, did require a shift in the technical
demands of family life, yet those technical demands did not in and of themselves necessitate an allocation of family roles based on gender.

Cross-cultural research also highlights the socially constructed and fluid nature of gendered family roles. A substantial body of research spanning the last decade clearly points to variations in the roles assumed by husbands and wives cross-nationally. Much of this variability appears directly attributable to differing structural conditions at the nation level, such as welfare state regimes, employment laws and pay practices, and family policies. Outcomes from these policies are wide-ranging, including differences in men’s unpaid work behaviors (Hook 2006), differences in both attitudes and practices when it comes to the equitability of the division of household labor (Davis and Greenstein 2004; Kunovich and Kunovich 2008), differences in the relationships between cohabitation and division of household labor (Batalova and Cohen 2002), differences in fathers’ working hours (Bunning and Pollman-Schulte 2016), and differences in the way men’s and women’s time is allocated (Anxo, Mencarini, Pailhe, Solaz, Tanturri, and Flood 2011; Neilson and Stanfors 2014). Sweden, which, among other Nordic countries is particularly known to have made a deliberate effort to enact policy designed to promote gender equality, has seen both ideology and family behavior at the micro level shift in an egalitarian direction accordingly. For example, Anxo et al. found that men’s and women’s use of time was least divergent in that country (Anxo et al. 2011), with more “traditional” patterns of gendered behavior found in non-Nordic countries (Neilson and Stanfors 2014). Though these examples point largely to structural causes for divergent patterns of family organization, culture seems to play a role as well. For example, Yodanis (2005) finds that in countries in which a “divorce culture” is
more prevalent, men’s and women’s family work is distributed more equally. More broadly, culture has been found to affect the overall extent of women’s participation in the labor force (Clark, Ramsbey, and Adler 1991; Fernandez 2007).

The fact that structural or cultural conditions so powerfully affect heterosexual spouses’ family behavior suggests that what is considered “appropriate” gendered behavior itself is fluid and, like the social roles that grow from it, is a product of the system of meanings to which it is attached. This idea is consistent with theoretical scholarship that suggests that gender is a social product that is created and re-created through situated, relational conduct. In their influential article proposing the concept of “doing gender,” West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is the product of ritualized performances in everyday interactions that serve to reinforce what they suggest are falsely broad notions of innate gender difference (Goffman 1977). Thus, West and Zimmerman argue that gender is not a fixed “condition,” but rather achieved and maintained through gendered conduct that is invoked as particular interactions demand. A socially constructed, fluid concept of gender—particularly when it is used as a way to organize the way people relate to one another—also has widespread cultural implications, particularly when it comes to the persistence and reproduction of gender inequality. As Ridgeway (2011:7) argues:

The use of gender as a framing device spreads gendered meanings, including assumptions about inequality embedded in those meanings, to all spheres of social life that are carried out through social relationships. Through gender’s role in organizing social relations … gender inequality is rewritten into new economic and social arrangements as they emerge, preserving that inequality in modified form over socioeconomic transformations.
Thus, Ridgeway suggests that situated gendered behavior not only serves to reinforce gender categories, but also has lasting cultural consequences when it is persistently framed as an organizing principle across social and economic institutions. This is precisely what is occurring when gender categories remain salient even across cultures and historical transitions that dictate shifts in the routine work of family members and the technical work of the family as a whole.

On the micro level, evidence suggests that these types of norms of gender-differentiation are enhanced substantially as heterosexual couples transition to parenthood. The gendered “framing” of family roles appears most salient when it comes to parenting, as opposed to other family or work tasks. Qualitative analyses point toward the idea that gendered meanings related to mothering and fathering are constructed and enhanced by spouses through the type of interactional process West and Zimmerman describe as heterosexual couples adjust to their new roles once a new baby is in the home (Fox 2009; Walzer 1998). Often, this means the adoption of certain characteristics of the male-as-breadwinner and female-as-homemaker/nurturer roles that otherwise-egalitarian couples might not have previously considered, or may even have previously rejected outright. As Walzer notes, “New parents’ own images of good parenting reflected gender-differentiated models of mothers as ever-present nurturers and of fathers as providers and part-time playmates.” (50) More broadly, Coltrane (1996:25) argues that “more than any other cultural belief, this idealized notion of separate spheres for mothers and fathers shapes what it means to be a man or a woman in a society.”
The fact that the roles assumed by heterosexual husbands and wives have fluctuated across cultures and both personal and historical transitions, when combined with the idea that gender itself is a fluid social category that is malleable across social circumstances and created across social interactions, casts serious doubt on the idea that any particular gendered family organization—or even any gendered basis for family organization—is, in and of itself, inherently better at meeting the technical goals of a given family organization. Rather, these divergent family arrangements suggest that what may be perceived as the taken-for-granted way to allocate family responsibility is instead steeped in culture and material circumstance, and particularly the meanings attached to particular roles that grow out of them—in other words, in a “mythology” informed by social conditions that prioritizes gender as an important organizing principle. As Suddaby (2010) notes, “The central point of the institutional hypothesis … is understanding how and why organizations attend, and attach meaning, to some elements of their institutional environments and not others.” In the case of the family organization—in modern times, most pivotally once children are introduced into a heterosexual relationship—the gender of the parents appears to be the element that receives primary attention when it comes to widespread assumptions about the best, or even only, way to allocate family responsibilities. This is rooted in an enduring, powerful cultural framing of motherhood that I call the ‘sacred mother-child bond.’

The ‘Sacred Mother-Child Bond’

In keeping with an understanding of the cultural legitimacy and mythology fueling a breadwinner-homemaker allocation of roles, one of Walzer’s (1998: 51) participants tellingly
proclaims: “I’m supposed to do what I’m doing just because I’m the mom.” But what is it, exactly, that mothers are “supposed” to do? At its core, this is a question about culture, and one that appears to be difficult both in theory and in practice. Extensive research shows that the motherhood in contemporary Western culture is, in fact, fraught with a wide array of complex cultural expectations and implications. Just a small sampling of the scholarly monographs on motherhood in recent decades explore topics such as the competing cultural mandates of motherhood and a capitalist economy (Hays 1996), the “epidemic” of guilt among mothers fueled by a society that tends to blame them for all of its ills (Eyer 1996); the expectation that mothers can or should provide security and salvation in a precarious world (Villalobos 2014); and the challenges and consequences of mothering outside of a heteronormative framework, such as the ways in which poor, single mothers (Edin and Kefalas 2005), middle class or wealthier single mothers (Hertz 2006), or lesbian mothers (Sullivan 2004) negotiate counter-normative mothering identities. Another large body of both scholarly and popular work is devoted to describing the challenges mothers encounter when attempting to manage the competing demands of work and family (e.g., Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996; Sandberg 2013; Slaughter 2015; Stone 2007), despite the fact that fathers’ roles have traversed both realms presumably for centuries—and even that mothers’ roles have done so across different cultures or time periods—apparently without notable conflict. This is not to say that there isn’t also scholarship on the challenges faced by contemporary fathers (e.g., Coltrane 1996; Doucet 2006a, 2006b; Edin and Nelson 2013; Marsiglio, Amato, Day, and Lamb 2000), but there is substantially less of it, and much of it seems to be in direct response to what was undeniably a longstanding fixation on mothers.
Much of the hyper-focus on women’s parenting role clearly stems from the social conditions in the latter half of the 20th century that led so many white, middle-class mothers, who were previously full-time homemakers, to full-time market work. Unsurprisingly, this shift left many concerned about who, if not mothers, would care for the next generation. But underlying these concerns were, and continue to be, some widely held presuppositions about the act of mothering itself—namely, that bonding with and nurturing children is a uniquely female capability, or at the very least a skill at which women are naturally, inherently, and immutably superior. Despite what is clearly a complex social landscape surrounding the act of mothering, this superiority is widely presumed to be grounded in basic, universal anatomical and biological differences between men and women, and as a result, continues to be considered a fixed, inescapable condition of human life. In addition to having the unique capability to give birth to and nurse babies, women have been long presumed to come equipped with “instincts” for child nurturance far beyond birthing and nursing (Darwin 1871), as well as a host of inherent related skills, such as empathizing or multitasking, that are presumed to be more biological than social (Udry 1994). Some scientists have, in fact, argued that women come endowed with a host of neuropsychological differences from men that amount to a wholly distinct “female brain” with a unique array of resulting abilities, predispositions, and limitations (see Brizendine 2006; Sax 2005).

Importantly, this type of over-emphasis on the few basic biological differences between males and females has been the basis for larger social process that early feminist thinker Charlotte Perkins Gilman ([1898] 1998) identifies as “excessive sex difference.” In other words, Gilman argues, an entire socio-economic system—the roles that men and
women come to assume and the resulting sexual and economic relationships that consequently develop between them—has been constructed around what are fairly rudimentary differences in biological functions mainly related to reproductive organs. As such, Gilman explains, these minor biological differences have largely come to define human social and economic life:

The primary sex-distinctions in our [human] race as in others merely in the essential organs and functions of reproduction. The secondary distinctions, and this is where we are to look for largest excess—consist in all those differences in manner, method, occupation, behavior, which distinguish men from women … With the human race, whose chief activities are social, the initial tendency to sex-distinction is carried out in many varied functions. We have differentiated our industries, our responsibilities, our very virtues, along sex lines. (136)

Gilman goes on to note that the economic relations built around overemphasized sex distinction, and the consequent overstatement of the attributes comprising femininity and masculinity, are ultimately what have brought about cultural mandates that enable men to partake more fully in the many aspects of human life and leave women to “devote much contention to the claim that women are persons as well as females.”

What’s more, social scientists have also long noted that biological reductionism by definition dismisses the substantial social and social-psychological influences that affect, almost from birth, the formation of gendered identities, proclivities, and even desires (see Chodorow 1978; Fine 2010). Further, the adoption of a purely biological model necessitates a disregard of evidence, even from other neuroscientists, of the ways in which still-highly-gendered social institutions such as the family, the education system, and the economy come to structure human social and cultural experiences in gendered ways that challenge
assumptions about inherently large physiological differences between the sexes, as well as the idea that the physiological causes the behavioral, rather than the reverse (see Eliot 2009).

As Chodorow (1978) notes, the act of mothering has seemed particularly vulnerable to ideas about women’s “natural” abilities or propensities, though she argues in great detail that a bioevolutionary model that attempts to explain why it is that women, and not men, “mother” is fraught with assumptions and inconsistencies (See pp. 14-30.) Using a social-psychodynamic model instead, Chodorow suggests that gender-related family behavior—and the act of mothering, most pivotally—is reproduced through “structurally induced psychological processes” that begin to take hold in even the earliest stages of the mother-child relationship. As such, she suggests that this process is both a function of an ongoing sexual division of labor in families, and ultimately what, in turn, reproduces those same divisions:

Women, as mothers, produce daughters with mothering capacities and the desire to mother. These capacities and needs are built into and grow out of the mother-daughter relationship itself. By contrast, women as mothers (and men as not-mothers) produce sons whose nurturant capacities and needs have been systematically curtailed and repressed. This prepares men for their less affective later family role, and for primary participation in the impersonal extra-familial world of work and public life. The sexual and familial division of labor in which women mother and are more involved in interpersonal, affective relationship than men produces in daughters and sons a division of psychological capacities which leads them to reproduce this sexual and familial division of labor. (7)

Notably, Chodorow’s account suggests that mothers’ and fathers’ gendered identities extend far more deeply into the psychological, unconscious, realm—and as such, have the capacity to be more powerful and also more likely to be presumed innate—than more traditional ideas about the gendered socialization of young children. That said, it is clear that boys and girls
continue to develop beyond their early psychosocial foundations in gender-related behavior and, as such, continue to become socialized throughout their lives by the various social institutions with which they come to interact. Building on what Chodorow suggests are initial cues internalized as a result of the mother-child relationship, social learning theories suggest a complex and multifaceted process through which socializing agents such as schools, peers, and the media—in addition to families—provide a plethora of influential environmental cues that teach children, also almost from birth, the complicated ways in which societies construct and make sense of gender differences (Fagot, Rodgers, and Leinbach 2000; Kane 2006). What we can take away from these social and psychosocial accounts of gender development is that, while some limited sex-linked physiological traits or capacities may exist, gender—and mothering as its most prominent extension—are also constructed socially on both the micro and macro levels both early in life and on an ongoing basis through persistently gendered social interactions (West and Zimmerman 1987). Though there may be some rudimentary differences based on anatomy or physiology, gender is largely not a fixed or automatic condition, but rather a dynamic product of social-psychological life.

I broaden Chodorow’s depiction of an early, deeply rooted process whereby a persistently sex-linked division of labor is reproduced to suggest that a larger-scale social construction of the motherhood role in contemporary Western culture is similarly reproduced, across both time and space. I argue that the construction of the motherhood role, and the mother-child relationship in particular, are the central tenets of the mythology that perpetuates the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization as an ideal type, and thus fuels its persistent isomorphic emulation. Specifically, the core set of cultural meanings
(that is, mythology) attached to what it means to mother, as opposed to father, has elevated the role of mother—and women’s ability to perform it—to the level of the “sacred,” meaning that it transcends ordinary day-to-day life and carries with it a symbolic power that inspires a certain level of awe or reverence (Durkheim [1915] 2001). To mother is, on a symbolic level, be imbued with special qualities that transcend the mundane; to be revered and respected above most else when it comes to child care and nurturance, even if only symbolically.

Even more critically, the bond between a mother and her child is also culturally deemed sacred—achieving this status simply by virtue of birth itself, as opposed to developed over time as any other relationship would be—and is therefore also presumed to be an inextricable product of a women’s inherent physiology, or at the very least her pregnancy. This bond, according to cultural messages, is not only inherent but also magical, imbued with special qualities that transcend the day-to-day realities of parenting. In other words, the sacredness of the mother-child bond is unrelated to the instrumental work of contemporary parenting, involving tasks such as feeding, bathing, diaper changing, tending to medical needs, driving to activities, fostering a social life, helping with homework, teaching to drive, etc., that few would argue could not be readily accomplished by parents or other adults irrespective of gender. Rather, the sacred mother-child bond exists in the realm of the symbolic, rooted, albeit powerfully, in much vaguer notions related to care, love, and nurturance that are presumed to be linked specifically to the gender of the parent.

Because the mother-child bond is culturally sacred, mothers’ wholly unique ability to nurture and sustain this bond is divine, at once both life-giving and life-altering. Fatherhood, while undeniably associated with a separate set of male-linked socially desirable traits, does
not carry with it this same type of biologically rooted idealized construction, nor is a similar larger symbolism attached to his relationship with his child. There is no presumed instantaneous connection between a father and his newborn child solely because he is the child’s biological father, nor is there a unique set of qualities he possesses that are assumed to arise solely from the birth of his child. While “traditional” constructions of fatherhood may suggest a man’s inherent superiority at financially supporting his family, for example, this ability is not thought to arise simply from the act of becoming a father, nor is it presumed that the biological father is the only person who is capable of fulfilling this role. There is no symbolic meaning attached to the bond between a father and his child that transcends the father’s basic day-to-day responsibilities. As such, it is the presumed sacredness of the mother-child bond that uniquely necessitates a family model that accommodates it. It is the sacredness of the mother-child bond, therefore, that is at the core of the mythology that perpetuates the isomorphic tendencies of the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization.

Even a small sampling of media content makes clear that imagery related to the sacredness of the mother-child bond is both pervasive and multifaceted. A popular American Greetings advertisement (see Bernard 2014) that aired on television in the run-up to Mother’s Day in 2014 and also “went viral” across social media portrayed a company interviewing via Skype to fill the position of “director of operations.” The would-be applicants are told that some of the job duties included standing up most of the time and constantly exerting oneself, working 24x7, 365 days a year, with little sleep. They must ensure that they always meet all of the needs of their “associate” and can only eat after the associate has finished eating. They
are told that there are no breaks allowed and no vacations, with work only increasing during holidays. Preferred job requirements are degrees in medicine, finance, and the culinary arts, in addition to interpersonal and negotiation skills and the ability to work in a chaotic environment with a “happy disposition.” In return for this, the director of operations will not receive any monetary compensation but instead will receive tremendous gratification from helping the “associate.” Toward the end of the ad, the incredulous job-seekers are told that a job with exactly this description is filled all over the world by, of course, “moms.” Rather than contest this obviously extreme description of the requirements of motherhood, or the idea that the majority of mothers actually fulfill these requirements, the “job applicants” instead begin to cry, suddenly flush with emotions about their love for their mothers and the previously unrecognized sacrifices their selfless mothers have made for them.

Other popular media memes similarly suggest that mothers can and should be all things to their children while expecting nothing in return. In Figure 3.1, for example, we see a minion dressed as a “mom”—in a bob-style wig and flower-print dress—stating that a mother “works 24 hours a day” as “an alarm clock, a cook, a maid, a teacher, a nanny, a nurse, a driver, a handyman, a bodyguard, a photographer, a counselor, a comforter, and an ATM.” In return, she “doesn’t get sick leave, days off, or overtime pay. She works through day and night and gets paid in hugs and kisses.” If a mother does not accomplish this Herculean list of tasks to idealized notions of “perfection,” another meme (Figure 3.2) illustrates the feelings of guilt that are presumed to follow. It features a bingo board titled “Mom Guilt Bingo,” and each of the 25 squares features supposed shortcomings that mothers are to feel guilty about, such as “pizza for dinner,” “used TV as a babysitter,” “forgot class
picture day,” “preschooler knows a 4-letter word,” “threw away their artwork,” “non-organic produce purchase,” and even items suggesting personal shortcomings such as “haven’t lost the baby weight” and “had an epidural.” Not surprisingly, the all-encompassing list of expectations set for mothers implies that their very identities are inextricably linked to their role as mothers, or at least they should be. Figure 3.3’s image of a smiling mother and her baby, for example, reads, “I didn’t lose myself when I became a mother. I found myself.”

As a result of their all-consuming self-sacrifice, mothers are presumed to be thoroughly depleted and exhausted due to motherhood alone. Figure 3.4, a meme titled “How Moms Watch Movies,” shows a woman desperately trying to keep her eyes open after five minutes of watching a movie, and completely asleep within 20 minutes.
Similarly, Figure 3.5, taken from an article in *Parenting* magazine, is titled “10 Reasons Moms Look Exhausted All the Time” and features a woman looking healthy and radiant in her “Before Kids” photo, and exhausted, depleted, and aged in her “After Kids” photo. This is presumed to have happened, as the subheading indicates, because “Even God had a day of rest. Not Mom.” What’s more, a mother’s love is instantaneous and impenetrable. Figure 3.6—a meme showing a picture of a mother holding her infant with the words “I never knew how much love my heart could hold until I became a mother”—suggests that a person cannot truly feel deep love unless and until she a) is a woman, and b) has a child.
Similarly, in Figure 3.7 we see a shadow of a mother holding her child, accompanied by the words “I gave birth to you but you came with no instructions. All I knew was that I loved you long before I saw you. I know I made some mistakes, and for that I am sorry, but I was doing the best I could with what I knew, everything I did for you I did from love. You are my child, my life, my dreams for tomorrow. I will always LOVE you and there is nothing that could ever destroy my love for you.” This meme suggests that a mother’s love for her child is utterly pure and, as a result, exempt from any sort of human failing—note that even her “mistakes” are a result of her selfless love for her child—or any of the trials and tribulations that accompany all human relationships.

![A note from a Mother](https://au.pinterest.com/explore/mother-poems-from-daughter, 1/20/17)

**Figure 3.7**

On a symbolic level, the sacredness of the mother-child bond extends even more deeply than an assumed unlimited well pure love, self-sacrifice, and requisite guilt for falling short of perfection. The power of the love between a mother and her child—presumably between *all* mothers and *all* of their children, instantaneously upon their births—is otherworldly, even magical. Figure 3.8 accompanied a story that appeared on a 2010 Today Show
‘A mother’s embrace brings baby back to life. After being told her newborn son was dead, mother Kate Ogg was able to cuddle and caress her baby’s limp body back to life, astonishing doctors. If you ever needed proof there is nothing like a mother’s touch, here it is.’


Figure 3.8

segment titled “Mother’s Embrace Brings Baby Back to Life.” In the still photo, we see a mother holding a premature newborn, with the father also in the bed cuddling both the mother and baby. Despite the father’s obvious appearance in the picture, the video is accompanied with the words, “After being told her newborn son was dead, mother Kate Ogg was able to cuddle and caress her baby’s limp body back to life, astonishing doctors. If you ever needed proof there is nothing like a mother’s touch, here it is.” In this case, a mother’s love is strong enough to defy science, even transcend life and death itself. The segment explains that the baby was declared clinically dead and then revived by his mother’s touch alone—an idea that the interviewer, journalist Ann Curry, states very matter-of-factly when she introduces the segment. After we hear from the parents, the father concludes that the baby’s life is owed to his “very smart, very strong wife who instinctively did what she did,” even though he appears in both the photo and video to also be actively cuddling his wife and baby skin-to-skin—the practice that is credited with the baby’s revival. And despite the many premature babies who presumably are not “revived” despite being held and caressed by their
mothers, the segment ends with a quote from a blogger who states, “It just goes to show you how a mother’s love trumps all of the known medical science.”

Along similar lines, mothers are symbolically elevated to being angelic or, as other memes have suggested, even god-like. Figure 3.9 is one example of a popular meme—again picturing a mother cuddling a newborn—that states, “A baby asked God, ‘They tell me you are sending me to earth tomorrow, but how am I going to live there being so small and helpless?’ God said, ‘Your angel will be waiting for you and will take care of you.’ Again the child asked, ‘Who will protect me?’ God said, ‘Your angel will defend you even if it means risking her life.’ The child hurriedly asked, ‘God, please tell me my angel’s name.’ God said, ‘You will simply call her Mommy.’” Figure 3.10, meanwhile, shows a piece by the late popular columnist Erma Bombeck titled “When God Created Mothers” that features a conversation between god and an angel, where god is struggling to create a “mother.” God says things such as, “Have you read the specs on this order? She has to be completely washable, but not plastic. Have 180 moveable parts ... all replaceable. Run on black coffee and leftovers. Have
a lap that disappears when she stands up. A kiss that can cure anything from a broken leg to a disappointed love affair. And six pairs of hands.” When the angel encourages god to get some rest, god replies by saying, “I can’t. I’m so close to creating something so close to myself.”

Though the elevation of motherhood to the sacred may on some level appeal to actual mothers who are indeed working hard and sacrificing for their children, the implications are
not without both personal and social consequence. Specifically, what may appear to be simple observations about the selflessness or “divinity” of mothers can readily turn into behavioral imperatives, as Figure 3.11 illustrates. Here we see a quote attributed to Mormon elder Neil L. Anderson that states that “Motherhood is not a hobby, it’s a calling … it’s not something you do if you can squeeze the time in. It’s what God gave you time for.” Along these lines, Figure 3.12 is accompanied simply by the words “A happy baby is the world’s way of saying, ‘Mama, you’re doing it right.’” Not only does this imply that a baby’s well-being is dependent solely on the actions of his or her mother, and that mothers are capable of fulfilling every need their children have, it also subtly suggests that a child’s lack of happiness at any given moment must be the result of a mother’s shortcoming—that is, she is doing “it” wrong (see Eyer 1996).

![Figure 3.11](http://quotesjunk.com/inspirational-mother-quote-motherhood-is-not-a-hobby-its-a-calling-if-you-can-squeeze-the-time, 1/20/17)

![Figure 3.12](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/558446422524060288, 1/20/17)
Villalobos (2014) applies this idea specifically to the culturally supported notion that it is a mother’s sole responsibility to keep her child safe in an insecure world:

Within the context of an unpredictable economy, uncertainty about marriage, and fraying government safety nets, the last refuge of security upon which society at large projects almost mythical powers to make it all better is the mother-child relationship. Not that the mothering relationship typically is a source of ultimate security, but due to a lack of alternatives, we hold out hopes that it will be. Because of this, many mothers today try to shoulder almost impossible burdens. (3)

Villalobos’ example underscores the challenges presented by outsized cultural mandates related to motherhood, and specifically to the sacredness of the mother-child bond. In this case, she notes “mythical” powers of the mother-child bond to be a source of refuge for children despite the fact, as Villalobos notes, that mothers’ abilities to accomplish this are inherently insufficient. Rather than challenge the mandate itself, the mothers Villalobos interviews adopt a variety of strategies aimed at fulfilling their perceived obligations, many of which ultimately exacerbate the problems they were attempting to alleviate.

Douglas and Michaels (2004) argue more broadly that what they identify as a cultural “idealization” of motherhood undermines women because it is impossible to live up to the images of motherhood that are routinely portrayed in and perpetuated by the media. What’s more, these and other scholars note that media images around mothering have supplanted what were once more common images focused the role of “wife,” adding substantially to pressures on women to center their lives around motherhood. As a result, some have suggested that issues such as postpartum depression may stem in part from women’s perceived inability to live up to these pervasive, idealized cultural images because they perpetually focus on how mothers need to change or adapt rather than on challenging the
construction of the motherhood role itself (Held and Rutherford 2012). Still, it appears that this very construction is at the heart of why the heavy burdens for child welfare continue to rely to such a great extent on mothers, as opposed to fathers or even the contributions of the larger community. When it is assumed that the mother-child bond is sacred—all-encompassing, divine, and universally rooted in the biological rather than the social—then the behavioral imperative that follows must be that mothers constantly attend to their children, or risk failing at their primary purpose. The mandate also suggests that any attempts to substitute for a mother’s attention will, by definition, compromise the well-being of her child.

As a result, the construction of the mother-child bond as sacred has inescapable repercussions when it comes to a gendered organization of family obligations. It sets up a breadwinner-homemaker model as an ideal type, consequently casting all other arrangements as falling short. In addition, it goes a long way toward explaining why heterosexual, married mothers have continued for decades to shoulder disproportionate burdens of family work—and particularly the burdens related to child care—even when they work full-time outside of the home (Bianchi et al. 2012). Lastly, it sheds light on why self-professed egalitarian women willingly take on responsibilities that are decidedly unequal, thus helping to explain the gap between their beliefs and their actual family arrangements. In neo-institutional terms, then, the sacredness of the mother-child bond is the core mythology that elevates the breadwinner-homemaker model to the taken-for-granted organizational form and fuels the isomorphic tendencies of its neo-traditional iterations.
Gender Essentialism and Anti-Feminist Backlash

The idea that cultural ideals related to women’s suitability for domestic tasks by virtue of their biological sex alone is not new to the scholarly literature. Decades ago, West and Zimmerman (1987), for example, argued that women’s performance of housework was also a critical piece of their gender performance. “It is not simply that household labor is designed as ‘women’s work,’” they argued, “but that for a woman to engage in it and a man not to engage in it is to draw on and exhibit the ‘essential nature’ of each.” (144) In other words, women’s ongoing performance of household labor both results from, and in turn reproduces, overarching gendered assumptions that a) there is a universal difference in men’s and women’s “essential natures,” and b) it is appropriate, as a result, to dictate a division of labor based on gender.

These assumptions have been well-explored by Charles and Grusky (2004) in relation to the pervasive segregation of the labor market. They fundamentally ask, in relation to market work, a question similar to that which I explore in relation to family work: Why has the labor market remained so persistently gender-segregated despite a clear and widespread rise in egalitarian values and, in the case of the labor market, even legal and other institutional reforms that attempt to alleviate it? While acknowledging substantial gains in relation to women’s education and overall labor-market participation, Charles and Grusky note, in particular, that “these developments, while spectacular and unprecedented, have nonetheless been coupled with equally spectacular forms of resistance to equalization, especially within the workplace. Most notably, women and men continue to work in very different occupations, with women crowding into a relatively small number of female-typed
occupations (teacher, secretary, nurse).” (3-4) To understand why this is the case, Charles and Grusky home in particularly on how this “horizontal segregation” of the labor market—primarily that women work mostly in the non-manual sector and men in the manual sector—comes to perpetuate itself through notions of “gender essentialism,” whereby certain traits are regarded as prototypically male or female:

Although prevailing characterizations of male and female traits are complex and multifaceted, a core feature of such characterizations is that women are presumed to excel in personal service, nurturance, and interpersonal interaction, while men are presumed to excel in interaction with things (rather than people) and in strenuous or physical labor (Zaretsky 1986; H. Bradley 1989; Eagly and Mladinic 1994; Conway, Pizzamiglio, and Mount 1996; Elvin-Nowak and Thomsson 2001; Gerson 2002; Fitzimmons 2002). These stereotypes about natural male and female characteristics are disseminated and perpetuated through popular culture and the media, through social interaction in which significant others (parents, peers, teachers) implicitly or explicitly support such interpretations, and through micro-level cognitive processes in which individuals pursue and remember evidence that is consistent with heir preexisting stereotypes and ignore, discount, or forget evidence that undermines them (Fiske 1998; Reskin 2000) (15)

Charles and Grusky go on to argue that gender essentialism results in horizontal labor-market segregation across occupations through mechanisms such as employer and institutional discrimination, which plays a large role in channeling women and men into distinct career paths, but also, perhaps even more critically, through gender-patterned individual preferences and self-evaluations that result from the internalization of gender essentialist beliefs. In addition, they argue, individuals are more likely to choose gender-normative career paths due to anticipated sanctions for non-conforming behavior, ranging from “the quiet disapproval of parents (when, for example, a son announces his desire to become a nurse) to overt discrimination against gender-atypical coworkers (when, for example, construction workers harass a female coworker).” (19)
Some research suggests that horizontal gender segregation in the labor market has begun to wane, particularly resulting from new cohorts of women coming of age at a time when they are more prepared for higher levels of employment and perhaps face less discrimination (Blau, Brummund, and Yung-Hsu Liu 2013). Like the waning pervasiveness of a gender-based household division of labor, however, Blau et al. find that the rate of progress toward equality has appeared to diminish, and that women’s representation in service jobs has continued to outpace their representation in the labor market as a whole. This research also suggests that this may be a class-based phenomenon, whereby more highly educated women—those who are less likely to do service-type jobs—represent the bulk of the horizontal “integration,” leaving the lesser educated still highly segregated along the service versus manual labor lines that Charles and Grusky depict.

I suggest that the very mechanisms that channel women into service-oriented market work also channel them into service-oriented family work. The performance of household labor—and, as I have argued, particularly child care—continues to be viewed as an “essentially female” undertaking, leaving aspects of the breadwinner-homemaker model firmly entrenched in the same ways that horizontal segregation of the labor market remains entrenched, despite the easing of some structural barriers and generally more liberal attitudes. What’s more, these same mechanisms leave women vulnerable to “personal choice” rhetoric that inherently disregards not only the remaining structural realities that women encounter (see Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007), but also the idea that, as Charles and Grusky argue, gender-essentialist ideals are internalized at a young age, even to the extent that men and women come to view their personal competencies or their performance of
particular tasks according to stereotypically gendered sets of abilities or qualifications. It also appears that the expectation of negative sanctions may be powerful enough to curtail many who would otherwise assume non-normative family roles, as evidence has shown, at least historically, that some heterosexual couples who adopted a non-normative division of labor made efforts to “neutralize” this deviance by adopting more gender-normative household arrangements (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, and Matheson 2003; Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000).

It is important to note that, while gender essentialist notions may be simultaneously permeating both the home and work spheres, affecting how specific tasks and jobs are allocated in gender-patterned ways in each sphere, it is also the case that these processes are not occurring independently of one another. As I noted earlier, Hartmann (1976:153) has argued that the strengthening of the domestic division of labor—the requirement that women to do housework, child care, and related chores—contributed to women’s subordinate position in the labor market, which “reinforced their subordinate position in the family, and that in turn reinforced their labor-market position.” Here we see that the structural feedback loop that Hartmann depicts carries with it an element of gender essentialism, whereby the conceptualization of housework and child care as “women’s work” in and of itself serves to simultaneously delegitimize women in the workplace, as I alluded to earlier. More specifically, the persistent feminization of care work—and namely the assumption that women possess specific characteristics that make them uniquely qualified to perform it—has important implications when it comes to women’s labor-market prospects. It means that women are associated with an “embodied femininity” that is inherently at odds with the
embodied masculinity that Acker (1990) argues is central to formal organizational structures. If a woman is presumed to be inherently caring, nurturing, and other-centered, for example, how easily can she be perceived as possessing the “masculine” qualities necessary to run a corporation or to assume a position in the highest levels of government? Especially if she has children with whom she is assumed to share a primary and all-consuming bond that cannot be substituted? And more broadly, how can this “embodied femininity” come to be negotiated with deeply embedded cultural ideals around what Acker articulates are the “generically male” workers that are most often the “placeholders” in non-feminized occupations? These are more than just vague theoretical questions, as a large body of empirical research points toward penalties and biases against mothers in both pay and promotion (Anderson et al. 2003; Budig and England 2001; Budig and Hodges 2010; Correll et al. 2007; Gough and Noonan 2013), often in relation to assumptions about their competence in traditionally male occupations (Heilman and Okimoto 2008). In addition, evidence suggests that when mothers are successful in high-status occupations, they are seen as less warm and likeable, and more hostile, even when they have shown themselves to be competent and committed to their paid work (Bernard and Correll 2010).

In addition to bumping up against traditionally “masculine” organizations and institutions, women continually contend with gender-essentialist assumptions about their superiority in performing “emotion work” or “emotional labor,” both at home and within service-oriented occupations (Hochschild 1983). This type of work extends beyond female-sex-type tasks or skills relating to things like cooking or child care to the arguably more burdensome ability to shoulder responsibility for the very essence of human relationships. As
Erickson (2005) argues, this type of work—while, ironically, most often not recognized as work at all—can range from the provision of emotional support and the enhancement of others’ emotional well-being to the facilitation of personal interactions and the containment of one’s own emotions for the sake of maintaining a socially acceptable public face. Because women are presumed to have a superior ability to perform this type of work, they are also presumed to be more suitable for service-oriented market work, and are held accountable for the outcomes of both personal and professional relationships in ways that men are not (Daniels 1987). What’s more, as Daniels argues, “The expectation that women possess the natural skills for this type of service blend with the expectation that they should do [it],” and they are sanctioned for not meeting those expectations. (410)

The assumption that women are superior at, and therefore responsible for, the care and maintenance of a multitude of different types of personal and professional relationships is, I suggest, an extension of the presumed sacredness of the mother-child bond. As Chodorow (1978) has argued, the nature of that bond becomes the primary driver of subsequent human relationships, and as such, the sacred mother-child bond mythology becomes inextricably intertwined with myriad assumptions about women’s home and work lives. As a result, cultural assumptions about motherhood fuel the replication of neo-traditional family arrangements both directly and indirectly through a multifaceted gender-essentialist process, whereby mothers are expected to be an irreplaceable source of care and nurture at home, while simultaneously diminished in the workplace for those very qualities, both through the assumption that they are more suited for nurturant work roles (Pierce 1995) and the assumption that they are lesser suited for positions associated with more “masculine”
qualities. In other words, gender essentialism in the general sense is the larger-scale mythology in which the sacred mother-child bond mythology is embedded, though arguably the sacred mother-child bond is the core from which other essentialist notions extend. And because they subtly permeate most aspects of human social life, gender essentialist beliefs come to guide family decision making, particularly prompting the isomorphism of neo-traditional family arrangements despite what may be their lack of efficiency for many families.

Understanding the persistently gendered allocation of family roles as a cultural, gender essentialist process also helps shed light on the complex and seemingly conflicting relationship between egalitarian ideals and neo-traditional family arrangements. While General Social Survey data indeed reveal that men and women continue to lean toward egalitarian beliefs, Cotter, Hermsen and Vanneman (2011) note that what were once sharp liberalizing trends toward egalitarianism leveled off or, in some cases, even reversed slightly starting in the late 1990s, ticking up again only slightly since 2000. Cotter et al. explore in depth what caused this reversal, testing structural, cultural, and demographic explanations including cohort replacement, shifting patterns in education attainment and religiosity, economic shifts related to men’s earnings and wives’ labor-force participation, and shifts in the ideological climate of the larger culture. Ultimately they conclude that the slowing trend toward egalitarianism in the 1990s did not stem from larger cultural or structural change, but rather was the result of one cultural force in particular: a delayed manifestation of the “anti-feminist backlash” that began in the 1980s in reaction to the rapid period of change that took place as a result of the gender revolution of the 1970s (Faludi 1991). That said, they argue
that this backlash was not due to a large-scale return to more traditional ideals, as many have assumed, but rather a repackaging of ideas that managed to combine both “elements of traditional familism and feminist egalitarianism.” They explain:

In the 1990s, a third cultural frame emerged that proclaimed itself egalitarian and woman-centered but nevertheless opposed some of the structural changes that had moved American society toward a more feminist future. In this alternative frame, equality meant the right of women to choose—so choosing a stay-at-home mother role could represent as much of a feminist choice as pursuing an independent career (Williams 2000). Stone (2007) shows that career women who “opted out” for full-time motherhood always used this rhetoric of choice in describing their changed lives—even if those changes were prompted mainly by unsupportive work environments or increased job demands. If traditional stay-at-home motherhood roles could be defended while still professing an egalitarian worldview, people could support traditional gender attitudes without identifying themselves with an outdated and unfair sexism. (283-4)

The rise of this “egalitarian essentialism”—the framing of the performance of a “traditionally” female role as one of many feminist choices—is the formula that enables even the most egalitarian-minded to be able to comfortably negotiate liberal gender ideals with neo-traditional choices or family arrangements. What’s more, it is rooted in the very same gender-essentialist processes that Charles and Grusky argue exist in relation to the labor market. Specifically, they argue that horizontal segregation is distinctly different from vertical segregation, wherein men rise to higher-status positions within both the manual and non-manual sectors, in that horizontal segregation, on its face, eliminates the hierarchical overtones of vertical segregation. This makes it a far more palatable framework for the egalitarian-minded in much the same way that the packaging of the “mother-as-caregiver” trope as a separate-but-equal feminist choice is also perceived as non-hierarchical and therefore non-threatening to women’s equality in the larger sense. In this respect, Cotter et al.
argue, gender essentialism—and its offshoot, egalitarian essentialism—serve to perpetuate a separate spheres ideology absent any concern about the notions of male primacy that once accompanied it.

As has been noted throughout history, however, a separate-but-equal framework is, ultimately, unequal. In the case of the remarkable persistence of gender-segregated family and work roles, it is important to note that this intransigence was, as Cotter et al. describe, rooted particularly in a backlash against the liberalizing gains of the feminist movement. Therefore, while the isomorphism of neo-traditional family forms may not represent a wholesale return to “traditional” family or work values, it does, nonetheless, represent a resistance to full egalitarianism and what that might mean when it comes to renegotiating the core of our assumptions about men’s and women’s work. Perhaps even more importantly, when the work of caregiving is inherently devalued and persistently low-status at the same time that it is “feminized” (Ridgeway and Correll 2004), it perpetuates a horizontal segregation of the labor market and a sexual division of labor in the home that are inextricably intertwined with one another, and in which gendered roles are, in large part, separate and decidedly unequal. In this respect, gender-essentialist cultural values and the persistent structural barriers in the labor market are, as Hartmann has argued, mutually sustaining.

**Culture versus Structure**

On its face, viewing the work-family interface through a gender essentialist lens poses a bit of a conundrum when it comes to understanding the roles that both social structure and
culture play in the perpetuation of neo-traditional family arrangements, and of gender inequality in the larger sense. On one hand, gender essentialist arguments, which are largely cultural, suggest that horizontal segregation—and particularly the belief in women’s unique suitability for nurturance that undergirds it—ultimately depresses workplace opportunity because women’s presumed skill set is largely incompatible with the characteristics presumed necessary for roles in both the economy and polity that tend to carry with them substantial economic power or control over material resources. In this scenario, then, the perpetuation of particular cultural constructions related to women’s family roles flow into the workplace and ultimately constrain their labor-market opportunities. On the other hand, more traditional structural arguments would appear to flow in the opposite direction. These arguments suggest that it is a restrictive, demanding, and largely intransigent workplace that “sends” women home to care for their children full time—or creates substantial conflict for those who do not have this choice—because workplace structures are not designed to accommodate workers who are encumbered with family responsibilities. This type of structural argument is the most substantial counter-argument to a neo-institutional explanation for the intransigence of the neo-traditional family form and its role in the stubborn perpetuation of gender inequality.

Admittedly, structural forces are both formidable and multifaceted. Feminist scholars, for example, argue convincingly that women continue to take on the majority of household and caregiving labor because these types of arrangements are in the interests of husbands, who, as males, still generally yield more power within heterosexual relationships due to persistent wage differentials, as well as their corresponding overrepresentation in positions of
power within larger economic and political institutions. Accordingly, husbands can wield their greater power to “buy their way out of” performing less-desirable tasks, such as housework or some of the more mundane aspects of child care, especially if they spend less time at home or earn more than their wives—both of which are still often the case, given the persistent segregation of the labor market (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson. 2000; Bittman et al. 2003). In short, wives’ greater likelihood of economic dependence on their spouses—a byproduct of myriad economic and other structural forces—reduces their power to negotiate. Adding weight to these structural arguments is the growing body of cross-national research on the division of family labor that suggests that state and local policies designed specifically to promote gender equality at the macro level do indeed have an effect on marital division of labor in ways that affect the balance of power between spouses (Anxo, Mencarini, Pailhe, Solaz, Tanturri, and Flood 2011; Bunning and Pollman-Schulte 2016; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Hook 2006; Kunovich and Kunovich 2008; Neilson and Stanfors 2014).

Similar arguments suggest, as alluded to earlier, that women’s “choices” regarding the assumption of full-time parenting are structured, rather restrictively, by an unaccommodating workplace, and by husbands who may be verbally supportive of egalitarianism, but are in fact unwilling to perform an equal share of household and parenting labor (Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1989; Stone 2007). And in the larger sense, more general conflict theorists argue that neo-traditional family arrangements persist because they continue to be in the interests of capitalist organizations, which still expect the devoted, unencumbered labor of male workers, a condition enabled by large-scale conformity to the woman-as-
devoted-parent trope (Acker 2006). This gives them incentive to penalize female workers for their disproportionate shouldering of the burdens of family care while also financially rewarding men who become fathers (Anderson et al. 2003; Avelar and Smock 2003; Budig and England 2001; Budig and Hodges 2010; Correll et al. 2007; Hodges and Budig 2010; Kmec 2011), thus creating structural conditions that perpetuate a cycle in which neo-traditional family arrangements are viewed as the only pragmatic choice.

Still, while contradictory in some ways at first blush, viewing structural and cultural arguments as inherently opposing or incompatible underscores some of the larger issues around the ways in which social scientists come to explain social phenomena. Viewing social life as a “culture vs. structure” dichotomy, in particular, almost by definition negates the complex and nuanced interplay between culture and structure and the ways in which, together, they come to inform human social life. In the case of family labor, it is important to note that structural conditions do not, in and of themselves, paint a complete picture. For example, gender-dictated family arrangements often persist regardless of the extent to which women contribute to the financial support of the family (Aassve et al. 2014; Bianchi et al. 2000; Bittman et al. 2003). Similarly, though workplaces have become increasingly demanding and, in turn, more predicated than ever on an unencumbered worker model, that fact does not, in and of itself, fully explain why women and not men largely suffer the ramifications of being encumbered by family responsibility. And lastly, as Charles and Grusky (2004) note, progressive, gender-egalitarian countries like Sweden continue to have some of the most a horizontally sex-segregated labor markets even when gender inequality has been largely alleviated on a structural level, and when those policies have filtered down
to individuals and families in myriad other ways (Batalova and Cohen 2002; Bunning and Pollman-Schulte 2016; Davis and Greenstein 2004; Greenstein 2009; Hook 2006; Hook 2010; Kunovich and Kunovich 2008).

The answer to these questions lies in the idea that neither structure nor culture exists in a vacuum, nor do they exist independently of one another. As such, a neo-institutional approach to understanding the persistence of gendered family arrangements is intended to build upon, rather than negate, structural arguments. Specifically, I suggest that isomorphic tendency of neo-traditional family arrangements is a cultural condition that grows out of, and in turn perpetuates, very real material and structural conditions. One ongoing example of this is how structural differences between countries in terms of gender equality at the policy level, as described by the cross-national research mentioned earlier, come to permeate the culture of those nations. For example, variation in policies regarding paternal leave can bring about varying cultural conceptualizations of masculinity that become embedded in the culture and even manifested in the differing discourse that men and women regularly use to describe their parenting roles (Plantin, Mansson, and Kearney 2003). Of course, these conceptions of masculinity in turn can come to guide the way future policies are enacted, particularly those involving families.

This connection between culture and structure was perhaps most powerfully expressed in Liebow’s classic 1967 ethnographic account of the lives of poor, black men. In *Tally’s Corner*, Liebow argues that the subculture that developed among the men he studied was very much rooted in the structural conditions they faced, particularly limited labor-market opportunities that left many unable to meet the minimum requirements of fatherhood.
as prescribed by mainstream cultural values. As a result, these “streetcorner” men developed a unique set of norms that appeared to reflect, most prominently, a lack of value particularly for taking responsibility for their children. Liebow argues, however, that these men’s “values” were, in many ways, a rational adaptation to their material circumstances:

He wants to be publicly, legally married, to support a family and be the head of it, because this is what it is to be a man in our society, whether one lives in a room near the Carry-out or in an elegant house in the suburbs. Although he wants to get married, he hedges on his commitment from the very beginning because he is afraid, not of marriage itself, but of his own ability to carry out his responsibilities as husband and father. His own father failed and had to “cut out,” and the men he knows who have been or are married have also failed or are in the process of doing so. He has no evidence that he will fare better than they and much evidence that he will not. [136-7]

Because they feel doomed for failure under mainstream standards, they adopt a backup plan in which they retreat from their wives, and ultimately their children, to avoid confronting the structural obstacles that leave them feeling profoundly wanting:

The man who lives with his wife and children is under legal and social constraints to provide for them, to be a husband to his wife and a father to his children. The chances are, however, that he is failing to provide for them, and failure in this primary function contaminates his performance as father in other respects as well. The more demonstrative and accepting he is of his children, the greater is his public and private commitment to the duties and responsibilities of fatherhood; and the greater his commitment, the greater and sharper his failure as the provider and head of the family. To soften this failure, and to lessen the damage to his public and self-esteem, he pushes the children away from him, saying, in effect, “I’m not even trying to be your father so now I can’t be blamed for failing to accomplish what I’m not trying to do.” [55-6]

As Liebow demonstrates, when certain behavioral patterns evolve into widespread norms, a “culture” develops, but it is one that represents an adaptation to the material circumstances and structural limitations of their social environments.
Anthropologists refer to a similar type of cultural-structural process as “cultural materialism.” Margolis (1984:3) specifically explains how this relates to gender and family roles:

[Cultural materialism] assumes that explanations for cultural similarities lie in the material conditions of human life: how people make a living, how they relate to their environments, and how they reproduce themselves. … This type of analysis has been fruitful in explaining certain aspects of human sex roles. Previous studies using a cultural materialist orientation have shown that variations in men’s and women’s roles are related to environmental, technological, and demographic factors, to people’s way of making a living, and to social and political arrangements. … The diverse roles that men and women play in different cultures, along with varying ideologies about women’s nature, are linked to and molded by such mundane factors as subsistence strategies and population pressure. … Ideas about women’s capabilities and proper place in the scheme of things do not change at random; they are ultimately shaped by society’s sexual division of labor, which in turn is causally related to its productive and reproductive imperatives.

As Margolis depicts, culture is developed and sustains itself through mechanisms that have material and structural conditions at their core. In other words, an entire host of gender-related cultural norms, including sex-based roles and gender-essentialist ideas related to women’s “capabilities and proper place in the scheme of things,” are inherently cultural but at the same time are byproducts of structural conditions ranging from everything from demography to the economy. Coontz (2005) similarly notes, as one example of this process, that the historical shift in marriage from a political-economic relationship between families to a private relationship between two individuals represented a shift in cultural norms, but one that was a direct result of structural shifts to a market economy and the spread of wage labor, which made young people less dependent on their parents and made women more able to earn their own dowries.
As in these examples, the neo-institutional thesis regarding the division of family labor that I have put forth is essentially a cultural argument, but it is one that is rooted in—and, in large part, represents an adaption to—persistently gender-unequal structural conditions. In other words, the remarkable endurance of aspects of the breadwinner-homemaker model may be due directly to cultural, gender-essentialist ideals based on a socially constructed mythology, as I have argued, but that mythology was not derived at random. Rather, it was created and persists due to stubborn structural conditions, primarily in the labor market but also in myriad other social and economic institutions that continue to limit women’s opportunities to gain traction or power in the larger society. As such, as one of my qualitative participants articulated, women’s assumption of the bulk of family responsibilities simply “makes sense” on an individual, pragmatic level due to what continue to be widespread differentials between men and women in both time availability and pay. At the same time, a gender-based division of labor tends to “feel right” to many because, while rooted in structural limitations, it has taken hold and become widely legitimated and perpetuated over time, existing even beyond any direct response to structural constraints. As such, I suggest that, as Liebow argued, what has in fact become “culture,” in that it involves values and choices, has developed as an adaptive response to structural limitations. Like Liebow’s streetcorner men, who create a culture that stems from the knowledge that their chances for economic success are slim, modern egalitarian men and women construct cultural norms knowing that their chances for a successful egalitarian partnership are also slim as long as such partnerships are largely unsupported by current social and economic institutions.
Some of the most interesting evidence of this complex interplay between structure and culture, and its effect on family decision making, comes from research that depicts the ways in which young men and women contemplate their future work and family lives. As I noted earlier, Gerson (2010), for example, interviewed 120 young men and women between the ages of 18 and 32 regarding their thoughts and plans for their future work and family lives. She found an important distinction between young people’s ideals and their “fallback positions,” namely that, while most young women and men hope for flexible and egalitarian bonds with their partners, they are skeptical of their ability to achieve this type of relationship, given that they have seen their parents negotiate, often unsuccessfully, structural conditions such as demanding workplaces and a dearth of caregiving support. As a result, they develop fallback positions that, in the men’s case in particular, are centered around a neo-traditional family structure in which men assume the bulk of the breadwinning responsibilities and women assume the bulk of family caregiving. Similar research shows that young women, in anticipation of family caregiving responsibilities, choose in advance career paths that are particularly amenable to accommodating those responsibilities, even though those paths so often involve lower pay and limited status or opportunity for advancement (Bass 2015; Marks and Houston 2002). When broadly enacted, these decisions come to represent normative “values” and choices on a large scale, even when these young people often have yet to actually encounter or negotiate structural obstacles themselves. Still, these cultural values are, nonetheless, guided by structural realities, even as they are anticipated by younger people. And stemming from the neo-institutional tenets of uncertainty, legitimacy, and the mythology of the “sacred mother-child bond,” neo-
institutional family arrangements seem comfortable and sensible, even when more egalitarian arrangements are clearly preferred. Arguably, the “familiarity” that is bred by isomorphic processes can become reason in and of itself to perpetuate the status quo.

In this respect, isomorphism is not the root cause of the persistence of neo-traditionalism, but instead is the mechanism through which it takes hold. In other words, what has become a cultural pull toward the replication of traditional family arrangements is, at least in part, an adaptive response to the structural constraints imposed by a patriarchal capitalist system, and isomorphism is the vehicle through which they have become ubiquitous. More specifically, patriarchal systems mold family processes, even among egalitarian couples, in part by elevating the “sacred mother-child bond” to a prized and revered status—a process around which a system of gendered family roles is culturally constructed. Based on this symbolism, those family arrangements become legitimized and, as a result, widely emulated and adopted to the point that they are “normative,” yet they are still nonetheless embedded in patriarchal structures and systems of power that create ideas about men and women as wholly distinct categories that ultimately drive perpetually unequal access to resources (Tilly 1998). What’s more, this process remains largely unchallenged due to a persistent dearth of institutional norms around family caregiving that continues to perpetuate uncertainty as to how family responsibilities should be met—an uncertainty that remains salient for many families even now decades past the time that married women began to enter the workforce in large numbers. Given this level of complexity, cultural and structural explanations are not only compatible, but also each arguably incomplete when viewed without consideration of the other.
Conclusions

Blair-Loy (2003) also carefully considers the interplay between structure and culture in her analysis of women executives negotiating their often-competing work and family demands. Addressing the impact of culture, she specifically takes on neo-institutionalist accounts, arguing that they represent a “cognitive” cultural view that is unsuited for addressing family decision making because it lacks a “moral” dimension:

This cognitive turn has been fueled by neo-institutional research, which studies how new practices and rules become adopted and established in organizations, institutions, and environmental fields ... the neo-institutionalist version of culture is ill-suited to the job of understanding the problem of work-family conflict. In contrast to the neo-institutionalists’ anemic, amoral understanding of culture, we argue that work-family conflict cannot be understood empirically without fully acknowledging and analyzing the moral dimension of this conflict. We argue that work-family conflict is fundamentally a conflict between emotionally salient, moral definitions of what it is to be a good worker and a good parent. Within individuals, work-family conflict cuts to the heart of what it means to be fully human. Within institutions, these normative definitions influence corporate ideologies, work scheduling, evaluation standards, and promotion patterns at work and shape the gender division of labor at home. [177-8]

Though I agree that cultural ideas about what constitutes moral behavior substantially influence the ways in which families negotiate their paid and family labor, I suggest that Blair-Loy’s conception of neo-institutionalism does not account for the “myth” piece of the theory’s foundations (Suddaby 2010). Specifically, it overlooks Meyer and Rowan’s (1977) argument that symbolic meaning becomes attached to particular roles, practices or routines and is ultimately legitimated and widely adopted for that reason alone. As such, I have aimed to identify the specific myths that ultimately serve as the moral foundations that drive the institutionalization of traditional ideas about gender and family processes. In doing so, I envision a less cognitive neo-institutional analysis that is more in line with the morality-
driven behavior that Blair-Loy argues is at the heart of women’s experience of work-family conflict. Specifically, I have identified the “sacred mother-child bond” as the highly moral underpinning of the organizational “facts,” “practices,” and “rules” that Blair-Loy argues are the mainstays of neo-institutional analyses. And, as I have argued, the mythology that elevates the mother-child bond to the sacred very much raises questions about “what it means to be human,” and in doing so offers a more well-rounded neo-institutional account that very deliberately recognizes the moral dimensions of human decision-making, while also serving to explain the more nuts-and-bolts mechanisms through which certain family forms and routines become widespread.

Thus, I have argued that, when considered as a whole, three of the major tenets of neo-institutional theory that have been argued are the foundation of the behavior of large organizations—uncertainty, legitimacy, and myth—can similarly be applied to the behavior of the small organization that is the family. Specifically, I have suggested that new families emulate the structures and routines of established families in their organizational fields in an attempt to reduce the uncertainty that results from the transformative transition to parenthood. This process, I have argued, is born out of a remarkably persistent dearth of institutionalized norms dictating how dual-earner families meet their domestic responsibilities, as well as a similar dearth of institutionalized supports to aid dual-earner families in caring for their children. Further, I have argued that adopting the structures and routines of already-legitimated families helps new families gain instant legitimacy, and the rewards that accompany it. And also in keeping with a neo-institutional approach to organizations, I have suggested that this legitimacy is not based on rational or economic
concerns regarding efficiency, but is rather based in a gender-driven mythology that suggests that neo-traditional family arrangements are the “best,” and therefore taken-for-granted, way to allocate labor for families with children. This mythology is rooted in a symbolic imagery that I have labeled the “sacred mother-child bond”—a gender-essentialist notion that mothers, and not fathers, have magical or “other-worldly” abilities or instincts related to child care that transcend its more mundane, day-to-day realities.

Of course, the widespread replication of even certain aspects of the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization has profound implications when it comes to the stall in progress toward gender equality. Some of that is clearly structural. When women continue to be required to assume the bulk of responsibility for the care of their children, their workplace opportunities are substantially diminished in ways that have clear ramifications when it comes to both their economic power and their economic independence from their male partners. On a cultural level, however, the sacred mother-child bond mythology fuels the gender-essentialist assumption that mothers must assume the bulk of responsibility for their children, suggesting that neo-traditional arrangements are therefore superior to all other family arrangements, especially when it comes to the well-being of children. As I have argued, these gender-essentialist notions also spill into the workplace, fomenting the notion that women, and especially mothers, have a skill set that is ill-suited for occupations or positions that are believed to require more essentially “masculine” qualities. As a result, both culture and structure interact in nuanced ways, together creating a cycle between the home and the workplace that fosters the perpetuation of neo-traditional family arrangements while simultaneously halting progress toward a fully gender-egalitarian
economic system. This persists even among couples who profess to have egalitarian ideals, and even among those who had egalitarian arrangements prior to the birth of their first child, helping to explain why abstract beliefs about gender have progressed further toward egalitarianism than actual practices.

The complexity around how gender becomes woven into both structure and culture—and, in turn, into the home and the workplace as well as myriad other related institutions—makes it clear that isomorphic processes are only one piece of the puzzle that is the slowing “gender revolution.” Similar to Tilly’s (1998) concept of emulation, I have argued that neo-institutional theory does a better job of explaining the proliferation of neo-traditional family forms, often even among families with economic parity between spouses, rather than explaining some of the structural conditions that for many other families cause neo-traditional arrangements to be viewed as the most practical alternative. As such, neo-institutional theory does not, and should not be made to, explain a social phenomenon of this magnitude in its entirety. It is unlikely that any theory can or should do that, especially when it is applied in ways that stray from its original intent. That said, understanding this process of proliferation is also critical to dismantling it. If we begin to understand the cultural processes that have resisted progress toward egalitarianism, we might also begin to identify cultural processes that would instead encourage it. These types of shifts have the potential to guide large-scale social change, because, as Zucker (1977) has suggested, the more highly institutionalized certain practices become, the more “culturally persistent” they will be. Specifically, she has argued, “the greater the degree of institutionalism, the greater
generational uniformity of cultural understandings, the greater maintenance without direct social control, and the greater resistance to change through personal influence.” (742)

In this respect, looking at the stubborn replication of the neo-traditional model through a neo-institutional lens is useful in that it offers some guidance as to how this cultural persistence might be disrupted, potentially setting in motion further progress toward full gender equality. Specifically, if we understand that conditions of uncertainty, the desire for legitimacy, and the symbolic, gender-essentialist “myths” related to the breadwinner-homemaker model of the family— and specifically to the “sacred mother-child bond”— are fueling widespread emulation of gender-based family arrangements, then we can surmise that specifically challenging each of those tenets might lessen the cultural pull toward family traditionalism that has existed despite generally widespread egalitarian ideals. Before discussing what such a challenge might look like, I first turn my attention in the next chapter toward gaining empirical support for the premises of neo-institutional processes— specifically ideas around legitimacy and myth—that I have argued are central to the widespread adoption of neo-traditional family arrangements.
CHAPTER 4: QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS

Empirical Approach

A comprehensive empirical test of a neo-institutional theory of family organization proves challenging for a variety of reasons, but the foundational aspects of the theory—that is, the building blocks upon which I argue the theory is based: uncertainty, legitimacy, and myth—are empirically accessible. While support for the existence of these building blocks does not, in and of itself, lend support to the theory in total, it is also true that said support would help advance our understanding of the motivations behind the widespread adoption of certain family arrangements and lend credence to some of the arguments regarding how and why isomorphic processes are at play.

Although uncertainty is a necessary precondition to a drive toward isomorphism, it is a larger social condition that, for the purposes of this analysis, we can assume has existed as a result of the erosion of the strictly prescribed gender-based norms that once guided the allocation of family responsibilities in white, middle-class families, as well as what I argue has been the incomplete institutionalization of the now-prevalent dual-earner family. Thus, my goal is to extend beyond uncertainty to address the constructs that have arisen as a result of it, namely the quest for legitimacy and the development of a symbolic mythology around motherhood.

Using a “conventional” gender ideology index similar to those used in most studies based on large-scale data sets, I will begin by examining whether and for whom beliefs about gender and family processes tend to predict or diverge from their actual family roles and arrangements, focusing specifically on whether this alignment is differs between
heterosexual couples with and without children in the home. Next, I will test two general propositions: 1) That neo-traditional family arrangements have been culturally idealized, and that this idealization drives the allocation of family responsibilities perhaps to a greater extent than general ideas about mothers’ prescribed roles, as measured in conventional gender ideology indices; and b) that the cultural symbolism of the “sacred mother-child bond” is at the root of this idealization, and therefore drives beliefs and behaviors related to women’s family and work responsibilities, particularly their unique suitability for the care of family members, especially young children.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

To address these propositions, I will explore the following sets of questions:

1. Do heterosexual married couples’ beliefs differ from their behaviors? If so, does gender ideology become less aligned with division of household labor once heterosexual partners become parents?

Hypotheses, Research Question 1:

A) Gender ideology, as measured using a conventional gender ideology index, will be more egalitarian for heterosexual partnered respondents without children under 18 in the home than heterosexual partnered respondents with children in the home.

B) Gender ideology will predict the division of housework and family care for heterosexual partnered respondents. Specifically, a more egalitarian gender ideology will be associated with a greater share of housework and family care performed by the husband.
C) More egalitarian gender ideology will be associated with a greater portion of housework and family care performed by the husband for heterosexual partnered respondents without children under 18 in the home, but will not predict the division of housework and family care for heterosexual partnered respondents with children in the home.

2. How do beliefs about mothering potentially differ from more general beliefs about women’s roles? Relatedly, how do beliefs about gender as it relates the performance of child care potentially differ from beliefs about gender and the performance of housework or other family tasks? To what extent are beliefs and behaviors more or less aligned when looking at mothering/general division of labor beliefs and housework/family care separately?

**Hypotheses, Research Question 2:**

A) Beliefs about women’s roles that are not related to mothering will be more egalitarian than beliefs specifically related to mothering.

B) More egalitarian beliefs specifically about mothers will be associated with a greater portion of family care performed by the husband.

C) More egalitarian beliefs about the general division of household labor will be associated with a greater portion of housework performed by the husband.

3. Are idealized notions about the “best” ways to organize family responsibilities better predictors of the division of housework and family care than conventional gender ideology indices? Similarly, based on the “myth of the sacred mother-child bond,” do beliefs
specifically about the need for mothers of young children to stay home with their children (i.e., not work full-time) predict the division of housework and family care?

**Hypotheses, Research Question 3:**

A) Beliefs about the “ideal” or “best” way to organize family labor will predict division of housework and family care to a greater extent than more conventional gender ideology measures. Specifically, the belief that neo-traditional arrangements are best will be associated with a decreased portion of housework and family care performed by the husband.

B) The belief that mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home with their children full-time will be associated with a decreased portion of housework and family care performed by the husband.

C) The belief that mothers of school-age children should stay home with their children full-time or work outside the home only part-time will be associated with a decreased portion of housework and family care performed by the husband.

**Data and Measures**

Data

To address these questions, I use data from the 2012 General Social Survey (Smith, Marsden, Hout, and Kim 2013), that year’s version of attitude surveys conducted biannually by the National Opinion Research Center. The 2012 survey is particularly useful for this analysis because it includes a subset of questions from the fourth round of the Family and Changing Gender Roles module, which was created in conjunction with the International Social Survey.
Programme (ISSP). A total of 1,974 respondents were interviewed for the 2012 GSS. The full probability sample was drawn from a universe that included all non-institutionalized English and Spanish speaking people aged 18 and over residing in the United States. The data were collected via a combination of computer-assisted, face-to-face, and telephone interviews.

My sample was restricted to the 562 respondents who reported being in a heterosexual marriage and living with their partners, and who were asked all of the questions used in my analyses. (About a third of the 1,974 GSS respondents were not asked the family-related questions due to a rotating ballot design.) Sample sizes were smaller and varied slightly in each analysis due to data missing primarily on either the dependent variables or the key independent variables. Specifically, there were 13 missing cases on the husband’s percentage of housework dependent variable, and one case missing on the husband’s percentage of family care variable. The majority of missing cases, ranging from 15 to 139, were on the key gender ideology variables used in each analysis. I chose not to impute these cases due to the centrality of these variables to the analysis, so they were dropped using listwise deletion. Missing data on the control variables was minimal, with eight cases or fewer missing only on the relative income measure and the husbands’ and wives’ work hours measures, so those cases were also dropped. T-tests revealed no statistically significant differences between missing and non-missing cases in each analysis on the means of the dependent variables. Weights (the “WTSS” variable) were applied to account for non-response in the second stage of a two-stage sub-sampling design, as well as the number of adults in the household.
Measures

Dependent Variables. All of my analyses aim to measure the way family labor is divided between the members of heterosexual married couples. I measure this by calculating separately the percentage of housework and care of family members that is performed by the husband or male partner. Generally speaking, the greater the portion of housework or family care is performed by the husband, the more egalitarian (or less traditional) the couple’s division of labor is presumed to be.

The portion of housework measure was derived using responses to the following two questions: 1) On average, how many hours a week do you personally spend on household work, not including childcare and leisure time activities? And 2) And what about your spouse/partner? On average, how many hours a week does he/she spend on household work, not including childcare or leisure time activities? Answers were given numerically in number of hours. For male respondents, percentages were calculated by dividing the respondents’ reported number of hours by the total hours the respondent reported for both themselves and their spouse/partner (herein referred to as “spouse,” “husband” or “wife”), and then multiplying by 100. For female respondents, the number of hours that they reported their spouse spends doing housework was divided by the total number of hours spent by both spouses and then multiplied by 100. As a result, the portion of housework done by the husband is represented by an actual percentage of the total number of hours contributed by both spouses, with 100 representing the husband doing 100% of the housework. For cases in which both the respondent and their spouse reported zero hours of household work, leaving an undefined denominator of “0,” I imputed 50% performed by the husband because these...
responses imply that both the husband and wife contribute equally (both nothing) to household work.

The portion of family care performed by husbands was derived similarly using the following two questions: 1) *On average, how many hours a week do you spend looking after family members (e.g., children, elderly, ill or disabled family members)?* And 2) *And on average, how many hours a week does [your spouse/partner] spend looking after family members?* Percentages were calculated in the same fashion as they were for housework—respondent’s family care hours was divided by the total number of hours performed by the respondent and his spouse and multiplied by 100 for men, and spouse’s family care hours divided by the total hours of the respondent and her spouse, then multiplied by 100, for women. I again imputed 50% of family care to the husband if both the husband and wife contributed zero hours to family care.

**Independent Variables.** Research Question 1 examines the relationship between gender ideology as measured using a conventional gender ideology index and the ways in which heterosexual couples allocate their family responsibilities. Thus, to measure respondents’ beliefs about the role of gender in families, I construct a gender ideology measure consisting of responses to questions similar to those traditionally found in large-scale family surveys. I start by assigning points to responses to six questions, each of which included the following response categories: 1) Strongly agree, 2) Agree, 3) Neither Agree nor Disagree 4) Disagree, and 5) Strongly Disagree: *A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work; A pre-school child is likely to*
suffer if his or her mother works; All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job; A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children; A man’s job is to earn money and a woman’s job is to look after the home and family; and It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.

For most items, I assign points according to the numbering system outlined above, that is, one point for “Strongly Agree,” two points for “Agree,” etc., with two exceptions. First, the final statement above (It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family) offered only four response categories, omitting the middle “Neither agree nor disagree” category, so I recoded this variable to align the points for that question with those assigned for the other questions, omitting the middle 3-point category. Second, to create a consistent scale in which “1” represents the most traditional views and “5” represents the most egalitarian views, I reverse coded the following item: A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work. To create the gender ideology variable, I add the values of the responses to each of the six items and divide by 6 to compute a mean score. Drawing from the sample of 519 married GSS respondents with available data on all items in the index, the resulting conventional gender ideology scale had a raw Cronbach’s alpha of 0.84.

Research Question 2 looks at the relationship between beliefs specifically related to the role of mothers and their effects on children versus beliefs that pertain more generally to the division of family labor. I performed exploratory factor analyses the full sample of GSS
respondents who were asked the questions used in my analysis to determine whether separate factors within the full gender ideology index might be identified. I extracted factors using principal component analysis (SAS PROC FACTOR default) and then rotated them using SAS’s Oblique Varimax rotation. Two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 emerged. Each had a simple structure, with three distinct items with loadings of between 0.70 and 0.85 and the remaining items with substantially lower loadings of 0.22 or below. What I have labeled the “mothering” factor included items that related specifically to children and families suffering if the mother works outside of the home: *A working mother can establish just as warm and secure a relationship with her children as a mother who does not work; A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works;* and *All in all, family life suffers when the woman has a full-time job.* As with the full index, I added the values of the responses to these items and divided by 3 to create a mean score. This 3-item index had a raw Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.82. What I label the “general division of labor” factor relates to a specific preference for a breadwinner-homemaker type of arrangement: *A job is alright, but what most women really want is a home and children; A man's job is to earn money and a woman's job is to look after the home and family;* and *It is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family.* Again, a mean score was calculated. This 3-item index had a raw Cronbach’s Alpha of 0.76.

Lastly, Research Question 3 examines alternate ways of measuring gender-related beliefs, specifically related to a) the extent to which respondents idealize some form of the breadwinner-homemaker model, and b) the extent to which respondents believe that mothers should be home with their children as much as possible, particularly before they begin
kindergarten. To measure the former, I use the following question/responses: Consider a family with a child under school age. What, in your opinion, is the best way for them to organize their family and work life? 1) The mother stays at home and the father works full-time, 2) The mother works part-time and the father works full-time, 3) Both the mother and father work full-time, 4) Both the mother and father work part-time, 5) The father works part-time and the mother works full-time, and 6) The father stays at home and the mother works full-time. I then condense these responses into three categories: The first category, which I label “Belief that a neo-traditional family arrangement is ideal,” includes response of 1 or 2, because either of those responses indicates that the respondent prefers some iteration of a husband-as-primary-breadwinner model. The second category, “Belief that an egalitarian family arrangement is ideal” consisted of responses of 3 or 4, because those responses show support for an arrangement in which mothers and fathers spend relatively equal amounts of time at work and at home. The final category, “Belief that a counter-traditional arrangement is ideal” consists of those who responded with 5’s or 6’s, because those responses reflected arrangements in which the father spends more time at home, and less at work, than the mother. Additionally, while I do not use this question for predicting the division of family labor, I also include the distribution of results from the follow-up question, And, in your opinion, which of these options would be the least desirable?, which offered the same response categories.

To measure the extent to which respondents believe in the centrality of a mother’s full-time caretaking during the children’s early years, particularly prior to kindergarten when “nurturing” is theoretically perceived as more critical, I use responses to the following
questions: *Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all when there is a child under school age?* And *Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all after the youngest starts school?* Answer categories for each of these include Work Full-Time, Work Part-Time, and Stay Home.

*Control Variables.* In light of the time availability hypothesis (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson 2000), which suggests that the division of family labor will be based in large part on the amount of time each spouse spends at work, and consequently how much time they have available at home to perform housework and child care, I include the number of hours worked outside the home for both respondents and their spouses. To determine the work status of respondents and their spouses, I first used responses to the question *Last week were you working full time, part time, going to school, keeping house, or what?* For respondents who reported working full-time or part-time the previous week, “Number of hours worked by the wife” is the response to the question *How many hours did you work last week, at all jobs?* by respondents themselves if they are female, and for their spouses if respondents are male. Similarly, “Number of hours worked by the husband” is the response to the same question for male respondents, and for their spouses for female respondents. If respondents or their spouses had a job but were temporarily out of work, the number of hours per week they “usually work at all jobs” was used. If respondents reported that they or their spouses were unemployed, retired, or keeping house, their work hours were considered to be “0.” Additionally, I imputed 20 hours per week for respondents or spouses who were in school (an estimate of
time they presumably spend fulfilling responsibilities beyond the home and family) and 10 hours per week for respondents or spouses who reported their work status as “other.”

Research Question 1 looks at how the relationship between ideology and behavior may differ once couples have children. As such, I include in all full models whether or not there are children under 18 in the household. Respondents were considered to have children in the home if they provided any non-zero answer to any of the following “Household Size and Composition” questions: Number of members under 6 years, Number of members 6-12 years, and Number of members 13-17 years old.

Next, I control for any potential differences in the relationship between ideologies and behaviors among different social classes and races. For social class, I include both education and income variables. I control for education by including a variable reflecting which of the following represents the highest degree earned by the respondent: Less than high school, High school, Associate/Junior College, Bachelor’s, or Graduate. I control for self-reported relative income using a measure reflecting responses to the following question: Compared with American families in general, would you say your family income is far below average, below average, average, above average, or far above average? For my analysis, “Far below average” and “below average” responses were collapsed into a “Below Average Income” category, and “Far above average” and “Above average” responses were collapsed into an “Above Average Income” category. I control for race based on responses to a self-reported race question, What race do you consider yourself? Answer categories included White, Black or Other.
Lastly, I include gender in all models, both as a predictor and in interaction with the key ideology variables. Gender is particularly interesting in these analyses not only because it is central to my thesis, but also because values on the dependent variables may differ depending on whether a male respondent or a female respondent is reporting the number of hours he/she and his/her spouse spend on housework and family care. Therefore, it is important to evaluate the gender variable (represented as “Female” in my analyses) not only in terms of its potential direct and indirect effects on the dependent variables, but also in terms of potential respondent bias particularly on the dependent variables.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 4.1 shows means and frequencies for the entire sample of married General Social Survey respondents for each dependent, independent, and control variable used in my analyses. (See Appendix A for descriptive statistics tables corresponding to each of the slightly smaller samples used in each regression analysis.) Because gender is critical to the theoretical and empirical questions I explore, I also break down each variable by sex and perform t-tests between male and female respondents to note any statistically significant differences in the means of these two groups. The total sample of 562 was 53.74% women (302) and 46.26% men (260), and the men were older on average (mean of 51.02 vs. 48.37). Of the total sample, 36.12% had at least one child under the age of 18 living in their homes, for a total of 203 out of the 562 married respondents. The sample predominantly identified as white (81.67%), with 9.25% identifying as black and 9.07% identifying as being of another
Table 4.1. Descriptive Statistics, Full Sample of Married 2012 GSS Respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Full Sample (N=562*)</th>
<th>Women Only (N=302*)</th>
<th>Men Only (N=260*)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.60</td>
<td>48.37***</td>
<td>51.02**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=561; 301 women; 260 men)</td>
<td>(15.01)</td>
<td>(14.28)</td>
<td>(15.73)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 20-89</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>53.74</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With kids under 18 in home</td>
<td>36.12%</td>
<td>35.43%</td>
<td>36.92%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>81.67%</td>
<td>83.11%</td>
<td>80.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>9.25%</td>
<td>8.61%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other Races</td>
<td>9.07%</td>
<td>8.28%</td>
<td>10.00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With less than high school degree</td>
<td>11.92%</td>
<td>11.26%</td>
<td>12.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With high school degree</td>
<td>47.69%</td>
<td>46.69%</td>
<td>48.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Associate’s degree</td>
<td>7.47%</td>
<td>6.95%</td>
<td>8.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>19.57%</td>
<td>22.85%</td>
<td>15.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With graduate degree</td>
<td>13.35%</td>
<td>12.25%</td>
<td>14.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Relative Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Average</td>
<td>25.45%</td>
<td>23.57%</td>
<td>27.63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Average</td>
<td>47.11%</td>
<td>49.49%</td>
<td>44.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Above Average</td>
<td>27.43%</td>
<td>26.93%</td>
<td>28.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>22.68</td>
<td>22.38</td>
<td>23.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is female; Spouse if R is male)</td>
<td>(21.11)</td>
<td>(21.19)</td>
<td>(21.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>34.06</td>
<td>33.61</td>
<td>34.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(22.50)</td>
<td>(21.96)</td>
<td>(23.14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Gender Ideology Index</td>
<td>3.49</td>
<td>3.60**</td>
<td>3.30**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=519; 280 women; 239 men)</td>
<td>(0.78)</td>
<td>(0.86)</td>
<td>(0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5; 1 = most traditional, 5 = most egalitarian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology—Mother-Related Factor</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3.77**</td>
<td>3.39**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=547; 294 women; 253 men)</td>
<td>(1.03)</td>
<td>(1.00)</td>
<td>(1.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology—General Division of Labor Factor</td>
<td>3.32</td>
<td>3.42**</td>
<td>3.20**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(N=527; 285 women; 242 men)</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td>(0.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total housework hours per week performed by husband</td>
<td>34.35%</td>
<td>31.82%**</td>
<td>37.29%**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(23.68)</td>
<td>(24.06)</td>
<td>(22.93)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total hours per week caring for family members performed by husband</td>
<td>37.87%</td>
<td>36.93%</td>
<td>38.97%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(23.10)</td>
<td>(23.50)</td>
<td>(22.62)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means given with standard deviations in parenthesis.
*Indicates statistically significant t-value between men’s and women’s means, p <.05.
**Indicates statistically significant t-value between men’s and women’s means, p <.05.
*Indicates statistically significant t-value between full-sample N’s that differ from living-as-married 2012 General Social Survey respondents. Variables with N’s that differ from full-sample N’s are provided separately within table. See Appendix A for descriptive statistics tables applying to varying samples across regressions.
A plurality of respondents (47.69%) reported a high school degree as their highest level of education completed. Of the remaining respondents, 11.92% reported not finishing high school, 7.47% reported completing an Associate’s degree, 19.57% reported completing a Bachelor’s degree, and 13.35% said that they had completed a graduate degree of some sort. 25.45% of the sample reported that their annual household income was either below or far below average, and 27.43% reported that their income was either above or far above average.

The average number of hours worked per week outside the home by the wife for each married respondent was 22.68. Note that this was the number of hours worked by the respondent for female respondents, and for the respondent’s spouse for male respondents. The average number of hours worked by husbands was 34.06. Standard deviations on both of these means indicate that there was considerable variability in the sample when it comes to weekly work hours.

On the full, conventional gender ideology scale, consisting of a total of six items, the full sample had a mean of 3.49, where 1 = the most traditional views and 5 = the most egalitarian views. Women tended to be more egalitarian than men, with a mean of 3.60 vs. 3.30 for men, and this difference was statistically significant. Women were also significantly more egalitarian than men on both the “mothering” gender ideology subscore and the “general division of labor” subscore, though even the men’s scores—while close to the “middle” score of 3—still leaned egalitarian on average.

Regarding the dependent variables used in these analyses, husbands were reported as performing an average of 34.35% of the total housework hours contributed by both members of the couple, and 37.87% of the total hours spent caring for children or other family
members. As Figures 4.1 and 4.2 show, the modal categories for husbands’ contributions to both housework and family care were both 50%, though both the variable means and histograms indicate that the results were skewed toward husbands providing less than 50%, with substantial percentages of husbands providing no family labor at all, especially housework. Again, the husbands here refer to the respondents themselves if they are male, and the respondent’s spouse for female respondents. Given this, it is important to note that women, on average, reported a statistically significantly lower percentage of housework performed by their husbands than men did when reporting about themselves. Men reported, on average, that they did a 37.29% share of housework, versus the 31.82%, on average, that female respondents reported was performed by their husbands. Similarly, men reported doing an average of 38.97% of the total family care hours, versus an average of 36.93% that women said their husbands did. For family care, however, this difference was not statistically significant.

Table 4.5 (see page 146) is a frequency distribution, pertaining to Research Question 3, that shows the responses to questions regarding the most and least desirable work arrangements for families with young children (under school age) in the home. Looking at the left side of the table, a total of 85.61% identified some sort of a “neo-traditional” arrangement as best, meaning that they either believed that the mother should stay home full-time and the father should work full-time (44.34%) or the mother should work only part-time with the father working full-time (41.27%). Slightly more than 1% said they favored the opposite arrangement, meaning that the father would stay home either part-time or full-time.
Figure 4.1. Histogram graphing the percentage of housework done by husbands across sample of married GSS respondents

Figure 4.2. Histogram graphing the percentage of family care done by husbands across sample of married GSS respondents
while the mother works full time. Only about 13% of the sample favored a strictly egalitarian arrangement in which both parents worked either part-time (3.07%) or full-time (10.14%).

The right side of the table shows that, by a considerable margin, respondents believed that either “both the mother and father work full-time” (38.55%) or “the father stays home and the mother works full-time” (36.34%) were the least desirable arrangements. Of the remaining respondents, 14.10% said that both the mother and father working part-time was the least desirable, followed by 4.63% reporting that the mother staying home and the father working full-time was least desirable, another 4.63% reporting that the father working part-time while the mother works full-time was least desirable, and 1.76% saying that the mother working part-time and the father working full-time was the least desirable arrangement.

Lastly, Table 4.7 (see page 149) shows a breakdown of responses to questions regarding respondents’ beliefs about the extent to which mothers should work outside the home, also broken down by sex. A majority of respondents held differing views about mothers of children under school age versus mothers of school-age children, with 24.12% saying that mothers of preschoolers should work part-time while mothers of school-age children should work full-time, and similar 28.39% saying that mothers of preschoolers should stay home full-time while mothers of school-age children should work only part-time. Similarly, 5.78% said that mothers of preschoolers should be home full-time but then work outside the home full-time once their children were in school. For those who were consistent regardless of the age of the children in the home, 18.84% said that mothers of both preschoolers and school-aged children should work full-time, 16.08% favored mothers of both preschoolers and school-age children working only part-time, and 5.28% of respondents
said they believed that mothers of both preschool and school-age children should be at home full-time. Only 1.5% of respondents favored arrangements in which the mother works more hours when her children are younger versus older.

Looking at the breakdowns by sex, women to a greater extent than men appeared to support mothers spending more time working outside the home. For example, 26.87% of women versus 21.32% of men said they believed mothers of preschoolers should work part-time and mothers of school-age children should work full-time. Conversely, 34.52% of men said they believed mothers of preschoolers should stay home while mothers of school-age children should work only part-time, while only 22.39% of women said the same. In general, a total of 47.21% of men favored arrangements that involved mothers staying home full-time with preschoolers, versus only 31.84% of women. On the other hand, a total of 21.89% of women said they favored arrangements in which mothers of preschoolers worked full-time, vs. only 17.77% of men favoring this type of arrangement.

**OLS Regression Analyses**

Research Question 1 addresses the association between gender ideology as measured on a conventional gender ideology index and the percentage of housework and family care performed by the husband in each couple. Ordinary least squares (OLS) regression is the appropriate tool for this and other analyses in this paper using these dependent variables, given the operationalization of these dependent variables as continuous percentages and that the effects of the independent variables are generally presumed to be linear.
Hypothesis 1A is a descriptive hypothesis that, based on the theory that the “sacredness” of the mother-child bond is what causes marriages to traditionalize upon the birth of the first child, presumes that heterosexual couples without children will have more egalitarian beliefs than those with children. However, t-tests performed indicate that there is not a significant difference in gender ideology between married respondents with children and those without children ($t=-1.48; 517$ df; $p=0.14$). On average, married people without children actually had a less egalitarian gender ideology (mean of 3.42) than married people with children (3.54). Thus, Hypothesis 1A is not supported.

Hypothesis 1B evaluates the alignment between gender ideology, as measured using a conventional gender ideology index, and the division of housework and family care between heterosexual partners. Turning to Table 4.2 Models 1 and 5, OLS regression analyses show that when in the model alone, gender ideology is a statistically significant, positive predictor of both the division of housework and the division of family care. However, Models 2 and 6 show that once wives’ work hours are added to the model, the association between gender ideology and division of labor becomes marginally significant ($p=.09$) for housework and non-significant for family care. This effect was unchanged by the addition of only the husband’s work hours or gender when those alone were added to the model (not shown). These findings remain unchanged in the full main effects models (3 and 7) predicting both housework and family care, with the only statistically significant independent variables beyond the spouses’ work hours being female or in the “other races” category, which were statistically significant, negative predictors of the percentage of housework performed by husbands, and having a graduate degree, which was a statistically significant, positive
Table 4.2. Linear Regressions Modeling the Effects of Full Conventional Gender Ideology Scale on Percentage of Total Housework and Family Care Performed by Husbands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Housework (N=495)</th>
<th>Family Care (N=501)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Model 1</td>
<td>Model 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology Full Scale Score (higher numbers more egalitarian)</td>
<td>4.12* (1.18)</td>
<td>2.03 (1.20)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>0.28* (0.05)</td>
<td>0.31* (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>-0.24* (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.24* (0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>-5.83* (2.01)</td>
<td>3.59 (8.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 in home</td>
<td>3.08 (2.12)</td>
<td>6.15 (8.43)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (baseline=white)</td>
<td>4.09 (3.39)</td>
<td>4.10 (3.40)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Income (baseline=Average)</td>
<td>-2.76 (2.48)</td>
<td>-2.84 (2.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>-3.84 (2.55)</td>
<td>-3.73 (2.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average Income</td>
<td>-3.84 (2.55)</td>
<td>-3.73 (2.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average Income</td>
<td>-3.84 (2.55)</td>
<td>-3.73 (2.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Earned by R (baseline=no degree)</td>
<td>-2.34 (3.18)</td>
<td>-2.20 (3.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent X Gender Ideology</td>
<td>-2.73 (4.41)</td>
<td>-2.28 (4.44)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>-3.86 (3.86)</td>
<td>-3.89 (3.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>0.51 (4.07)</td>
<td>0.79 (4.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-2.93 (3.36)</td>
<td>5.21* (2.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent X Gender Ideology</td>
<td>-1.16 (2.61)</td>
<td>1.22 (2.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 X Gender Ideology</td>
<td>0.38 (2.51)</td>
<td>2.84* (2.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female X Children&lt;18 X Gender Ideology</td>
<td>0.38 (1.17)</td>
<td>2.84* (1.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>20.30* (4.19)</td>
<td>20.84* (4.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted $R^2$</td>
<td>.0220</td>
<td>.0824</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F</td>
<td>12.13*</td>
<td>23.19*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized (metric) regression coefficients shown with standard errors in parentheses. Married 2012 General Social Survey respondents (weighted).
Percentages = Proportion of total work performed by respondent if respondent is male, and by respondent’s husband if respondent is female, multiplied by 100.
*p < .05

predictor of the percentage of family care performed by husbands. Therefore, it appears that the association between gender ideology and division of household labor in the bivariate
models is spurious, accounted for predominantly by the number of hours worked by the wife. In other words, an association between gender ideology and the number of hours worked by the wife is making it appear like gender ideology is predicting the division of labor, when in fact it is the wife’s work hours that is predicting the division of labor. Thus, Hypothesis 1B is also unsupported.

It is important to note that both the wife’s work hours and husband’s work hours have statistically significant effects across all models in this and all other analyses. As would be predicted by the time availability hypotheses, the more hours worked by the wife, the more housework/family care is performed by the husband. There is a similar negative association with husbands’ work hours, that is, the more hours the husband works outside the home, the lesser his contribution to housework and family care. Both of these associations are independent of the number of hours worked by the other spouse, and of gender ideology, in addition to the other control variables in the models.

Hypothesis 1C looks specifically at the interaction between married people with and without children under 18 in the home when it comes to predicting the division of housework and family care, suggesting that beliefs and behaviors become less aligned once heterosexual couples have children. To fully explore this question as it may also relate to the gender of the respondent, I include in Models 4 and 8 two-way interactions between gender and gender ideology, and children in the home and gender ideology, as well as a three-way interaction between gender, children in the home, and gender ideology. When it comes to the prediction of family care (but not housework), Model 8 shows that there is a statistically significant two-way interaction between gender and gender ideology, and a 3-way interaction between
gender, gender ideology, and children under 18 in the home. Further analyses (not shown) indicate that gender ideology was a marginally significant predictor (p=.09) of husband’s portion of family care for married women but not for married men (p=0.35), explaining the 2-way interaction between gender and gender ideology. For married women with children under 18 in the home, the relationship between gender ideology and husband’s portion of child was just below 0.10 (p=0.0989), and was non-significant for married women without children (p=0.21).

Thus, Hypothesis 1C is also largely unsupported, with a caveat. The statistically significant two-way interaction between gender and gender ideology when it comes to predicting the division of family care suggests that women’s ideologies may have more sway in how this particular type of labor is divided than those of their husbands (see Greenstein 1996). While there was also an interaction involving children in the home, this, too, applied only to women and the prediction of family care. Moreover, these associations were largely non-significant for married women both with and without children. Even when taking into consideration the marginally significant result for married women with children, the finding is in the opposite direction than what was predicted, that is, married women with children appeared to have gender ideologies more aligned with their division of family care than married women without children.

Research Question 2 looks to explain the relationships between gender ideology and division of labor when looking at beliefs related to mothering and child/family care versus beliefs related more generally to the division of household labor and housework. Hypothesis 2A is a descriptive hypothesis suggesting that beliefs will be more traditional when related to
motherhood and more egalitarian when related more generally to the division of family labor between heterosexual couples. A paired t-test was performed on the sample of married GSS respondents, and there was indeed a statistically significant difference between the means of the mothering and general division of labor factors derived from the complete gender ideology index ($t=6.91; 518$ df; $p<.0001$). However, the difference was in the opposite direction as predicted, with the mean of the mothering factor (3.59) more, not less, egalitarian than the mean of the general division of labor factor (3.32). Thus, Hypothesis 2A is not supported.

Hypothesis 2B and 2C turn our attention to the extent to which there is an association between ideology and division of labor when looking at the mothering and general DOL factors separately, presuming that the mothering factor will predict the division of child/family care and the general division of labor factor will predict the division of housework. However, none of the main effects models in Table 4.3 predict a statistically significant relationship between the mother-related gender ideology index and the division of family care. There is a statistically significant 3-way interaction between gender, gender ideology and children under 18 in the home predicting the division of family care, just as there was in Table 4.2, which used the full gender ideology scale as a predictor rather than the mothering-only subscale. The 2-way interaction between gender and gender ideology was marginally significant ($p=0.076$), also suggesting similarity with Table 4.2. This suggests that the mothering-factor-only index is not behaving differently from the full index when predicting the division of family care. However, unlike they did with the full index, separate analyses (not shown) in this case also did not yield a statistically significant nor near-
Table 4.3. Linear Regressions Modeling the Effects of the Mother-Related Gender Ideology Subscale on the Percentage of Family Care Performed by Husbands (N=527)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology Mother-Related Subscore</td>
<td>1.48</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>-1.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(higher numbers more egalitarian)</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td>(0.99)</td>
<td>(1.61)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>-0.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>-2.94</td>
<td>-11.89</td>
<td>-1.43</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
<td>(6.81)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
<td>(7.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>11.89</td>
<td>2.80</td>
<td>-11.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
<td>(6.81)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
<td>(7.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 in home</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>-0.22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
<td>(7.09)</td>
<td>(2.03)</td>
<td>(7.09)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (baseline=white)</td>
<td>0.28</td>
<td>-0.11</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>(3.25)</td>
<td>(3.24)</td>
<td>(3.18)</td>
<td>(3.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.80</td>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>1.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Income (baseline=Average)</td>
<td>-2.47</td>
<td>-2.52</td>
<td>-2.47</td>
<td>-2.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average Income</td>
<td>(2.38)</td>
<td>(2.38)</td>
<td>(2.42)</td>
<td>(2.42)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average Income</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.27</td>
<td>2.20</td>
<td>2.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Earned by R (baseline=no degree)</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.39</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td>0.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>(3.06)</td>
<td>(3.05)</td>
<td>(3.17)</td>
<td>(3.17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>3.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>3.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>10.11*</td>
<td>9.73*</td>
<td>10.11*</td>
<td>9.73*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.91)</td>
<td>(3.91)</td>
<td>(3.91)</td>
<td>(3.91)</td>
<td>(3.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.39</td>
<td>3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
<td>(1.91)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;18 X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
<td>(2.04)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female X Children&lt;18 X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
<td>-2.37*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
<td>(1.06)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>31.97*</td>
<td>30.96*</td>
<td>35.71*</td>
<td>40.18*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(3.53)</td>
<td>(3.43)</td>
<td>(4.54)</td>
<td>(6.07)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.0027</td>
<td>.0603</td>
<td>.1209</td>
<td>.1272</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F</td>
<td>2.41</td>
<td>17.86*</td>
<td>6.56*</td>
<td>5.79*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized (metric) regression coefficients shown with standard errors in parentheses.
Married or living-as-married 2012 General Social Survey respondents (weighted).
Percentage = Proportion of total family care performed by respondent if respondent is male, and by respondent’s husband if respondent is female, multiplied by 100.
*p < .05

significant association between the mothering-related gender ideology factor and the division of family care for any of the subgroups, including married women with children, which was
marginally significant in Table 4.2. Thus, Hypothesis 2B was not supported. Notably, the only statistically significant predictor in this model, beyond the work hours of both spouses, was having a graduate degree, which predicted a 10.11% greater portion of housework performed by the husband.

Table 4.4 evaluates Hypothesis 2C, namely the nature of the relationship between the general division of labor subscale and the division of housework. Table 4.4 shows that the relationship between the general division of labor subscore and the division of housework appears to be more robust. The subscore was statistically significant when in the model by itself and remained so when accounting for all control variables in Model 3, predicting a 2.69% increase in the percentage of housework performed by the husband for each point toward egalitarianism on the subscale. (The association just missed significance in Model 2, with a p-value of .054, when only the wife’s work hours were in the model.) Therefore, it can be concluded that the general division of labor gender ideology subscale is a statistically significant predictor of the division of housework, net of the other variables in the model, including the husbands’ and wives’ work hours. Thus, Hypothesis 2C is supported. That said, it is important to note that the association between the full gender ideology index and the division of housework was marginally significant in Table 4.2 (p=.068). This suggests that there may be only minimal difference between the full gender ideology index and the general division of labor factor subscale when it comes to predicting the division of housework.

Based on what I have proposed is a cultural idealization of traditional family arrangements based on a perception of the mother-child bond as “sacred,” Hypothesis 3A
### Table 4.4. Linear Regressions Modeling the Effects of the General Division of Labor Gender Ideology Subscale on the Percentage of Housework Performed by Husbands (N=502)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
<th>Model 4</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology General Division of Labor Subscore (higher numbers more egalitarian)</td>
<td>3.92* (1.10)</td>
<td>2.14 (1.11)</td>
<td>2.69* (1.17)</td>
<td>4.69* (1.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>0.28* (0.05)</td>
<td>0.31* (0.05)</td>
<td>0.31* (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>-0.25* (0.05)</td>
<td>-0.25* (0.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>-6.30* (1.98)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 in home</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (baseline=white)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>4.32 (3.38)</td>
<td>4.34 (3.39)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>-9.07* (3.20)</td>
<td>-9.20* (3.22)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Income (baseline=Average)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average Income</td>
<td>-2.63 (2.46)</td>
<td>-2.67 (2.46)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average Income</td>
<td>-3.85 (2.52)</td>
<td>-3.82 (2.52)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Earned by R (baseline=no degree)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>-3.05 (3.13)</td>
<td>-2.72 (3.14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>3.15 (4.33)</td>
<td>3.09 (4.34)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>-3.48 (3.82)</td>
<td>-3.00 (3.85)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>-0.88 (4.04)</td>
<td>-0.72 (4.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;18 X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female X Children&lt;18 X Gender Ideology Subscore</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>21.52* (3.78)</td>
<td>20.78* (3.66)</td>
<td>33.23* (4.69)</td>
<td>27.24* (6.48)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.0227</td>
<td>.0831</td>
<td>.1607</td>
<td>.1601</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F</td>
<td>12.65*</td>
<td>23.72*</td>
<td>8.38*</td>
<td>6.97*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized (metric) regression coefficients shown with standard errors in parentheses.
Married or living-as-married 2012 General Social Survey respondents (weighted).
Percentage = Portion of total housework performed by respondent if respondent is male, and by respondent’s husband if respondent is female, multiplied by 100. *p < .05

looks at the extent to which respondents believe that neo-traditional arrangements are ideal
will predict the division of housework and family care. As mentioned in the Descriptive
Statistics section, Table 4.5 shows that GSS respondents overwhelmingly idealized some type of neo-traditional type of arrangement. Of married respondents, 85.61% said that they believe that the best way to organize a family with a child under school age is for the mother to either stay home full-time (44.34%) or work only part-time (41.27%) while the father works full-time. This arrangement was favored overwhelmingly above a counter-traditional arrangement in which the mother works full-time when the father is home either full- or part-time, as just over 1% said either of these arrangements were ideal despite the fact that these arrangement would theoretically provide children with the same amount of parental time and supervision. This was also a far greater percentage than those who favored both types of egalitarian arrangements (both parents work full-time or part-time), which totaled 13.21%. This finding supports the foundations for Hypothesis 3A, namely that some iteration of the “traditional” breadwinner-homemaker model is clearly idealized among these respondents when it comes to families with children.

What’s more, the right side of Table 4.5 shows an active disfavor for both egalitarian and counter-traditional arrangements. When asked which was the least desirable way to arrange a family with young children, the full-time dual-earner arrangement (38.55%) and the counter-traditional arrangement where the mother works full-time and the father stays home full-time (36.34%) were the most common responses by a large margin. This shows that, despite the rhetoric by some who say they believe that “a parent” should be home with a young child—a gender-neutral statement—it appears overwhelmingly that people feel certain that the parent at home should be the mother. Again, this supports the foundations for Hypothesis 3, as these frequency distributions in and of themselves provide support for the
Consider a family with a child under school age. What, in your opinion, is the best way for them to organize their family and work life? (N=424)

And, in your opinion, which of these options would be the least desirable? (N=454)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESPONSE</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Cumulative Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The mother stays home and the father works full time</td>
<td>188</td>
<td>44.34</td>
<td>44.34</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>4.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The mother works part-time and the father works full-time.</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>41.27</td>
<td>85.61</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1.76</td>
<td>6.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the mother and father work full-time.</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>10.14</td>
<td>95.75</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>38.55</td>
<td>44.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both the mother and father work part-time.</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3.07</td>
<td>98.82</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>14.10</td>
<td>59.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The father works part-time and the mother works full-time.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.47</td>
<td>99.29</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>4.63</td>
<td>63.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The father stays home and the mother works full time.</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.71</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>36.34</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Full sample of married 2012 General Social Survey respondents who were asked these questions and provided responses.

theory that neo-traditional family arrangements are idealized, and that this idealization is based specifically on the perceived necessity for mothers, rather than fathers, to spend more time at home with young children.

OLS regression analyses in Table 4.6 show that beliefs about “best” family arrangements also more clearly predict the division of family labor, at least housework, than the traditional gender ideology measures. Specifically, the belief that neo-traditional arrangements, where the mother either stays home full time or works only part-time while the father works full-time, are ideal was negatively associated with the portion of housework performed by husbands, net the control variables in the model, including wives’ (and husbands’) work hours. When alone in the model, the belief that neo-traditional relationships are best was associated with 15.2% less housework performed by husbands compared with
Table 4.6. Linear Regressions Modeling the Effects of Beliefs about the “Best” Way to Organize a Family on the Percentage of Housework Performed by Husbands (N=399)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Model I</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
<th>Model 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that neo-traditional family arrangement is ideal</td>
<td>-15.20*</td>
<td>-11.31*</td>
<td>-10.23*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.37)</td>
<td>(3.41)</td>
<td>(3.31)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that counter-traditional family arrangement is ideal</td>
<td>-10.78</td>
<td>-5.94</td>
<td>-0.91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(12.43)</td>
<td>(12.20)</td>
<td>(11.74)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>0.23*</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>-0.28*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(0.05)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>-3.31</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.12)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 in home</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.31)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (baseline=white)</td>
<td>7.05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.79)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>-7.68*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.24)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Income (baseline=Average)</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average Income</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.88)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average Income</td>
<td>-4.20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2.59)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Earned by R (baseline=no degree)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>-2.68</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.18)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>2.70</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.56)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>-2.33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.99)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>1.85</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4.32)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>46.43*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3.14)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>.0442</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F</td>
<td>10.20*</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Note: Unstandardized (metric) regression coefficients shown with standard errors in parentheses.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married 2012 General Social Survey respondents (weighted).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage = Proportion of total housework performed by respondent if respondent is male, and by respondent’s husband if respondent is female, multiplied by 100.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*p &lt; .05</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

those who believed egalitarian arrangements were ideal. Even in the full main effects model (Table 4.6, Model 3) accounting for all demographic and control variables, this belief was associated with a drop of 10.23% in total housework performed by husbands. Analyses with
the same variables predicting the division of family care (not shown) yielded only a marginally significant association between beliefs about best family arrangements and family care. Thus, Hypothesis 3A is supported for housework but not for family care. In this analysis, like those in Tables 4.2 and 4.4, being of a race other than white or black was negatively associated with the percentage of housework performed by the husband and was the only statistically significant control variable in the model.

Further, rather than looking at gender ideology or family arrangements in the abstract, as is done in more conventional gender ideology indices like the ones used in the prior analyses, Hypotheses 3B and 3C suggest that the specific belief that mothers need to be home with their children—that is, participate in the paid labor market either in a limited way or not at all, especially when their children are young—may also be better than conventional gender ideology scales at predicting a lesser contribution of housework and family care on the part of the husband. Table 4.7 shows the distribution of beliefs regarding the arrangements of mothers of babies/preschoolers vs. school-age children. As with the ideal family arrangements, both men and women overwhelmingly believe that mothers of babies/preschoolers should either stay home full-time (39.45%) or work only part-time (40.7%). This leaves only 19.84% of people who believe that mothers of babies/preschoolers should work full-time, and this amount was less for men (17.77%). Opinions shifted toward more work outside of the home for mothers of school-age children. For those mothers, many still believed they should work part-time (45.22%), but many fewer believed they should stay home full-time (6.03%) and many more believed they should work full-time (48.74%). This distribution supports the foundation for hypotheses 3B and 3C, as well as the “myth of the
Table 4.7. Frequency Distribution for Beliefs about Mothers’ Work Hours

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BELIEF</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Women Only</th>
<th>Men Only</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(N=398)</td>
<td>(N=201)</td>
<td>(N=197)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers and mothers of school-age children</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should both stay home full-time.</td>
<td>5.28</td>
<td>3.98</td>
<td>6.60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home full-time and mothers</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should work only part-time.</td>
<td>28.39</td>
<td>22.39</td>
<td>34.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home full-time and mothers</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should work full-time.</td>
<td>5.78</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>6.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should work part-time and mothers</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should stay home full-time.</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers and mothers of school-age children</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should both work only part-time.</td>
<td>16.08</td>
<td>18.41</td>
<td>13.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should work part-time and mothers</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should work full-time.</td>
<td>24.12</td>
<td>26.87</td>
<td>21.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should work full-time and mothers</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should stay home full-time.</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>0.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers should work full-time and mothers</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>of school-age children should work only part-time.</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td>1.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of babies/preschoolers and mothers of school-age children</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>should both work full-time.</td>
<td>18.84</td>
<td>21.39</td>
<td>16.24</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Full sample of married 2012 General Social Survey respondents who were asked these questions and provided responses.

sacred mother-child bond,” by showing that, on average, married GSS respondents believed that mothers need to spend more time with younger children more than they do with older children.

When it comes to predicting the division of housework and family care, Table 4.8 Model 1 shows that believing that mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home full-time with their children was significantly associated with a 9.21% decrease in the percentage of housework performed by the husband, net the other variables in the model, including
Table 4.8. Linear Regressions Modeling the Effects of Beliefs about Mothers’ Work Hours on the Percentage of Total Housework and Family Care Performed by Husbands

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Belief that mothers of Preschoolers should stay home full-time</td>
<td>-9.21*</td>
<td>-12.46*</td>
<td>-6.95*</td>
<td>-8.51*</td>
<td>-12.09*</td>
<td>-2.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that mothers of preschoolers should work only part-time</td>
<td>(3.36)</td>
<td>(3.70)</td>
<td>(3.38)</td>
<td>(3.73)</td>
<td>(4.72)</td>
<td>(4.59)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that mothers of school-age children should stay home full-time</td>
<td>1.90</td>
<td>-1.78</td>
<td>-2.81</td>
<td>-2.77</td>
<td>(3.21)</td>
<td>(3.23)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belief that mothers of school-age children should work only part-time</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>-0.22*</td>
<td>-0.29*</td>
<td>-0.29*</td>
<td>-0.29*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>0.28*</td>
<td>0.27*</td>
<td>0.29*</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.31*</td>
<td>0.32*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.06)</td>
<td>(0.05)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female Respondent</td>
<td>-5.39*</td>
<td>-5.62*</td>
<td>-6.62*</td>
<td>-4.48*</td>
<td>-4.57*</td>
<td>-4.19*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt; 18 in home</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>2.50</td>
<td>3.09</td>
<td>0.24</td>
<td>(2.33)</td>
<td>(2.25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race (baseline=white)</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>3.86</td>
<td>3.57</td>
<td>-0.58</td>
<td>-0.44</td>
<td>-1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>(3.73)</td>
<td>(3.71)</td>
<td>(3.63)</td>
<td>(3.68)</td>
<td>(3.68)</td>
<td>(3.46)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Race</td>
<td>-7.94*</td>
<td>-8.49*</td>
<td>-10.38*</td>
<td>3.50</td>
<td>3.22</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relative Income (baseline=average)</td>
<td>(3.47)</td>
<td>(3.47)</td>
<td>(3.49)</td>
<td>(3.49)</td>
<td>(3.51)</td>
<td>(3.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Above Average Income</td>
<td>-1.25</td>
<td>-1.04</td>
<td>-2.50</td>
<td>-1.91</td>
<td>-1.81</td>
<td>-3.39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Below Average Income</td>
<td>(2.89)</td>
<td>(2.88)</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
<td>(2.91)</td>
<td>(2.92)</td>
<td>(2.83)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Degree Earned by R (baseline=no degree)</td>
<td>-5.14</td>
<td>-5.42*</td>
<td>-5.28</td>
<td>1.51</td>
<td>1.37</td>
<td>0.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High School</td>
<td>(2.74)</td>
<td>(2.73)</td>
<td>(2.75)</td>
<td>(2.74)</td>
<td>(2.74)</td>
<td>(2.64)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>-2.46</td>
<td>-2.35</td>
<td>-2.42</td>
<td>-1.28</td>
<td>-1.21</td>
<td>-2.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bachelor’s</td>
<td>(3.29)</td>
<td>(3.28)</td>
<td>(3.31)</td>
<td>(3.30)</td>
<td>(3.30)</td>
<td>(3.21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>0.79</td>
<td>-0.49</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>-1.33</td>
<td>-1.88</td>
<td>-1.51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;18 X Belief that mothers of preschoolers should stay home</td>
<td>-4.26</td>
<td>-4.83</td>
<td>-4.00</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>-0.24</td>
<td>-0.81</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children &lt;18 X Belief that mothers of preschoolers should stay home</td>
<td>(4.84)</td>
<td>(4.86)</td>
<td>(4.78)</td>
<td>(4.80)</td>
<td>(4.83)</td>
<td>(4.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>4.68*</td>
<td>48.74*</td>
<td>45.41*</td>
<td>45.86*</td>
<td>46.76*</td>
<td>44.24*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjusted R²</td>
<td>(5.04)</td>
<td>(5.10)</td>
<td>(4.33)</td>
<td>(5.04)</td>
<td>(5.18)</td>
<td>(4.19)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Model F</td>
<td>.1463</td>
<td>.1535</td>
<td>.1503</td>
<td>.1336</td>
<td>.1336</td>
<td>.1354</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Unstandardized (metric) regression coefficients shown with standard errors in parentheses.
Married 2012 General Social Survey respondents who were asked all questions (weighted).
Percentages = Proportion of total work performed by respondent if respondent is male, and by respondent’s husband if respondent is female, multiplied by 100. *p < .05
husbands’ and wives’ work hours. This appears to be the case across female and male respondents, as an interaction between gender and beliefs (not shown) was not statistically significant. Thus, Hypothesis 3B is supported for housework. Notably, gender was also a statistically significant predictor in this model, with female respondents reporting a 5.39% lower percentage of housework done by husbands. This is consistent with other models predicting the division of housework in Tables 4.2 and 4.4 (though not Table 4.6) and corresponds with the finding that female respondents are reporting that their husbands do a lesser percentage of total housework than male respondents report themselves doing. Gender was also a statistically significant predictor of family care in Table 4.8, though not in the other tables predicting the division of family care.

Model 2 in Table 4.8 also shows a statistically significant interaction between beliefs about mothers staying home with babies/preschoolers and having children under 18 in the home when it comes to predicting the division of housework. (This was the only statistically significant interaction found; 2-way and 3-way interactions that included gender were performed but not shown because they were not statistically significant.) Examining this interaction, separate analyses not shown indicate that the association between these beliefs and a decreased portion of housework done by the husband was specific to people without kids (p=.02), as the association was non-significant (p=.22) for people with kids under 18 in the home. Returning to Hypothesis 1C, this finding suggests the hypothesis that ideology and division of labor will be more aligned for heterosexual couples without children than it is for couples with children was supported when it comes to beliefs about mothers staying home with babies/preschoolers, at least for predicting the division of housework, even though it
was not supported when using the conventional gender ideology index. Model 4 shows that the belief that mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home full time is also significantly associated with a decrease in husbands’ portion of family care, net the other variables in the model. Specifically, the belief that mothers should stay home with babies or preschoolers full-time was associated with a 6.95% drop in family care performed by the husband, net the other variables in the model. Thus, Hypothesis 3B is supported family care as well as housework. Model 5 shows that there was not a statistically significant interaction in the relationship between beliefs that mothers of babies/preschoolers should stay home full-time and the presence of children in the home when it comes to predicting husbands’ portion of family care, as there was for housework. As with housework, there were no other statistically significant interactions.

Table 4.8, Model 3 shows that the belief that mothers of school-age children should stay home full-time or work only part-time were both statistically significant predictors of a reduced portion of housework done by husbands. Specifically, believing that mothers of school-age children should stay home full-time was associated with a 12.09% drop in the portion of housework performed by the husband as compared to those who believed these mothers should work full-time, and believing that mothers of school-age children should work only part-time was associated with a lesser but still statistically significant drop in the husband’s housework of 5.42%. Thus, Hypothesis 3C is supported for housework. All interactions between these beliefs, gender, and having kids under 18 in the home were tested (though not shown) and found to be nonsignificant. Additionally, Model 6 shows that beliefs about mothers of school-age children is not associated with husbands’ percentage of family
care, and all interactions tested here were nonsignificant as well. Thus, Hypothesis 3C is not supported for family care.

Discussion

This analysis set out to test some of the foundational concepts underlying a neo-institutional understanding of the persistence of gendered family arrangements. Specifically, I looked to determine if a) neo-traditional family arrangements among heterosexual couples were considered more culturally legitimate than other arrangements, and b) the extent to which this legitimacy is rooted in what I labeled the “myth of the sacred mother-child bond”—the belief that the relationship between mothers and their children has “magical” qualities that transcend the more mundane aspects of child care and, by extension, the belief that the mother should be the person primarily responsible for the care of children, particularly when they are young. Given the halt in progress toward gender egalitarianism, and the apparent stall in progress toward a fully egalitarian division of family labor, I was specifically interested in seeing the extent to which particular beliefs that women and men hold about gender and family roles predict how their actual family roles unfold.

These analyses promised to add to the current body of literature on the relationship between ideology and division of labor in several ways. First, I tested beliefs about mothering and more general beliefs about division of labor separately, rather than together as has been done in most prior research, to see if relationships between ideology and behavior might be more robust if specifically looking at the role one or the other factor played in predicting the division of housework versus family care. Perhaps more importantly, the 2012
General Social Survey provided a unique opportunity to examine the role that cultural ideals in the abstract play in determining the division of family labor. By asking respondents questions about what they believe to be the “best” or “least desirable” ways to organize family life, the GSS was able to tap into what respondents idealize—a cultural product separate from the extent to which respondents may agree or disagree with specific aspects of prescribed roles for mothers and fathers. Similarly, the GSS also asked very specific questions about respondents’ beliefs about mothers’ time with their children, asking separate questions about mothers of babies and preschoolers versus mothers of older children. This is also a unique construct that taps into the types of arrangements that are idealized by respondents, illuminating potential differences in beliefs about the need for mothers’ time and nurturance during different stages of children’s lives. Taken together, these unique constructs, and the findings that have resulted from their use, shed new light on the relationship between ideology and behavior and offer a window into the cultural construct that I have identified as the “sacred mother-child bond.”

Consistent with the extensive body of research that shows a varied and inconsistent relationship between gender ideology—at least as conventionally measured using the type of attitude index normally found in large-scale data sets—and the actual division of household labor, I find here that this type of gender ideology scale only predicts the division of household labor in limited ways. Specifically, gender ideology as measured by this index only marginally predicted the division of family care, not housework, and only for married women, not married men. There was also some suggestion that this relationship might exist more for women with children, but the evidence for this was not overwhelming. Though this
finding suggests that wives’ ideologies might hold more sway than husbands’ when it comes to determining the division of household labor, it is important to temper this conclusion by noting that this only applied to the division of family care, not housework, and that this was the only model tested in this analysis that showed this kind of two-way interaction with gender. Therefore, further study is warranted to draw specific conclusions about the relative role of wives’ vs. husbands’ ideologies. What’s more, given that this analysis relies on cross-sectional rather than longitudinal data, it is impossible to conclude whether the ideology actually caused the difference in family care allocation, or if adjustments in ideology after the allocation of labor had already been determined were more likely to be made by women, rather than men.

Factor analyses using the gender ideology index did separate the six items on the original index into two very distinct factors—one that focused more on the suffering of children or families when mothers are absent for periods of time, and another that focused more on the general division of labor of the spouses. This would be consistent with the argument that mothering is viewed fundamentally differently than other family tasks. However, these separate factors did not behave all that differently than the entire index when it came to the prediction of the division of labor. One exception is that the general division of labor subscale was a more robust predictor of the division of housework than the full scale, suggesting that, once ideas about “mothering” and family care are removed from the discussion, there may be a clearer relationship between ideology and behavior. This also warrants further scrutiny, as it suggests that, as the “myth of the sacred mother-child bond” might indicate, beliefs about mothering and nurturing in general may complicate ideas about
the provision of family care, while beliefs about division of labor and the performance of housework may be more clear-cut, and therefore more easily aligned.

The larger story emerging from these analyses is one of measurement, particularly related to gender ideology. Stemming from what I have outlined as a neo-institutional approach to understanding the family organization, I looked to see whether the cultural idealization of the breadwinner-homemaker model, and specifically of the bond between mothers and their children, were distinct sets of beliefs from those typically measured in gender ideology indices, and therefore might do a better job of predicting how heterosexual couples decide to allocate their family responsibilities. This is important to understand because knowing more about how these arrangements are arrived at—and, specifically, what types of beliefs are at the core of these decisions—can help us to understand why roles have remained more entrenched in recent decades than they had been in the preceding decade or two. Arguably, these measurements also provide a more telling window into the current cultural climate, as what is considered to be “ideal” at any given time is most certainly a cultural product.

The frequency distributions shown in Table 4.5 show that neo-traditional arrangements are indeed favored overwhelmingly when it comes to heterosexual families with children under school age. With more than 40 percent of married people idealizing an arrangement in which the mother is home with the children full-time, it can even be argued that fully traditional families—those reminiscent of 1950s white middle-class America—are still idealized in a great many cases. Further, this preference is very much rooted in gender rather than pragmatism. As the right side of the table shows, there was an equally
overwhelming disfavor for identical arrangements in which the gender of the parents is swapped, that is, the father is home full-time while the mother works outside the home full-time. In fact, this type of counter-traditional arrangement was the modal response to the question about which arrangement was the least desirable, followed closely by the fully egalitarian arrangement in which both parents work full-time. This alone provides evidence that, when stripped of pragmatic concerns or the details of individual circumstances, the breadwinner-homemaker model of family organization, or some iteration thereof, is still strongly idealized, even to the extent where alternative arrangements—including those that would theoretically provide a similar amount of parental supervision of children—are seen as particularly undesirable.

This analysis also shows that the idealization of neo-traditional arrangements is ultimately associated with the way that family responsibilities come to be allocated. This was clearly evident in relation to housework. Specifically, those married respondents who believed that a neo-traditional arrangement is ideal reported that the husbands in their households do 10.23% less housework than those who preferred egalitarian arrangements, even when accounting for husbands’ and wives’ work hours as well as the rest of the control variables. This is an especially notable effect given that the similar analysis that used the conventional gender ideology index did not yield a statistically significant relationship to the division of housework. This shows that the idealization of neo-traditional arrangements not only exists, but also that it may have important consequences when it comes to household division of labor, and potentially to the stalling progress toward gender equality.
Interestingly, however, these analyses revealed only a marginal association between this belief and the percentage of family care performed by husbands.

The final set of analyses I performed provided further support for the idea that the idealization of the breadwinner-homemaker model is rooted in the belief that mothers need to be home with their young children, arguably because their continuous presence in caring for young children cannot be substituted. Specifically, Table 4.7 showed that both men and women believed that it was more important for mothers of young children to be at home for a greater number of hours than mothers of older children. In fact, the modal responses across the board were all preferences for mothers of younger children to be home more than mothers of older children. This lends credence to the argument that mothers’ bond with young children is deemed particularly “sacred,” as respondents overwhelmingly believed that mothers of older children should work at least part-time.

These beliefs also had more substantial associations with the division of family labor than the beliefs tracked in the conventional gender ideology index. Unlike the idealization of neo-traditional arrangements, the belief that mothers of young children should be home was associated with a decrease in husbands’ contribution to family care as well as housework. Specifically, this belief was associated with husbands doing over 9 percent less housework and nearly 7 percent less family care compared to those who believed that mothers of young children should work outside the home full-time. This effect was less, but still statistically significant, when it came to the belief that mothers of school-age children should work only part-time, which was associated with a drop in 5.42 percent of housework performed by husbands. Interestingly, the largest drop in the portion of housework performed by husbands
(12.09 percent) was associated with the belief that mothers of even school-age children should also stay home with children full-time. While this may appear to contradict the evidence that a much greater percentage of respondents believed that mothers of preschoolers, as opposed to mothers of school-age children, should be at home full-time, it also makes sense because the belief that even mothers of school-age children should be home full-time is arguably at the most conservative end of the belief spectrum. Thus, while fewer people held this belief, those who did are also the same subset of respondents who allocate family responsibilities in the most “traditional” manner. Lastly, Table 4.8 showed that the association between the belief that mothers of preschoolers should stay home and a decreased portion of housework performed by husbands was specific to married couples without children, lending some credibility to the earlier unsupported hypothesis that beliefs and behaviors may be more aligned before children enter the picture. Given that this was limited only to this specific belief and only to housework, however, further study to tease out the role of having children in the alignment of beliefs and family arrangements is warranted.

Taken together, some interesting ideas emerge from these analyses more generally. First and foremost is the potential need to reconsider how researchers measure gender ideology going forward. In these analyses, beliefs about both the “ideal” family arrangements as well as when mothers should ideally stay home full-time with their children and when and how much they should participate in the paid labor force, were both better predictors of the division of household labor than the questions asked in the type of index that has historically been used to measure gender ideology in countless prior studies, across many large-scale data sets. Though different, what these two more effective measurements have in common is that
they both home in on current cultural conditions, particularly the remarkably persistent consideration of the breadwinner-homemaker model as the “gold standard” for family arrangements when young children are present in the home. While conventional gender ideology indices aim to measure similar concepts (for example, beliefs that children or families suffer when mothers go to work, or that it is a man’s job to earn money and a woman’s job to care for the home and family), I would suggest that respondents don’t answer these types of questions in a similar fashion because a large majority of families, presumably including those of most GSS respondents, are arranged in ways that differ from the cultural ideal. Therefore, respondents are less willing to call a mother’s absence harmful, or to suggest that men’s and women’s roles can’t be flexible, because to do so would be calling into question the very foundations upon which their own families, and/or those of many others whom they know, are built. In other words, metrics used in attitude surveys like the GSS and others may be becoming obsolete in an era in which family structures and processes have become increasingly diversified and less reminiscent of the fully “traditional” arrangements of the past (see Cherlin 2010). Notably, however, these concrete changes in families are neither reflected in more abstract beliefs about the “best” or “worst” way to organize families, nor in ideas about how much time mothers would ideally spend at home with their young children, because these are worded as “ideals” and can therefore coexist more harmoniously with arrangements that don’t match them due to pragmatic or other concerns.

Another question that arises out of these analyses is why the findings related to the prediction of housework were more consistent than those predicting family care. As with
gender ideology, this may be a question of measurement. It is first important to recognize that, on average, fathers were reported as doing a larger portion of family care (37.87 percent) than housework (34.35 percent). This may be due to the wording of the question, which only asks for the amount of time spent “looking after family members.” This is a very broad notion of “care” that can easily be perceived by respondents to extend into the leisure-related activities that fathers have been found to engage in with their children more than mothers, though some evidence suggests that fathers are participating more in routine care as well (Sayer, Bianchi, and Robinson 2004). In other words, because this is strictly a measurement of time, the types of “care” that fathers may be performing may or may not be qualitatively different or less demanding than the types of care provided by mothers. What’s more, researchers have also argued that the “mental labor” involved in managing children’s and families’ needs and schedules is assumed disproportionately by mothers and often is not factored into reports of time spent on particular tasks (Daly 2002; Mederer 1993; Offer 2014; see also Parcel, Hendrix and Taylor 2016). If this more fine-grained information were able to be teased out in this particular variable, prior research suggests that it is entirely possible that the time differences spent between wives and husbands on family care might look much more divergent. This means that the associations between the time spent on family care and various ideologies might in turn be different as well, perhaps conforming more to those found with housework.

A final general result worth noting from these analyses are the remarkably consistent effects of the number of hours spent in paid work by both spouses across analyses. Of course, this makes intuitive sense and would also be predicted by the time availability hypothesis,
and possibly the economic dependency and relative resources hypotheses as well (Bianchi et al. 2000; Davis and Greenstein 2004)—the more time the wife spends doing paid work and, in turn, the more money she earns relative to her husband, the more her husband contributes to both housework and family care; similarly, the more time the husband spends in paid work, and the greater share of family income he earns, the less he contributes at home. These variables were highly statistically significant when it came to predicting both housework and family care across every model I ran, net all of the gender ideology and control variables. This suggests a theme that my qualitative participants expressed, namely that, while they may have been taking responsibility for many of the “traditionally female” family tasks, they believed this was a fair arrangement due to the disproportionate time their husbands spent in paid work. Indeed, according to the GSS data, husbands were on average doing about a third of the total housework, while wives were doing on average about a third of the total paid work, at least measured in time spent. At first glance, this may indeed appear to be a “fair” arrangement, with both spouses potentially devoting complementary amounts of time to market and family work. However, it is important to consider these arrangements in light of the slowing progress toward gender equality. Specifically, spending time in unpaid family work versus paid market work has very different consequences when it comes to economic security, career trajectories, control over resources, and economic power more broadly. What’s more, unpaid family work is qualitatively different from market work and may be more likely to have differing psychological, in addition to economic, ramifications (Bird 1999). Thus, while a “fair” distribution of family work is certainly a worthy goal, it should also be understood that a family model that widely encourages primary specialization in
market work versus family work along gender lines can also leave wives more vulnerable within their relationships, and more broadly leave women more vulnerable when it comes to gaining traction in the larger economy and society.

Limitations
As with most analyses of this nature, any conclusions drawn from the results are only as good as the measurement of the variables used. In the case of this analysis, the gender ideology variables offered by the GSS were extraordinarily useful in that they allowed for the opportunity to compare and contrast different types of ideological constructs and their respective roles in predicting the division of household labor. The measurement of how that labor is divided, however, could have potentially been more fine-grained and reliable. Asking respondents to recall at the precise number of hours that they and their spouses do particular tasks, particularly over a time period as long as a week, is subject to both recollection issues and biases, leaving them potentially less accurate than other methods of data collection such as time diaries. Some of this became evident by the statistical significance of the gender variable in some of the models, which indicated that women, on average, reported that their husbands did less household work than men reported they did themselves. Importantly, however, this was not the case across models, suggesting that this type of bias may have been somewhat limited.

Another characteristic of the dependent variables worth noting is that the “family care” variable was just that—it extended beyond child care to care of elderly, ill, or disabled family members. This was very useful for my purposes, because it allowed for the
comparison of these types of tasks in married people both with and without children, rather than only parents as a variable limited to “child care” would have. It also enabled me to see if the “mother-as-nurturer” assumptions applied to all women in their relationships with all needy family members, rather than just mothers. However, it is also true that this broader notion of “family care” complicated the testing of a theory that is primarily centered around motherhood. In other words, if there was a qualitative difference between child care and other types of family care, which might be presumed based on the theory of the “sacred mother-child bond,” then we cannot be sure that this variable did not muddy the interpretation of the results. If husbands reported more time on family care, we cannot be sure that they weren’t including time they spend, for example, mowing their elderly mother’s lawn. In this respect, a child-care-only variable might have provided more specific support for my theory.

Beyond specific variables, there were some limitations with the GSS data set. The first and most important is that these data are cross-sectional, so they offer no insight when it comes to causality. When there was an association between certain beliefs and family arrangements, we may surmise that the beliefs were driving the behaviors, yet prior research shows that the effect could have been the reverse, with beliefs being amended to adjust to current circumstances (Davis 2007; Fan and Marini 2000; Kroska and Elman 2009; Vespa 2009). The lack of longitudinal data here also does not allow us to see how or when beliefs and behaviors may converge or diverge as couples and families proceed through the life course. Thus, while the associations found between these variables are an important starting
point, there is more to be learned about how these new ideological constructs and division of labor may relate to one another and evolve over time.

Lastly, these analyses would have been enhanced if the GSS had offered paired couples data. While respondents were restricted only to those who were married in my analyses, any information on respondents’ spouses was left up to the respondents’ reporting. Had there been data available directly from both spouses, it would have lent more accuracy to the variables and offered more insight into specific couple dynamics or biases.

Future Research
As it is clear that cultural ideals about families may be playing a role in the intransigence of gendered family arrangements, future inquiries into neo-institutional processes in the organization of families would be beneficial. While cultural constructs can be challenging to operationalize, questions pertaining to people’s “ideal” notions are a good starting point, as they have proven useful here when it comes to measuring what people culturally value—the “mythology” that, in turn, may be fueling the isomorphism of gendered family arrangements. Future research would benefit from developing similar constructs to explore these ideas further.

Along these lines, it is clear that we must reconsider the measurement of gender ideology to incorporate this type of idealization, as this analysis suggests that it may be more consequential in determining the allocation of family responsibilities. Similarly, asking very concrete questions about whether mothers “should” work full-time, stay at home, etc., also enables respondents to answer in terms of their ideal, while also tapping into something very
concrete that again seems to be a better predictor of the division of family labor. In fact, even my qualitative participants, when asked about their “beliefs about gender,” often responded by telling me specifically what they thought about mothers working. Thus, this belief alone may be the most important measure of gender ideology going forward. Relatedly, it would also be interesting to specifically investigate beliefs about mothers working part-time, especially when their children are school-age. The data indicated that many see this as the solution to the dilemma of the woman who wants to work or needs to contribute to the family income but also wants to or believes she must spend weekday time at home with her children. This apparent cultural ideal is an important avenue to explore, given the longer-term economic consequences of women’s lesser participation in the work force discussed earlier.

Finally, it is critical to explore how these ideas may differ across races and social classes. Although the GSS provides a national random sample that spans individuals across a wide variety of backgrounds, the statistical significance of some control variables in various analyses suggests that different processes may be at play among different groups. For example, in most of the analyses, having a graduate degree was associated with husbands doing a substantially greater portion of family care. This suggests that social class may be playing a role in the equitability of family care, though interestingly, self-reported relative income was not a significant predictor of either housework or family care in any of the models. Similarly, the broad category of “other race,” which is unfortunately as fine-grained as the GSS gets, was just as consistently associated with a substantially lower portion of housework, but not family care, across models. When viewing gender ideology using these
new types of constructs, it will be important—especially given the centrality of culture to the neo-institutional argument—for future research to explore the effects of education and race on the allocation of family responsibilities in order to gain a more nuanced understanding of the different processes that may be at play for diverse groups.
CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSION

In the late 1980s, Arlie Hochschild was among the first scholars to note that the considerable progress toward gender equality that had been made largely in the 1970s had begun to stall. In her influential work *The Second Shift*, now cited tens of thousands of times by family scholars since its publication, Hochschild illuminated the marital processes that were underlying the puzzling coexistence of women’s burgeoning egalitarian ideals with a division of family labor that remained largely modeled after the breadwinner-homemaker model prevalent among white, middle-class families in the 1950s. Notably, this type of arrangement has erroneously been labeled “traditional” despite the fact that it represents neither the majority of arrangements prior to or since the 1950s, nor the experience of countless other families outside of the white middle class even during that decade. Still, the grip that the specter of “traditional” family arrangements has held on American culture has been remarkable. As recently as 2010, Kathleen Gerson, similarly noting an “unfinished” gender revolution even then, found that even the youngest of adults, primarily young men, saw traditionalism as the most viable “fallback option” to the egalitarian arrangements that to many young people have appeared messier and more difficult to manage. Similar conundrums and contradictions were indeed echoed by the five married, middle-aged mothers with whom I conducted in-depth interviews in an effort to explore the ways in which beliefs about gender may or may not be dictating what has appeared to be a persistently gendered division of family labor among heterosexual couples, and parents in particular.

This dissertation has offered a cultural explanation for the intransigence of certain vestiges of the breadwinner-homemaker model that still remain entrenched well into the
fourth decade following the dramatic but incomplete gains made during the women’s movement. Specifically, I borrowed from a neo-institutional theory of organizations to suggest that this type of arrangement within heterosexual nuclear families has persisted for some of the same reasons that neo-institutional scholars have suggested that organizational forms replicate themselves: because there is society-wide uncertainty, in this case about meeting family obligations due to the incomplete institutionalization of the dual-earner family; because breadwinner-homemaker arrangements are still considered to hold the most legitimacy when it comes to heterosexual families with children; and because this legitimacy is based on a myth, specifically what I have called the myth of the “sacred mother-child bond”—the belief that mothers, and not fathers, have relationships with their young children that have magical, biologically determined qualities that render them uniquely able to meet their young children’s needs.

To make the case for these assertions, I offered extensive evidence, spanning decades, drawn from within the extant theoretical and empirical literature. In addition, I tested parts of these propositions using data from the 2012 General Social Survey. The 2012 GSS asked questions typically found on conventional gender ideology indices, but also offered separate, unique gender ideology constructs that I have suggested tap into cultural idealizations related to the “sacred mother-child bond.” When analyzing these types of gender ideology measures, as opposed to the more conventional measures, findings revealed that there indeed appears to be a particular reverence for “neo-traditional” family arrangements that are modeled after breadwinner-homemaker family form, and that the idealization of this model may have important implications when it comes to how housework labor, in particular, is divided.
between heterosexual married partners. The belief in the importance of mothers spending
time at home with their young children rather than working full-time jobs, as fathers were
largely expected to do, seemed to hold even more sway when it came to predicting the
division of housework and family care, even when accounting for the number of hours both
spouses spent working outside the home. And, notably, both of these beliefs were far better
predictors of the division of family labor among heterosexual couples than various groupings
of questions asked on more conventional gender ideology indices. These findings shed new
light on the extensive body of existing research looking at the relationship between gender
ideology and division of family labor. Specifically, they have implications when it comes to
the ways in which scholars measure gender ideologies, and more broadly to understanding
the effects that these ideologies have on family processes. Broader still are the implications
for the “gender revolution,” for the persistent idealization and replication of neo-traditional
family arrangements among heterosexual couples is surely a roadblock toward the
achievement of large-scale gender equality in the U.S.

Admittedly, as much as a neo-institutional theory of family organization can
potentially explain, there is also much that it doesn’t. First, the theory should not be so
overarching as to imply that there hasn’t been considerable movement in the ways that
families are structured or even the ways in which family responsibilities come to be divided.
To submit to the theory in toto would be to overlook the considerably greater diversity in
today’s family forms than in past decades, as well as the sizable extent to which fathers’
contributions to both housework and child care have increased over that time. As such, the
theory does not illuminate the processes through which many families come to resist, rather
than replicate, historically gendered arrangements. Underlying these shifts is some cultural movement that has allowed for an undeniable expansion in the ways in which people come to define what it means to be a family (Powell, Bolzendahl, Geist, and Steelman 2010), and these shifts are also left largely unexplained by a theory that focuses on the stability of arrangements, rather than how and why they change. Still, it is important to recognize that a neo-institutional theory as applied to families is not intended to account for changes in the growing constellation of different family structures that we are indeed seeing, but rather for why so many heterosexual nuclear families, in particular, remain entrenched in gendered processes even amidst what we know has been an expansion in family types and definitions.

Second, the theory does not fully account for the role that power plays in many heterosexual relationships, or within the larger society. Both patriarchal and capitalist social and economic structures, over the long span of history and even today, have put men in a position to craft arrangements that prioritize their self-interest and leave women economically vulnerable. The inequity of power steeped in the legacy born of centuries of these structures—along with the decades of scholarship that has definitively articulated their effects on family arrangements, dispute resolutions, and decision making—cannot and should not be dismissed in favor of a purely cultural argument. What’s more, perceived inequities in the division of household labor have been implicated in marital dissatisfaction and dissolution (Frisco and Williams 2003; Stevens, Kiger and Riley 2001; Suitor 1991), so the experiences of those like my qualitative participants, who have remained happily married in part by developing adaptive strategies to deal with unequal family arrangements that at times do not match up with their views, may make it appear as though power inequities are benign.
or inconsequential. To the contrary, as I discussed at the end of my quantitative analysis, even marital arrangements that are arguably “fair” but still highly gendered continue to create vulnerability for women on the micro level as well as reinforce macro-level power dynamics when taken as a whole. That said, I have argued extensively in my theory development chapter that the culture that I have suggested propels the proliferation of gendered family arrangements is a byproduct of exactly those types of power-laden structures. Specifically, I have suggested that longstanding patriarchal and capitalist structures are precisely the reason that persistently gendered workplaces and families have come to be seen as “normative” and, ultimately, more legitimate. And, perhaps most importantly, a neo-institutional theory applied to family organization isn’t intended to contest or undermine the power/structure arguments, but rather to illuminate the mechanisms through which their resulting gendered arrangements have been able to become pervasive and have lingered for so long.

Lastly, it is worth reiterating that a neo-institutional theory as applied to gendered family organization may have limited utility beyond the white middle class. As Dow (2016) suggests, hegemonic ideas about motherhood are fueled by the dominant class, which enjoys the privilege of framing ideals and ideologies related to mothering and other family roles for society as a whole, despite the fact that those ideals may not apply to more marginalized cultures. For example, Dow finds that African American women—even those in the middle and upper middle classes—report cultural values related to mothering that do not have a gendered division of heterosexual labor at their core, but rather values such as financial self-reliance and the use of kin and community for help with child caregiving. These differing sets of priorities and expectations clearly have different implications for a neo-institutional
theory of family organization because they upend all three of the core tenets on which I have argued the theory is based—environmental uncertainty, the quest for legitimacy, and the mythology of the “sacred mother-child bond.” However, the fact that these basic tenets may be largely inapplicable to some marginalized cultures underscores the very point that neo-institutional scholars have tried to make, namely that the alleged superiority of certain organizational forms over others is a “mythological” cultural product that becomes taken for granted despite its potential lack of utility or efficiency. Applied to families, this suggests that hegemonic ideas around mothering—and the family arrangements that I suggest are culturally built around them—are also social constructs that have become taken for granted only because they have come to be legitimized by the dominant culture. Given this, there would be undeniable benefit gained to both marginalized and dominant groups from future scholarship that looks at the unique ways in which different groups approach issues of gender, both ideologically and in practice.

Caveats aside, the development of a neo-institutional theory of family organization holds considerable benefit for both theory and empirical research going forward. On the smaller scale, the elements of support gained for the theory in the quantitative analysis suggest that it is important to rethink gender ideologies specifically in ways that reflect larger cultural ideals, rather than specific beliefs, about gender and family processes. Because we are now further into a time when egalitarian-leaning beliefs have become more cemented and dual-earner heterosexual families have become so prevalent, it is easy to lose track of the apparent fact that gendered family arrangements are still idealized, even though they run counter to the beliefs professed by many and are far fewer in number than in decades past. As
the analytical results suggested, this cultural idealization has consequences, and particularly
the kinds of consequences that retard overall movement toward greater ubiquity of a more
gender-equal sharing of family responsibilities. What’s more, I have argued that these
cultural ideals play a role in the reciprocal effects between the home and the workplace that
cause family labor to remain so gendered; while it is clear that workplace and other economic
and structural constraints cause women to take on a greater share of the burdens of domestic
labor, it is also true that the persistent cultural identification of mothers as primary domestic
laborers is likely causing some of those very constraints and limitations to persist.

Beyond the experiences of individual families, the theory and evidence I have
provided is instructive when looking to understand the larger-scale mechanisms of cultural
change, or in this case, stability. While much is understood about the persistence of structural
impediments to gender equality, as well as lingering power structures that continue to
privilege men and even fathers over mothers, not all that much previous literature has put
forth concrete, macro-level theory to explain the mechanisms through which gendered ideas
remain salient even in individual arrangements in which power is arguably more equal.
Those who have attempted to do so have put forth arguments that are compelling but don’t
articulate the entire picture. For example, some scholars have suggested that adaptation to
changes in gendered arrangements may be “lagged,” at least on the micro level, meaning
that husbands of working wives begin to assume more household responsibility over a matter
of years, rather than immediately after their wives resume full-time work (Gershuny,
Bittman, and Brice 2005). Though empirical evidence appears to support these claims, they
do not advance our understanding of why these men “lag.” Understanding the cultural ideal
of the “sacred mother-child bond” may provide such an explanation, because it would suggest that the lagging may be due more to father’s increased comfort with children as they age—a condition that would reflect pervasive beliefs that mothers are uniquely critical to the care of babies and younger children—rather than simply a slowness to respond. Similarly, theories of gender display or deviance neutralization (Brines 1994; Greenstein 2000), which have suggested that men do even less housework in marriages in which their wives make more money in order to conform to gendered role prescriptions or “neutralize” a non-normative provider role, explain the resistance to adapt to change but do not fully explicate what is at the core of that resistance, namely the widely shared assumption that families are simply considered more legitimate when they adhere to breadwinner-homemaker-type arrangements.

All of this points very clearly to the idea that gender essentialists beliefs, and the cultural mythology that grows out of them, underlie much of the resistance toward a fully gender-equalitarian society. By applying the “mythology” element of neo-institutional theory to explain gendered family arrangements, I have suggested that these essentialist beliefs result in more than just a horizontally segregated workplace (Charles and Grusky 2004); they also result in equal if not greater segregation of duties both within the home, and between the home and the workplace, and this is part of what leaves mothers persistently disadvantaged. Rooted in these essentialist ideals are clearly some very specific ideas about femininity that I have explored at length, particularly those that revolve around the care and nurturance of children. Less obvious but equally powerful, however, are the core ideas about masculinity that have also come to inform this mythology. The flip-side of positioning care and
nurturance as essentially women’s work, by virtue of biology and instinct, is the assumption that to be masculine, by definition, is to be void of such tendency or capability (see Connell 2005). Thus, while hegemonic ideals related to what it means to be masculine may shift across time and place, a unifying feature of these varying ideals is a distinct avoidance or negation of that which is considered feminine. Such avoidance carries positive sanctions in the form of the rewards of legitimacy, and even the potential for tangible outcomes such as occupational growth (Williams 1995). The implications of this cultural script must be thoughtfully considered in future work so that we may more fully understand what is potentially a substantial resistance on the part of many men to take on the more “feminine” aspects of family work, and especially child care.

Widespread gender essentialist beliefs also have implications for the very definitions of what it means to be a family, and such definitions have undeniable consequences when it comes to an expansion of family forms and processes. For example, beliefs about the suitability of men or women to particular family tasks underlie some people’s opposition to same-sex marriage and their desire to limit what types of families are considered legitimate (Powell et al. 2010). Thus, even in the more contentious issues of our time, debates about the nature of what constitutes a family are rooted powerfully in the lingering perception of the superiority of the breadwinner-homemaker model, which fundamentally relies on heterosexual pairing and a gender-based division of labor. As Collins (1998:62-3) noted decades ago,

Situated in the center of “family values” debates is an imagined traditional family ideal. Formed through a combination of marital and blood ties, ideal families consist of heterosexual couples that produce their own biological children. Such families
have a specific authority structure; namely, a father-head earning an adequate family wage, a stay-at-home wife, and children. … Assuming a relatively fixed sexual division of labor, wherein women's roles are defined as primarily in the home and men's in the public world of work, the traditional family ideal also assumes the separation of work and family. Defined as a natural or biological arrangement based on heterosexual attraction, this monolithic family type articulates with governmental structures. … The power of this traditional family ideal lies in its dual function as an ideological construction and as a fundamental principle of social organization.

As Collins suggests, cultural ideals related to neo-traditional family arrangements extend beyond individual families or even the powerful results of those processes in their collective; they come to underlie the very definition of family and in turn alter in meaningful ways some of the fundamental foundations for social organization.

This raises additional questions about the future institutionalization of the family, and particularly the extent to which said institutionalization must be based not only on a heteronormative family structure, but also on the adherence to gendered role prescriptions. Scholars expressed concern over the course of the better part of a century that the very existence of the family would be imperiled by loosening norms related to a gendered division of labor (Becker 1981; Durkheim [1893] 1984; Parsons and Bales 1955) Though these concerns have not come to fruition in a world in which dual-earner, more egalitarian marriages are prevalent, and in which women’s marital prospects have come to be based increasingly on their earning potential rather than their domestic capabilities (Sweeney and Cancian 2004), it is also true that any movement further away from gender as the primary organizing principle of family life raises questions about exactly what a “genderless” sharing of family responsibilities might look like. The full legalization of same-sex marriage in 2015 provides unique opportunity for such a window as, over the long term, these marriages will
likely be instructive for the purposes of reimagining the sharing of family responsibilities—and even the basis of family structure itself—in ways that reflect individuals’ own unique strengths, abilities, and desires, rather than gender or any particular culturally legitimated family structure. As a paradigm for this type of expansion of the definitions of families and the ways in which they come to be arranged, recent work has suggested that contemporary family life may be considered “disorganized” as compared to decades past, but nevertheless remains institutional, that is, still steeped in “a complex array of normative expectations ... which distinguish familial from other types of relationships.” (Smyth 2016:692).

The idea of a “disorganized” institution underscores the clear historical evidence that even the most institutionalized practices and norms do shift over time. Institutionalization may hamper the rate of change, but it usually does not prevent change altogether. What’s more, these cultural shifts can also be drivers of great progress; there is no greater evidence than the dramatic gains toward gender egalitarianism initially made in the 1970s and 80s to show that changing norms can just as easily encourage, rather than hinder, progress as they become institutionalized. When it comes to gendered family role prescriptions, it is clear that the rate of change has dramatically slowed if not ceased since that period, but also that things do, in fact, now appear to be moving slowly toward greater egalitarianism. For example, my data analysis revealed that, when looking at the mean, wives are still doing nearly twice as much housework and family care as their husbands, but it also showed that a 50-50 division of this labor was also the most common arrangement. Additionally, recent research has shown that support for counter-traditional family roles, whether it be mothers working full-time outside the home or fathers staying home full-time, is now substantial once people’s
individual circumstances are taken into consideration (Jacobs and Gerson 2016). This
evidence suggests that continued disruption of normative prescriptions for family life is not
only possible, but probable in the long term, perhaps furthering a “disorganization” of family
life that does not undermine the basic goals of families, only the stubbornly persistent ideals
that have identified one form as superior to others. Such disruption might cause a shift
toward an institutionalization based on the family’s core functions—the care of children and
contribution to the greater society—rather than on specific family structures or practices.

What needs to happen for this change to accelerate and regain the pace it once had?
The basic principles of neo-institutional theory, and the ways in which this dissertation has
applied them to understanding family practices and the larger slowdown in progress of the
gender revolution, offer some clear suggestions. As I have argued at length, the myth of the
“sacred mother-child bond” and the resulting legitimacy of the breadwinner-homemaker
model of family organization are being fueled by gender essentialist beliefs, particularly
around motherhood. As such, it is difficult to imagine a dismantling of these cultural ideals
without a more basic reconsideration of gender and the extent to which certain abilities or
tendencies are inherent and biologically determined, rather than learned. Still, I would
suggest that this is precisely what must happen, because the elements of legitimacy and
mythology on which isomorphic tendencies rest cannot survive if these ideas about gender
are deconstructed. But beyond this, it is also important to recall that conditions of uncertainty
lay the groundwork for ideas around legitimacy to grow and take hold. Thus, it is critical to
diminish the environmental uncertainty that was born of the dramatic changes brought on by
the women’s movement and still persists today. A majority of mothers have been actively
participating in the work force for four decades, and yet institutions have been painfully slow to develop around the needs of dual-earner families. Workplaces have remained steeped in outdated assumptions that their workers are unencumbered by family responsibilities, and child care remains the burden of individual families, who manage by putting together a multitude of different arrangements that often do not fully accommodate either their work or family demands. As such, public policy that reduces the uncertainty around how a variety of family types might meet their responsibilities would undoubtedly reduce the allure of the breadwinner-homemaker model as the most viable or desired “fallback option” for families struggling to make dual-career parenthood work.

The five married, middle class mothers that I interviewed at the onset of this project all articulated, with varying degrees of emphasis, their belief that gender should not be what dictates how family responsibilities come to be divided among heterosexual parents. Even more powerfully, several of these women described feeling adamant about the need to urge their daughters and other younger women to avoid the pitfalls of economic dependence that come with a “traditional” division of household labor. Yet, elements of exactly that type of arrangement were present, also in varying degrees but present nonetheless, in each of their marriages. In other words, they wanted the younger generation to do as they were saying, but not necessarily as they were doing.

In part, this discrepancy was owed to the realities of still-male-dominated labor market that in most cases resulted in husbands earning a greater salary, making wives’ greater assumption of family responsibilities the most sensible way to meet their family
obligations. Still, this was often not a calculated decision; it was a situation in which they found themselves once they had children, either because this was the way they had previously envisioned their lives, or because they felt more adept than their husbands at meeting some of the demands of family care, or because they felt a strong obligation to take on full-time motherhood. At the heart of all of these reasons are cultural prescriptions about what it means to be legitimate—as mothers, as wives, and as women. Dismantling these imperatives and the mythology that fuels them would surely go a long way toward making both women’s and men’s family lives more closely aligned with their widely held ideals. When coupled with a continued challenge to the structural conditions that still disempower and disadvantage women, this may also be what it takes to reignite the momentum that the gender revolution once had and finally see a fully gender-equal society through to fruition.
REFERENCES


Fan, Pi-Ling and Margaret M. Marini. 2000. “Influences on Gender Role Attitudes during the Transition to Adulthood.” *Social Science Research* 29(2):258-283.


Kane, Emily W. 2006. “‘No Way My Boys are Going to be Like That!’ Parents’ Responses to Children’s Gender Nonconformity.” *Gender & Society* 20(2): 149-176.


APPENDIX A: Descriptive Statistics by Regression Model

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics for Table 4.2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Housework Regression (N=495)</th>
<th>Family Care Regression (N=501)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.41 (14.87)</td>
<td>49.52 (14.94)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>53.74%</td>
<td>53.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With kids under 18 in home</td>
<td>36.36%</td>
<td>36.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>81.21%</td>
<td>81.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>9.49%</td>
<td>9.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other Races</td>
<td>9.29%</td>
<td>9.18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With less than high school degree</td>
<td>12.12%</td>
<td>11.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With high school degree</td>
<td>47.47%</td>
<td>47.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Associate’s degree</td>
<td>6.46%</td>
<td>6.79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>19.60%</td>
<td>19.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With graduate degree</td>
<td>14.34%</td>
<td>14.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Relative Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Average</td>
<td>25.65%</td>
<td>25.55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Average</td>
<td>46.67%</td>
<td>47.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Above Average</td>
<td>27.68%</td>
<td>27.34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>23.17 (21.32)</td>
<td>23.01 (21.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is female; Spouse if R is male)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>34.36 (22.28)</td>
<td>34.46 (22.27)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Gender Ideology Index</td>
<td>3.47 (0.88)</td>
<td>3.47 (0.88)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5; 1 = most traditional, 5 = most egalitarian</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total housework hours per week performed by husband</td>
<td>34.36% (23.48)</td>
<td>37.67% (23.10)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A2. Descriptive Statistics for Tables 4.3 and 4.4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Table 4.3 (N=527)</th>
<th>Table 4.4 (N=502)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.61</td>
<td>49.44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(14.95)</td>
<td>(14.89)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>53.51%</td>
<td>53.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With kids under 18 in home</td>
<td>35.67%</td>
<td>36.65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>81.78%</td>
<td>81.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>9.49%</td>
<td>9.36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other Races</td>
<td>8.73%</td>
<td>9.56%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With less than high school degree</td>
<td>11.76%</td>
<td>12.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With high school degree</td>
<td>47.82%</td>
<td>47.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Associate’s degree</td>
<td>7.02%</td>
<td>6.57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>19.73%</td>
<td>19.32%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With graduate degree</td>
<td>13.66%</td>
<td>14.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Relative Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Average</td>
<td>25.61%</td>
<td>25.69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Average</td>
<td>47.63%</td>
<td>46.41%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Above Average</td>
<td>26.75%</td>
<td>27.89%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>22.63</td>
<td>23.28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is female; Spouse if R is male)</td>
<td>(21.29)</td>
<td>(21.36)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>34.28</td>
<td>34.40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(22.42)</td>
<td>(22.38)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology—Mothering Factor</td>
<td>3.60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5; 1 = most traditional, 5 = most egalitarian</td>
<td>(1.04)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender Ideology—General Division of Labor Factor</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range: 1-5; 1 = most traditional, 5 = most egalitarian</td>
<td>(0.95)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total housework hours per week performed by husband</td>
<td>34.43%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(23.56)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total hours per week caring for family members performed by husband</td>
<td>37.60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(22.88)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VARIABLE</td>
<td>Full Sample</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(15.23)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>51.88%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With kids under 18 in home</td>
<td>35.59%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>79.70%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>8.77%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other Races</td>
<td>11.53%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With less than high school degree</td>
<td>14.04%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With high school degree</td>
<td>49.87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Associate’s degree</td>
<td>6.27%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>17.54%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With graduate degree</td>
<td>12.28%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Relative Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Average</td>
<td>30.32%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Average</td>
<td>47.87%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Above Average</td>
<td>21.81%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife</td>
<td>22.06</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is female; Spouse if R is male)</td>
<td>(21.16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband</td>
<td>33.56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(21.97)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Best way to organize a family with young children</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe neo-traditional arrangement is ideal</td>
<td>85.71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe equal arrangement is ideal</td>
<td>13.03%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe counter-traditional arrangement is ideal</td>
<td>1.25%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total housework hours per week performed by husband</td>
<td>33.35%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(23.19)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total hours per week caring for family members performed by husband</td>
<td>38.10%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>(23.36)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table A4. Descriptive Statistics for Table 4.8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>VARIABLE</th>
<th>Housework Models 1 &amp; 2 (N=402)</th>
<th>Housework Model 3 (N=416)</th>
<th>Family Care Models 4 &amp; 5 (N=407)</th>
<th>Family Care Model 6 (N=423)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>49.96 (15.53)</td>
<td>49.73 (15.45)</td>
<td>50.17 (15.64)</td>
<td>49.92 (15.55)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Female</td>
<td>51.49%</td>
<td>50.96%</td>
<td>51.35%</td>
<td>51.06%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With kids under 18 in home</td>
<td>35.57%</td>
<td>36.30%</td>
<td>35.14%</td>
<td>35.93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Race</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% White</td>
<td>79.60%</td>
<td>78.85%</td>
<td>79.36%</td>
<td>78.72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Black</td>
<td>9.95%</td>
<td>10.82%</td>
<td>10.32%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Other Races</td>
<td>10.45%</td>
<td>10.34%</td>
<td>10.32%</td>
<td>10.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With less than high school degree</td>
<td>14.18%</td>
<td>14.18%</td>
<td>14.25%</td>
<td>13.95%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With high school degree</td>
<td>52.99%</td>
<td>51.92%</td>
<td>53.07%</td>
<td>52.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Associate’s degree</td>
<td>5.47%</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
<td>5.65%</td>
<td>6.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With Bachelor’s degree</td>
<td>16.17%</td>
<td>16.35%</td>
<td>15.97%</td>
<td>16.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% With graduate degree</td>
<td>11.19%</td>
<td>11.30%</td>
<td>11.06%</td>
<td>11.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-Reported Relative Income</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Below Average</td>
<td>28.85%</td>
<td>28.37%</td>
<td>29.00%</td>
<td>28.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Average</td>
<td>48.76%</td>
<td>49.28%</td>
<td>48.89%</td>
<td>49.88%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Above Average</td>
<td>22.39%</td>
<td>22.36%</td>
<td>22.11%</td>
<td>21.98%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by wife (Respondent if R is female; Spouse if R is male)</td>
<td>21.19 (21.13)</td>
<td>22.62 (21.20)</td>
<td>21.00 (21.10)</td>
<td>22.04 (21.16)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours worked per week by husband (Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>33.22 (22.56)</td>
<td>33.30 (22.41)</td>
<td>32.96 (22.62)</td>
<td>33.08 (22.41)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beliefs about Mothers’ work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of preschoolers should stay home full-time</td>
<td>39.55%</td>
<td>39.80%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of preschoolers should work part-time</td>
<td>41.54%</td>
<td>41.52%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of preschoolers should work full-time</td>
<td>18.91%</td>
<td>18.67%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of school-age kids should stay home full-time</td>
<td>5.53%</td>
<td>5.44%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of school-age kids should work part-time</td>
<td>43.03%</td>
<td>43.74%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% Believe mothers of school-age kids should work full-time</td>
<td>51.44%</td>
<td>50.83%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total housework hours per week performed by husband (Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>34.47% (23.35)</td>
<td>34.92% (24.02)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage of total hours per week caring for family members performed by husband (Respondent if R is male; spouse if R is female)</td>
<td>37.50% (23.63)</td>
<td>37.80% (23.48)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>