ABSTRACT

GREther, scott thomas. “How is it Gonna Get Done?”: Analyzing Men’s Perspectives on the Household Division of Labor. (Under the direction of Dr. Theodore N. Greenstein).

Research on the household division of labor illustrates that despite recent increases to men’s participation in housework and childcare, women continue to do more. This research emphasizes heterosexual women’s expectations and experiences around household work. An equally important, and understudied, question remains – how do men experience and justify their involvement in the household division of labor? To this end, I conducted 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews from March 2017 to April 2017 with married men from diverse economic, racial, age, regional, and parental backgrounds. I found that while men emphasized the physical and emotional work they do in housework and childcare tasks, they overlooked what I call mental labor – the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated with household labor. Similar to “emotion work,” mental labor is invisible, necessary for managing household functions and activities, and largely performed by women. Men also repudiated traditional conceptions of masculinity (e.g., control and dominance) by divulging their involvement in specific housework and childcare tasks. They unknowingly, however, reinforced these aspects of hegemonic masculinity by accentuating what they do with their bodies and emotions to complete these tasks and by delegating mental labor to their wives. Despite their intentions, they reified gendered ideologies and practices by not engaging in mental labor. By only focusing on what they do with their bodies and emotions, these men did not address the mental patterns of thought which reproduce gendered understandings of family life. Findings from this research have
implications in the sociology of family, gender, food, workplace, and the reproduction of inequality.
“How is it Gonna Get Done?”: Analyzing Men’s Perspectives on the Household Division of Labor.

by
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To my family. I couldn’t have done this without you.
BIOGRAPHY

Scott T. Grether was born and raised in Asheville, North Carolina. He graduated from the University of North Carolina at Greensboro in 2009 with a B.A. in sociology and history. In August 2010, he started his graduate training in sociology at the George Washington University where he earned his M.A. in sociology. Afterwards, he continued (and finished!) his graduate education at North Carolina State University where he earned his Ph.D. in sociology. In April 2017 he met and married his best friend Madison Boden. Scott achieved his dream of being a college professor where, starting in fall 2018, he will be a tenure-track Assistant Professor of sociology at Longwood University.
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INTRODUCTION

This project is about how men understand and justify their involvement in the household division of labor. Before I started this project, my partner accepted a job offer in Fort Mill, South Carolina. We relocated from Raleigh, North Carolina, I faced unfamiliar territory in my personal life – being financially dependent upon my wife. Even though I was working part-time as an instructor at a community college, she shouldered the financial burden of our household and continues to do so. Consequently, I feel that I need to do more in the home to make up for not earning as much as she does.

Not long after our move I realized that beyond completing physical tasks in our home (like doing laundry), I was spending a great deal of time planning what needs completing in our apartment and when. What should we eat for dinner? When should I go grocery shopping? What type of food should I get to pack for her lunch? What clothes does she need washed for work the next day? When was the last time someone walked Bessie (our family dog)? Do we have enough shampoo and conditioner? Has anyone from the maintenance staff repaired the leaky kitchen sink?

I became curious if, and how, other married, heterosexual men confront the same issues I face. How do men feel about being, or not being, the breadwinner? Do they think their contributions to housework should be based on their financial contributions? Would they be willing to relocate for their wife’s job? How do they feel if their wife makes more
money? How do gender, race, age, and class intersect to inform heterosexual men’s feelings about and experiences around the household division of labor and wage work? I soon realized we do not know much how men talk about these issues. Beyond survey data and a handful of interview studies there is limited understanding of men’s perspectives about the household division of labor.

Analyzing how men experience and justify their level of involvement is important for, at least, four reasons. First, the unpaid, invisible work which needs to be performed in the home affects everyone in a household. Adults come home from work and are confronted with many housework and, if they have children, caregiving tasks. Children come home from school and also face household tasks – such as putting away their school items (i.e., backpacks, jackets, lunchboxes), changing into clothes for extracurricular activities, completing any assigned chores, caring for family pets or younger siblings, or making a snack for themselves before dinner.

If women are the ones performing the majority of these tasks this reproduces a number of inequalities. For example, women often do not enjoy as much leisure time as men. The Pew Research Center estimated that from 2003-2011, in households with children younger than 18, men spent approximately 2.7 hours more per week in leisure activities than women and 5.1 hours more per week in households with children older than 18 (Pew Research Center 2013). Additionally, women who work outside the home also experience greater work-family spillover than men (Offer 2014), emotional stress (Offer 2014; Shaw 2008), and pressure to devise time-management strategies (such as multitasking or
outsourcing) to balance the demands of paid and unpaid work (Hessing 1994; Meier, McNaughton-Cassill, and Lynch 2008; Offer and Schneider 2011; Zimmerman et al. 2002).

Second, families suffer economically from men’s lack of involvement in the household division of labor. In an era where many families feel “cut-adrift” from the economic safety-net of governmental and private organizations (Cooper 2014), overworked (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), “squeezed” for time to meet their parenting duties (Clarkberg and Moen 2001), and struggle to balance precarious work schedules with their expectations of family life (Pugh 2015), working mothers often are the ones who adjust their work schedules to meet family demands. Doing so diminishes their earning potential because they may adjust their work schedules (e.g., working less hours) to compensate for men’s lack of involvement in household work (Deutsch 1999; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Sherman 2009).

Third, understanding men’s perspectives on the household division of labor can deepen our understanding of how gendered practices and ideologies are reproduced within the home. For example, even though a vast majority (97 percent) of Americans claim to support gender equality and women working outside of the home (Pew Research Center 2010a), there is mixed evidence about the extent to which women and men should equally share in the household division of labor (Quadlin and Doan 2016; Pew Research Center 2010b; Pew Research Center 2007). Thus, an important, but understudied, component towards understanding how the “gender revolution” (England 2010) might have stalled in the home is exploring how men understand and justify their level of involvement in the household division of labor.
Finally, men’s narratives of household work provide a needed contribution to research on the household division of labor. Even though there is a rich body of literature on this topic, there is limited understanding of what men think, say, and do in regards to household work (Atkinson and Boles 1984; Banerjee 2015; Demantas and Myers 2015; Deutsch 1999; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerksi and Cornwall 2010; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005). Analyzing men’s narratives of household work can extend recent research which explores how differing types of labor markets (Cha and Thébaud 2009) and workplaces with varying levels of supportive work-family polices (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015; Thébaud and Pedulla 2016) influence men’s gender ideology and views about breadwinning.

As I argue throughout this dissertation, the perspectives of men in my study demonstrates a budding concept towards understanding the household division of labor – mental labor. A small, but growing, body of research calls attention to how families attend to the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated with the household division of labor (Ahn, Haines, and Mason 2017; Coltrane 1996; DeVault 1991; Mederer 1993; Offer 2014; Offer and Schneider 2011; Thorstad et al. 2006; Walzer 1996; Zimmerman et al. 2002). Similar to “emotion work” (Hochschild 1979), mental labor is invisible, necessary for managing household functions and activities, and largely performed by women.

Lester’s comments, for example, on his family’s morning routine illustrates how many men in my study abdicate mental labor to their wife. Lester is 38 years old and has been married to Amber for 16 years. Both have graduate degrees, work full-time, and have
two children together, Wesley and Preston. He, however, spends less time per week completing housework and childcare tasks than Amber. Lester reported doing 12 hours of housework and two hours of childcare per week while Amber does 14 and 15 hours, respectively, per week.

Lester believes that, for the most part, their division of household labor is fair. Reluctantly, he concedes that he should spend more time per week on childcare. When I asked him to elaborate on why he thinks this, he describes his family’s morning routine to clarify his point:

Lester: I could do more if I got up with her and helped out. Her life would probably be a little less stressful. But I also come to work with a lot fresher mind if she handles all that. It's probably true for her too. But I don't know what clothes to pick out for them [Wesley and Preston]. I don't know where their clothes are in the dresser. When they have to change clothes, I'll ask them where their clothes are because I don't put them where they're supposed to go. So, in the morning time [if] she wakes up late and has to get to work [she’ll ask me], "I need you to get the kids ready." [I’ll say]"All right." So, I get them up. I put their clothes on the dresser, see that they get to school, but sometimes their clothes don't match to her liking. Or their hair wasn't combed just right or the collar wasn't right. Now I could pay more attention to detail, but if I'm too good at it, then I might get delegated to do it more often.

Lester’s comment illustrates how many of the men I interviewed understand and justify their involvement in the household division of labor. First, he rarely takes the initiative in completing tasks which he knows need completing in the home. In this instance, it is only when prodded into action by his wife does he become involved in getting their children ready for school.

Second, Lester acknowledges the mental and physical work required in getting his children ready for school. One reason he does not actively help out in getting his children
ready for school is that he lacks the knowledge of where Wesley and Preston’s clothes are located, which ones are suitable for school, and how to manage a presentable impression of children. Another reason could be that he feigns ignorance or incompetence (or both) in completing the mental labor associated with childcare in order to avoid being, “…delegated to do it more often.”

Third, Lester does not appear willing to invest the time to learn how to accomplish the mental labor associated with these particular tasks. Lester prefers that Amber get their children dressed because he is able to “come to work with a lot fresher mind” if she completes these tasks.

Finally, and most revealing, Lester assumes that housework and childcare is his wife’s responsibility. By saying he could “help her out” and that he might get “delegated” to do more childcare illustrates his belief that, by default, it is Amber’s responsibility and if she needs help to complete these tasks, all she has to do is ask for help. Ironically, Lester believes he is enacting egalitarian beliefs and practices because he is willing to be involved in unpaid labor; but only if Amber asks him to do more.

This is how many of the 37 married men I interviewed from diverse economic, age, regional, and parental backgrounds understood and justified their involvement in the household division of labor. They emphasized the physical and emotional work they do in household labor by divulging their involvement in specific housework and childcare tasks. It is my argument that doing so, they believe, is evidence of their repudiation of traditional conceptions of masculinity and equally sharing in the household division of labor. Despite their intentions, however, men reified the very conceptions of masculinity they admonished
by delegating mental labor to their wife. Moreover, they reproduce existing inequalities in the division of household labor by not engaging in the mental labor required to run and maintain family life. By only focusing on what they do with their bodies and emotions, these men are not addressing the mental patterns of thought which reproduce gendered understanding of family life and justify patterns of behavior which contribute to gender inequality within the home.

I structured the following chapter into five sections. I begin by providing a brief overview of the overall trends in the household division of labor. I focus on how previous literature focuses the physical and emotional aspects of household work, but only recently examines the mental aspect of household work. Second, I discuss men’s involvement, or lack thereof, in the household division of labor. Third, I highlight the limited, but growing, body of research focusing on what men say about their involvement in housework and highlight how my study fits into this body of research. Fourth, I discuss the theoretical approach guiding my study and highlight how this perspective informs my analysis of the data. Finally, I conclude this chapter by summarizing the remaining five chapters of this dissertation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overall Trends in the Household Division of Labor

Women have always done the majority of household work. Some scholars note that as early as the 17th century women not only performed the majority of household and childcare tasks (Boydston 1990) but were expected to (Coontz 2006). Slowly, and through major structural (e.g., industrialization, no-fault divorce laws, Civil Rights legislation protecting
women’s rights, Title IX) and cultural (e.g., first and second wave Feminism, women’s entry into the labor force, women’s increased educational attainment) changes did these trends begin to change.

Over the past 40 years women and men are more equally sharing in the household division of labor than ever before. For example, women devoted 30 hours per week to housework in 1965 and 16.2 in 2010. Over this same time period men increased their time from 4.9 to 9.9 hours per week (Bianchi et al. 2012). The same is true when comparing married women (33.9 to 17.8) to married men (4.7 to 10.3) and married mothers (35.7 to 19.3) to married fathers (4.7 to 9.5) (Bianchi et al. 2012). Many call this a “gender convergence” – where the number of hours men and women work per week in the home is approaching parity (Sullivan 2015). The fact remains, however, that women continue to spend more time completing household and childcare tasks than men. In fact, some breadwinning women are more likely to do more housework than their non-breadwinning husbands (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Evertsson and Nermo 2004; Greenstein 2000; Schnieder 2011; Thébaud 2010).

As this brief overview illustrates the number of hours people spend physically completing household tasks is the typical unit of analysis when assessing how families divide household work. For example, Bianchi and colleagues (2006) analyzed data from national time diary studies conducted in 1975, 1985, 1995, 1998, 1999, 2000, and 2001. As the name implies, time diary studies are a form of data measurement where respondents record their daily time usage in a journal. In these studies, either for one day or for one week, respondents open-endedly recorded activities they engaged in over a 24-hour period (e.g., washing
dishes) from when they awoke to when they went to sleep. This design enabled respondents
to describe their time usage in their own words and to ensure they accounted for all minutes
of the day. This is why, in fact, many argue that time-diary studies are the best way to assess
who is doing what in the home, how often, and where gender disparities may arise in the
household division of labor (Sevilla 2014).

The time people spend in *physical* tasks related to housework and childcare is not the
only way to capture how and why people divide household labor. Moreover, only focusing
on the time people devote to household labor does not adequately capture all of the work
which goes into running and maintaining a home. This misses the invisible work
accompanying many tasks associated with the household division of labor. This also ignores
the qualitative differences in how women and men experience and perceive what needs
completing in the home and to what effect.

*Invisible Work in the Household Division of Labor*

Arlene Daniels (1987) was one of the first scholars to propose that “work” in the
public and private spheres is more than just what we can see. People must also complete
invisible tasks as well. People must complete the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate,
and execute tasks in both the public and private spheres. The problem, according to Daniels,
is that this type of work is invisible, unpaid, and not characterized as “work” by many
people.

A way to delineate visible and invisible work in the private sphere is the household
division of labor. We can conceptualize visible work as all of the work anyone can see which
needs accomplishing. Some classic examples of this type of work are washing dishes, doing
laundry, bathing an infant, providing transportation for school aged children, and cooking meals. However, running and maintaining a home requires much more work.

One way previous literature documents invisible work is how people manage the emotional wellbeing of those living within a household. According to Hochschild (1979), “emotion work” is the attempt to manage others’ feelings by manipulating your own emotions. Emotion work, then, is based upon how people understand the rituals and settings of social interactions and how to operate during these interactions. This means people develop shared understandings of how people “should” act when assuming roles within social interactions. People do this in social interactions in order to meet people’s expectations for the appropriateness of a social setting or encounter. For example, to have pleasant social exchanges people must learn the “appropriate feeling rules” – the socially expected way to feel – for any given situation, such as at a funeral or birthday party. In every scenario, people must, at least, attempt to manipulate their feelings in order to make others feel at ease within the interaction. This means exhibiting “appropriate” outward displays of grief and sadness at a funeral (e.g., crying, wearing black clothing, offering condolences) or happiness at a birthday party (e.g., smiling, laughing).

The problem with emotion work is twofold. First, it is socially constructed as women’s work. Whether in a public or private setting people come to expect that women should nurture the feelings of others (Hochschild 1979). For example, mothers are expected to do the majority of emotion management within families (Hochschild and Machung 2012).¹

¹ Although, research indicates fathers are increasingly expected, and are willing, to engage in emotion work as well (Kaufman 2013).
This is especially consequential for women in the workplace when work colleagues and superiors hold them accountable to gendered constructions (Blair-Loy 2003; Stone 2007). Moreover, even though some women do not perceive shouldering the burden of emotion work as negatively impacting their martial satisfaction (Meier, McNaughton-Cassill, and Lynch 2008), the fact remains that women are primarily tasked with this responsibility while men are not. Second, women can become divorced from how they personally feel about interactions versus how they “should” feel (Hochschild 1979). That is, private acts – how I feel – become regulated by powerful others – how you should feel. Consequently, this can lead people to feel emotionally numb to the circumstances in which they find themselves.

The body of literature on emotion work is enormously important because it pushes academic and lay understanding on how to measure equality, and understand what it may look like, within the home. It forces us to consider how household and childcare tasks cannot be solely measured in the physical work performed in the home. The emotional work required to manage household members’ emotional and psychological well-being are just as important for the health and vitality of families. But there is another dimension of invisible work within families as well.

Over the past several decades a growing body of literature focuses on “mental labor.” Generally, this refers to the invisible, mental work required to run and maintain a social institution. This requires people to have a working knowledge of the daily needs of the institution itself, personnel within the institution best suited to complete these tasks, resources at the institution’s disposal to complete these tasks, and time and effort required to complete these tasks.
In one of the first studies of mental labor, Margolis (1974) examined the gender division of labor in local Democratic and Republican party organizations in a small New-England town. Through fieldwork and interviews with 13 women and 23 men across these parties, Margolis found that women took it upon themselves to ensure they completed the logistical needs of their respective parties. These tasks included planning meetings, ensuring workers printed mailing lists, and arranging fundraisers. This required them to work twice as many hours as their male counterparts. Men, on the other hand, spent their time talking with voters, candidates, and local party clubs; all of which required less time. Consequently, women performed the invisible, mental work required to run and maintain the local political party operations, while men performed the visible work. Such arrangements not only hid contributions women made to ensure the smooth operation of these parties, but rewarded women and men differently. Men received more praise and were in better position for promotion than women. Additionally, people justified this gendered division of labor by essentializing gender differences in that women are better suited for planning and organizing than men.

Such is the consistent finding when examining mental labor within the family. For example, DeVault (1991) examined how 30 women in Chicago approached feeding and caring for their families. While seemingly innocuous, feeding the family requires more than just being able to physically perform this task. It requires knowing the dietary needs and food preferences of family members, ensuring meals are both nutritious and delicious, planning meals and time to cook, retaining a working knowledge of ingredients at home and those which need purchasing, and rotating popular family meals so people do not become bored
with the household menu. Moreover, women justified performing the majority of mental
labor because they are “naturally” better suited at organization and planning than men.

Although not the first to identify the phenomenon, Walzer (1996) was the first to use
the term “mental labor” when examining how 25 couples talked about caring for their infant.
According to Walzer, mental labor, “…is meant to distinguish the thinking, feeling, and
interpersonal work that accompanies the care of babies from physical tasks…” (1996: 219).
Through her interview data, Walzer argues that women worried more about their babies,
processed solicited and unsolicited advice on the best practices to care for children, and
managed the baby appointments and supplies while trying to “entice” fathers to become
involved in infant care. Because these women shouldered the burden of the mental labor,
they changed their work patterns, quit, or cut back in their work hours to meet the increased
mental work associated with baby care. Additionally, women reported co-workers held them
more accountable to be the ones to care for their children which added pressure on them to
leave their jobs. Other studies find similar results where women shoulder the mental labor
within their family, such as maintaining family calendars and children’s activities
(Zimmerman et al. 2002), manipulating their paid work schedules to meet the organizational
demands of family life (Daly 2002; Hessing 1994), scheduling family activities while
balancing and delegating household tasks for husbands to complete (Coltrane 1989; Coltrane
1996), and planning their weddings, mostly, on their own (Sniezek 2005).

Similar to the burdens of emotion work, mental labor is taxing on several different
levels. First, women who perform the majority of mental labor feel overburdened, stressed,
and perceive their marriages to be of low quality (Mederer 1993; Offer 2014; Offer and
Schneider 2011; Thorstad 2006). For example, in a sample (N=359) of women employed by the state of Rhode Island, Mederer (1993) found that wives were overwhelmingly responsible for household management items and more likely to be responsible for assigning chores, making household financial decisions, and arranging home repairs than men. Additionally, the more time women spent planning and doing household tasks, the less likely they were to feel the division of household labor was fair. Similarly, Offer (2014) found that when men are not involved in mental labor (in addition to physical and emotional aspects of housework and childcare), women are more likely to experience work-family spillover which negatively impacted their emotional wellbeing.

Second, when men do not engage mental labor this runs the risk of reifying gendered ideologies and patterns of behavior which justify gender inequality within the home. Just as emotion work becomes associated as an essential feature of being a woman, mental work is similarly constructed as an essential difference between women and men. Consequently, this leads to yet another form of invisible labor women are expected to complete. While men are slowly recognizing they need to contribute more physical hours in the home, it is uncertain if they think the same with regards to the invisible labor in the home.

At present, the majority of research on the household division of labor focuses on heterosexual women’s expectations and experiences around household work. Thus, an important contribution of this project is analyzing an underexplored question in previous literature – how do heterosexual men experience and justify their involvement in the household division of labor? Addressing this question will extend research on the invisible and unpaid work in the household division of labor. As I discuss in detail in Chapter 3 how
accomplishing household and childcare tasks does not just happen. People have to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks while balancing other professional and social obligations (i.e., work schedules, extracurricular activities, people’s preferences for doing certain tasks, managing social relationships).

We are not without some understanding of how men talk about the household division of labor. I now turn my attention towards what we know about how men describe their involvement in housework and childcare tasks.

*Men’s Involvement in the Household Division of Labor*

In general, the household division of labor refers to how people living together share the unpaid work that goes into running and maintaining a home. These tasks include, but are not limited to, washing the dishes, doing the laundry, dusting, vacuuming, grocery shopping, taking out the garbage, cleaning the bathrooms and kitchen, cooking, purchasing goods and services for the home, auto maintenance, repairing items, and planning meals.

A noticeable omission from this list is childcare. For those families with children, tasks related to childcare (i.e., dressing children, playing with children, preparing meals, providing transportation to and from school, assisting in homework) are an integral part to the household division of labor. It is important to distinguish between childcare and household work because an interesting contradiction emerges from a careful examination of the literature on the household division of labor.

Men are embracing childrearing tasks associated with the household division of labor, while simultaneously shirking housework tasks. This is an interesting contradiction because, in the not-so-distant past, both were viewed as being the sole responsibility of women.
Researchers focus a great amount of scholarly attention towards unraveling how, and why, men are embracing a major part of the household division of labor – childcare (Coltrane, Parke, and Adams 2004; Kaufman 2012; Kramer and Kramer 2016; Luke, Xu, and Thampi 2014; Townsend 2002). What is less understood, however, are the underlying processes in how, and why, men continue to rebuke another major part of the household division of labor that is unrelated to childcare – housework.

For example, Kaufman (2013) explores what being a father means to a racially and economically diverse group of 70 fathers in North Carolina and California. Through in-depth interviews she identifies 21 of these men as “superdads,” men who embraced being a caregiver as a central part to their identity. In fact, these men change their work lives in order to share parenting duties with their wives and become deeply involved in the lives of their children. They place primacy upon being a “good father” over being a “good worker.”

Kaufman’s (2013) work is illustrative of men’s changing views and practices on fatherhood. In 2015, the Pew Research Center estimated the majority of fathers (57 percent) see parenting as a central part of their identity (Parker and Livingston 2016). The number of stay-at-home fathers doubled from 1.1 million in 1989 to 2.2 million in 2010 (Parker and Livingston 2016). Men also greatly increased the average number of hours they spend on childcare. From 1965 to 2011, the average number of hours fathers spent on childcare increased from 2.5 hours per week to 7 hours per week (Parker and Wang 2013).

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2 Women, however, continue to spend more time on childcare than men. Over this same period, women spent an average of 10 hours per week on childcare in 1965, and 14 hours per week in 2011. This is partly due to many working mothers who are forced out of the workforce because of encouragement from husbands and from workplace practices and policies which discourage them from working (Stone 2007). Working mothers are also
The evidence is mixed, however, on the extent to which women and men view how much household work men should do. In 2007, 62 percent of American adults said marriages are better when women and men share childcare and housework (Pew Research Center 2007). These numbers were even larger for younger adults (ages 18-25) where 72 percent said the best marriages are when women and men equally share in childrearing and domestic work (Pew Research Center 2010b). A recent study by Quadlin and Doan (2016), however, belie these trends which suggest a move towards gender egalitarianism in the home. In a nationally representative survey of 1,025 adults in 2015, respondents assigned a preselected list of household chores and childcare tasks to couples in hypothetical vignettes. Almost 75 percent of respondents assigned women in the heterosexual vignettes to complete the indoor household tasks (e.g., cooking, cleaning the house, buying groceries), while almost 90 percent assigned men to outdoor tasks (e.g., maintain the car, cutting the grass). Additionally, women were overwhelming tasked with meeting the physical and emotional needs of children and the majority of respondents (62 percent) thought women should be the stay-at-home parent.

We also know that, in practice, men do not do their fair share of housework unrelated to childcare. Recent research demonstrates the gender gap in housework is narrowing (Bianchi et al. 2000; Bianchi et al. 2006; Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011; Sayer 2005). For example, in 1965, men did approximately four hours of housework per week while women performed 32 hours per week (Parker and Wang 2013). In 2011, men more than __________

expected to invest enormous amounts of emotional energy, financial resources, physical labor, and time into raising their children (Hays 1996).
doubled their time doing housework where they performed nine hours per week as compared to 15 hours for women (Parker and Wang 2013). Despite these increases women continue to do more housework than men (Bianchi et al. 2006; Sayer 2005; Sayer et. al 2009). Even in marriages where: a) women are the primary breadwinners (Atkinson and Boles 1984; Brines 1994; Demantas and Myers 2015; Greenstein 2000; Tichenor 2005), b) egalitarian arrangements of household work existed before the arrival of children (Yavorsky, Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015), c) men are unemployed (Brayfield 1992), and d) couples live in some countries outside of the United States (Geist and Cohen 2011; Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011) women do more housework than men.

Lost in the trends, prevalence, and variance of housework within heterosexual marriages is how men justify their level of involvement in childrearing tasks, but not household work. It is important to have a critical analysis of what men say because they have a hand in perpetuating traditional gendered ideologies within the home. What men say about both childrearing and housework, how they feel about it, and experience it within their marriage can provide deeper insight into the underlying processes in the gendered household division of labor. More broadly, these narratives can provide larger worldviews men have about gender, work-family balance, and how gender inequality is produced within the home.

Previous research is not without some understanding of men’s perspectives on the household division of labor. In the next section I discuss select literature which takes a qualitative approach towards understanding men’s perspective on the household division of labor (both childcare and housework). Throughout this section I highlight how my study draws upon and contributes to this growing body of work.
What do Men Say about the Household Division of Labor?

*Employment Status and Men’s Involvement*

There are two themes emerging from the growing body of literature on men’s perspectives about the household division of labor. The first theme is that suffering a job loss will make some men more active in fathering, but not in housework tasks. For example, men interviewed by Demantas and Myers (2015) who suffered job loss during the Great Recession reportedly\(^3\) engaged in more housework and childcare after losing their job. Prior to this, women sharing homes with these men (e.g., wives, mothers, sisters, and relatives) did the majority of household labor. Similarly, some\(^4\) husbands interviewed by Banjeree (2015) who immigrated to the United States took pride in, and lobbied for, childrearing as being just as valuable as being the economic provider in their family. At the same time, these men lamented their job loss and refused to engage in household work unrelated to childcare because it is “women’s work.”

Job loss for some men, however, does not appear to change their views and practices in housework (Banjeree 2015; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Naples 1994; Tichenor 2005). Some men attributed their refusal to engage in housework after

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\(^3\) “Reportedly” is important to remember. We know from numerous studies that married men notoriously over report the amount of time they spend completing household tasks (Newport 2008; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009).

\(^4\) Some women interviewed by Banjeree reported their husbands refused to travel to the United States because this would result in unemployment. H-1B visas are used as worker visas for skilled positions in the U.S. economy. The majority of Indians who receive these types of visas are men in the high-tech industry. Since the 1970s, Indian women have received the majority of H-1B visas and, primarily, work as nurses. Spouses receive a H-4 visa which is a ‘dependent’ visa. These visas place employment restrictions on spouses entering the U.S where they are not allowed to work for pay until the spouse with the H-1B visa is a permanent resident (which can take 5-15 years). Thus, these families are forced into a breadwinner-homemaker model.
a job loss to the gendered belief that housework is “women’s work.” For example, Legerski and Cornwall (2010) found that the majority of steel-working men who lost work because of a closure to a steel-factory refused to engage in more housework. In fact, the more hours their wives worked, the less these men did around the home. Even younger generations of men appear to retain to rigid gendered beliefs of housework if faced with the prospect of job loss (Gerson 2010). For example, Gerson (2010) found that when talking with younger generations of men about their future plans for marriage and family, they would support their wives’ jobs, believe it is important for both spouses to work, and express egalitarian views in childrearing and housework. They stated they would be unwilling, however, to pursue a family strategy where they are not the breadwinners. Furthermore, these men stated they would be unwilling to relocate for their wives’ jobs. Women, they argued, should be the ones willing to relocate so the family does not lose the breadwinner’s (i.e., their) income.

My dissertation contributes to this body of literature by exploring the conditions under which men identify as being the breadwinner or non-breadwinner in their family and, in turn, how this shapes their view of the household division of labor. As I discuss in Chapter 3, regardless of their breadwinning status, the majority of men discuss housework in terms of physical and emotional contributions. Interestingly, many men express the difficulties of the emotion work required of being a father and caring spouse; but fail to discuss parallel work with regards to the mental work associated with the household division of labor. This is surprising when considering that many of these men work in occupations, or enjoy leisure activities, which require an enormous amount of mental work. Exploring how these men reconcile their breadwinning status with their views of unpaid work offers a nuanced
understanding into how men from a variety of social class backgrounds conceptualize the household division of labor. This extends recent research which shows that even in favorable institutional settings where men have access to supportive work-family polices they are likely to favor relationships which maintain their status as the primary breadwinner (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015; Thébaud and Pedulla 2016).

Moreover, how these men justify their involvement, or lack thereof, in childcare and housework addresses the contradiction in the literature where men embrace selective aspects of the household division of labor. As I discuss in Chapter 4, comparing how breadwinning and non-breadwinning men justify their level of involvement in the household division of labor provides additional, and more nuanced, insight into how economic positioning within a marriage shapes men’s views on the household division of labor. This is important because previous studies indicate that some men’s views of housework can change, but only after suffering a job loss. It is not because of a newfound sense of commitment towards feminist ideals. It is because these men’s vulnerabilities as not being the breadwinner that they refashion their involvement in housework as a “compensatory act of masculinity” (Demantas and Myers 2015; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).

**Gender Ideology and Negotiating on Unpaid Work**

The second theme is that some men engage in household work if they are willing to confront hegemonic ideals of masculinity and negotiate with their partners over the allocation of tasks. For example, the professional and blue-collar Chicana workers studied by Pesquera (1997) used their labor market positions to convince their husbands to do more housework. These women argued that long work days and travel requirements did not leave them much
time to complete housework. They also pointed out that changing their work schedules would impact household income. In her interview study among 150 married heterosexual couples, Deutsch (1999) argues what matters most in creating equal childcare arrangements are the mundane, everyday choices couples make together. Even though all married couples face structural barriers – where their jobs are located in relation to where they live, how many hours they work per week, their pay, do they have benefits from the job (and if any are offered can they cover the family), how childcare services are covered and by whom – what matters most are the decisions couples make together. In the negotiation process over childcare, couples who are able to create equal arrangements are those who commit to egalitarian ideas and practices. Sherman (2009) found that men who suffered job loss in the logging industry were amenable to changing their views on housework. Specifically, some families (35 out of 52) developed “flexible gender identities” where men refashioned masculinity away from breadwinning, no longer believed in separate spheres, and (reportedly) engaged in more childcare and housework.

Other studies suggest that men reframe housework as an alternative means through which to demonstrate their ability to provide for their families. This is because when some men are unable to enact the hegemonic masculine ideal of “breadwinner,” they, and their wives, develop rhetorical strategies to emphasize men’s ability to “provide” for their families. For example, “unconventional earners” – when wives earn substantially more than their husbands or work in much higher status occupations – interviewed by Tichenor (2005) worked together to redefine what it means to be a “provider.” Aware that men in these marriages were unable to provide economically, these couples expressed that men provided
for their families by meeting the emotional needs of the family or managing the family finances. The same was true for men interviewed by Demantas and Myers (2015), Banerjee (2015), and Legerski and Cornwall (2010), but only with respect to childcare.

Based upon this previous research an unanswered question develops: what does being a “provider” mean to married men? Even though being the breadwinner of the family remains a central feature for many men in their masculine identity (Banjeree 2015; Christiansen and Palkovitz 2001; Connell 2005; Demantas and Myers 2015; Kimmel and Ferber 2006; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Nock 1998; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005; Townsend 2002), it appears that some men are refashioning the idea of “providing” for their family away from economic means. In Chapter 5, I explore how men conceptualize “providing” and what the implications of these meanings are to their level of involvement in the household division of labor. Assessing the different conditions under which men create meaning to the idea of “providing” is an important contribution towards understanding how the hegemonic ideal of breadwinner shapes their identity.

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

*Doing Gender* is my theoretical approach towards understanding men’s involvement in the household division of labor. In the following sections I highlight the central tenets of this theory, how scholars utilize a version of this theory to explain the allocation of household tasks among women and men, and discuss how my study fits into this theoretical tradition.
Doing Gender

The key to understanding doing gender is to distinguish between sex, sex category, and gender. According to West and Zimmerman (1987) people use sex to identify a person’s genitalia. Sex category is how people display and recognize any one person’s sex. These displays, generally, can be what people do with their body, dress, and behavior. Finally, gender is when people are held accountable to act in accordance with their perceived membership to a sex category. What is important to note, however, is that sex categorization (i.e., how people externally indicate and recognize other people as being a particular sex) is socially regulated and culturally specific. This means that how people display and recognize membership to a sex category and are held accountable to act in accordance with a perceived sex category (i.e., do gender) changes over time and across space.

Accordingly, gender is an ongoing, interactional, and social process. This means that on a daily basis people are “doing” gender. It is through social interactions people have with one another, and with social institutions, reinforce and maintain our ideas about the activities and behaviors in which women and men “should” engage. For example, Chicana workers interviewed by Pesquera (1997) noted their husbands’ staunch belief that housework is “women’s work” was a major barrier in getting men to do more housework. The same was true for the husbands of immigrant, female nurses from India working in the United States (Banjeree 2015). These husbands expressed that housework was “women’s work” and thus, not something that men should do. Demantas and Myers (2015) found that in coping with job loss during the Great Recession, many men struggled with their deeply held views that men should be the breadwinner of the family. While men embraced doing the majority of
housework (i.e., providing “care instead of bread” (2015: 659)) and women as the breadwinner, they were uncomfortable with the “reversal of roles.”

The result of “doing” gender is that people are inclined to believe that socially created differences between women and men are the result of natural, biological differences. The resulting social patterns emerging from these interactions become a taken-for-granted part of social reality. This is problematic because socially constructed differences become viewed as naturally occurring processes, rather than the product of social forces. In turn, this can reinforce and justify patterns of social behavior which benefit men at the expense of women.

For example, some scholars utilize a variation of “doing gender” to explain how people divide household labor within families where women are the breadwinners and men are the economically dependent spouse. These types of households are interesting because some scholars predict that women will do more housework than is typically expected by a breadwinning spouse. They do this in order to neutralize their “deviant” behavior of being a breadwinning woman and as a way to demonstrate their femininity. Conversely, men do less housework than expected of the non-breadwinning spouse. Refusing to do housework (or at least their fair share) is a way to compensate for their inability to be the breadwinner by enacting the belief that housework is “women’s work.”

This pattern of behavior trumps conventional thinking on how people within households divide household labor. In economic dependency models (Brines 1994) the non-

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breadwinning spouse does more housework than the breadwinning spouse. They do this in order to equalize the amount of unpaid work they do in relation to the paid work of their spouse. In these models, money is what matters most in predicting which spouse does the majority of housework. Simply put, money trumps gender in determining which spouse does more housework.

Although this is a small segment of the married population, scholars examine these types of family arrangements in order to explore the pervasiveness of gender ideology in structuring the household division of labor (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Evertsson and Nermo 2004; Gupta 2006; Greenstein 2000). Brines (1994) and Greenstein (2000) were the first scholars to find a neutralization effect using nationally representative data. Brines (1994) found that dependent husbands do less housework the more they depend on their wives for income. Women, however, did less housework the more economically independent they became. Greenstein (2000) found a neutralization effect for both women and men. Specifically, when wives are the primary breadwinners they do more housework than wives who earn about the same amount as husbands. Economically dependent husbands did the least housework, whereas husbands who are sole breadwinners were predicted to do more of the total housework. Other scholars found similar results among women in international settings (Aassve, Fuochi, and Mencarini 2014; Baxter and Hewitt 2013; Bittman et. al 2003; Yu and Xie 2011), wives without a college degree who have children under 18 (Usdansky

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6 In 2017, the Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates there were 59 million married-couple families in the United States. Wives and husbands worked in 29 million families, husbands alone worked in 11 million families, only wives worked in 4 million families, other employment combinations were in 4 million families, and there were 11 million families with no members in the workforce (BLS 2018).
and Parker 2011), men in 18 select countries (Thébaud 2010), and men in non-normative gendered occupations (Schneider 2012).  

**Undoing or Redoing Gender**

A growing area of interest in this theoretical tradition is assessing how people are undoing gender. If gender is a fluid concept, constructed through how people act, interact, and held accountable to act in particular ways, can people engage in behavior which works towards dismantling the resulting power differences between sexes? West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is not something which is accomplished. It is an ongoing, daily process which is constantly evolving and changing to reflect the socio-historical moment in which people live. It would, therefore, stand to reason that people can work towards deconstructing hegemonic conceptions of masculinity and femininity. Put differently, if people are doing gender, are there ways people are *undoing* gender?

Judith Butler (2004) was the first to posit a social theory of undoing gender. Drawing upon psychoanalysis, philosophy, feminism, and queer theory, Butler’s divides her work into 11 essays reflecting upon how people become defined as gendered and sexualized beings. Throughout her work, she urges readers to confront prevailing assumptions about gender and sexuality. Doing so, she argues, forces us to consider how gender and sexuality are social constructions, and how categorizing people by gender and sexuality creates differences

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7 There are scholars, however, who argue that no such effect happens. These scholars contend that measurement errors in women’s income as compared to men’s (Gupta 2006; Gupta 2007; Gupta and Ash 2008; Hook 2017), women’s employment hours (Hook 2017), and time spent on household labor (Kan 2008) account for the perceived gender deviance neutralization effect. Moreover, changes to men’s attitudes and practices in housework over the last several decades refute assertions that men in these types of marriages avoid housework (Sullivan 2011).
which, in turn, are used to justify inhumane treatment of people. By addressing such topics as sex reassignment surgery, transsexuality, kinship and sexuality, and the gendering of human bodies Butler highlights what the experience of undoing gender looks like and the potential ramifications of this process to the gender order.

Since then, a growing body of research calls for researchers to focus on the interactional ways people are undoing gender. Most prominently, Deutsch (2007) and Risman (2009) assert that future research should focus on how people challenge prevailing gendered norms in social interactions, the conditions under which people subvert gendered expectations, and potential ways structural and interactional levels can work together to eradicate gender inequality. In short, examining social processes of “undoing gender” can address perceived, experienced, and objective instances of gender inequality.

Some people, however, are not so optimistic about the prospect of people undoing gender. West and Zimmerman (2009) acknowledge people can act in gender atypical ways. This, however, does nothing to address the accountability structures which result from people “doing” gender. People will still hold others accountable to their sex category. Consequently, rather than undoing gender people are doing gender in a different way, or what they call “redoing” gender. For example, Brenton and Elliott (2014) examined interview data from 25 people who use complementary and alternative medicine (CAM) (e.g., chiropractic, acupuncture, reiki, and homeopathy). While CAM is typically associated with women who seek self-care and inner tranquility, men describe CAM as an example of being a responsible health consumer. To offset the stigma of using “feminine” medicine, they emphasized scientific and logical reasons for using CAM in addressing their health concerns. Rather than
“undoing” gender by utilizing CAM, these men are “redoing” gender by redefining a perceived feminine action through hegemonic masculine ways (i.e., emphasizing how logic and control, and not their emotions, influence their actions).

Others, however, examine social interactions to assess how, and if, people are undoing gender. For example, Darwin’s (2017) virtual ethnography of a gender non-binary online community illustrated how people reproduce and challenge gender differences. Even though people in this online community explicitly reject the gender binary as natural, some members work to cultivate gender identities which are distinctly “feminine” or “masculine.” In these instances, members of this community, ironically, reproduce the gender order by explicitly engaging in behavior to present clear gendered identities. Others, however, intentionally craft ambiguous gender identities by subverting expectations of how women and men “should” act and appear in public. Even though these members attempt to “undo gender” in their actions (i.e., clothing choices, hair style, body movements, use of pronouns), people who identify in the gender binary system still hold them accountable to being either male or female. Scholars make similar conclusions when studying police work (Chan, Doran, and Marel 2010), women working as police officers (Morash and Haar 2012), the division of labor in Dutch sports governance boards (Claringbould and Knoppers 2008), divorce (Walzer 2008), and how separated parents discuss child support (Natalier and Hewitt 2014).

Undoing gender (as well as redoing gender) is the ideal framework for analyzing how men understand and justify their involvement in the household division of labor. If, as Judith Lorber (2000) argues, the way to change our gendered expectations and assumptions in modern Western societies is to change everyday behavior, what can we conclude about men
who do housework and childcare? Are men who plan, prepare, and cook meals regularly for
their family playing a part in disrupting the gender order? If men actively nurture and console
their children, are they “undoing” gender?

These are but a few of the theoretical questions I explore in this dissertation. Doing so
will contribute to theoretical discussions on whether undoing gender is possible. As I discuss
throughout chapters three, four, and five research on the household division of labor is
limited by not considering how gender is also constructed as a mental process that works
simultaneously with what people do with their bodies and emotions in order to create
understandings of gender. The men in my study go to great lengths to describe how their
physical and emotional actions are indicative of undoing the gender order (at least within
their families). However, despite their intentions to undo gender, men are redoing gender in
ways which reify the gender order by not disrupting how they think about gender and larger
issues surrounding gender inequality.

CONCLUSION

The point of this study is to examine how men understand and justify their
involvement in the household division of labor in contemporary heterosexual American
couples. Doing so, I argue, is important for two very important reasons. One, there is a dearth
of understanding as to how men reflect upon their actions in the home and justify their level
of involvement. This study, therefore, contributes to a small, but growing body of literature
on men’s involvement in housework and childcare tasks. Two, how men discuss household
chores and childcare is a vehicle through which to understand larger ideas men hold about
gender and family life. As I will argue in this dissertation, how men frame and describe their involvement (or non-involvement) in household chores is a reflection of larger contemporary views men have about gender.

I divided the remaining parts of this dissertation into five chapters. Chapter 2 outlines my research methods. I provide an in-depth discussion of my research questions, methods, research sample, and method of data analysis. I also include a discussion of the research ethics associated with this study, as well as how my positionality shaped the research process.

In Chapter 3 I highlight how mental labor – which is the mental work required to recognize, plan, and execute the demands of living in a family – features prominently in men’s accounts of housework and childcare. I outline four ways that mental labor appeared during interviews, implications of this type of work on family life, and how men avoid this type of work.

In Chapter 4, I identify and analyze the stories men tell about which tasks they do, and do not do, in the home. Regardless of the task, men rejected the idea that housework and childcare is “women’s work.” They point to their purported involvement in household and childcare tasks as evidence of their commitment to feminist practices within the family. They ground their logic, however, within traditional thinking about the household division of labor when describing their involvement in housework and childcare tasks. This lays the groundwork for these men to justify any resulting inequalities in the household division of labor and perpetuate gender stereotypes within the home.
In Chapter 5, I explore what equality means to men when dividing up household labor with their partners. Despite the majority of men in my sample spending fewer hours per week on housework than their wives, they overwhelmingly argue these arrangements are fair. I analyze these justifications, which ultimately enable them to benefit from these purportedly fair arrangements.

I conclude my dissertation in Chapter 6 with a summary of my results. In particular, I highlight how the mental labor found within the home mirrors the type of paid work performed by many men in their occupations. Consequently, it is not surprising to see that many men do not want to engage in mental labor at home – because they spend all day doing it at their jobs. However, as we move deeper into the 21st century where more jobs will require mental labor, future research will need to explore the implications of mental labor on the family, applications of this concept to the workplace, and highlight how this contributes towards understanding the reproduction of gender inequality.
CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH METHODS

INTRODUCTION

In this chapter I detail how I collected and analyzed data for my dissertation. I begin by presenting the research questions guiding my study. I discuss my method of interviewing, study criteria, recruitment strategy, interview medium, and utilization of a demographic information form. I then discuss my research sample and how I analyzed the interview data. I conclude this chapter by discussing ethical concerns posed by this study and research positionality.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In Chapter 1 I reviewed two key themes from research on the household division of labor. First, despite men doing more housework than ever before women continue to do the majority of household work. An interesting, and unreconciled, contradiction emerges from men’s involvement in the household division of labor. Men are increasingly embracing childrearing tasks but avoiding household work unrelated to childcare. Second, there is limited understanding about men’s perspectives on the household division of labor. What little we know suggests that some men engage in household work if they are willing to confront hegemonic ideals of masculinity and negotiate with their partners over the allocation of tasks. Other studies suggest when some men are unable to enact the hegemonic masculine ideal of “breadwinner,” they, and their wives, develop rhetorical strategies to emphasize men’s ability to “provide” for their families in non-monetary ways. Thus, it appears men have a tenuous, but unexamined, relationship of what “providing” means and looks like for their family. To this end, this project explored the following research questions:
1. What does the division of household labor mean to a group of men from diverse economic and racial backgrounds?

2. How do these men experience and do household labor within their marriage?

3. What does being a family provider mean to these men?

Within these broad questions, I explored how men understand the intersection of gender, work, and family. I explored what being a father means to these men. How do they practice it? What does doing housework look like for them? Does engaging in housework conflict with their conceptions of masculinity? How do they negotiate completing housework and childcare tasks with their partners? How do they feel about the practices of unpaid labor within their marriage? What do the different conceptions of housework and childcare practices say about these men’s social location and how it enables them to actualize their professed beliefs in sharing household work?

Answering these research questions is a meaningful contribution to research on the household division of labor by examining it as a process, rather than an outcome of family life. Part of this process, which this study focuses on, are the views and practices men have about household work. Exploring these questions provides deeper insight into men’s perceptions of the household division of labor, experiences in negotiating how it gets done, and justifications for their involvement in unpaid labor. Finally, these questions serve as a way to theoretically explore men’s understandings of marriage, family life, and how gender inequality manifests within modern-day marriages.
RESEARCH METHODS

Recruitment

I began this study by recruiting heterosexual, married men from within my social and professional networks (n=8). These are people with whom I either had at least one prior conversation, exchanged contact information during a previous interaction, or knew through a colleague or friend. These people did not include family members (immediate or otherwise), people I talk with on a weekly or monthly basis (i.e., close friends), or those which could provide conflicts of interest.8

I primarily used snowball sampling to recruit men for my study. I asked men for interview referrals after each interview for those they knew who fit my study criteria. In the end, 27 of the 37 men I interviewed came from referrals. This is a standard and widely accepted practice in qualitative research (Esterberg 2002; Gilgun, Daly and Handel 1992; Greenstein and Davis 2013; Maxwell 2005). Indeed, I found that having someone (i.e., a gatekeeper) vouch for who you are, what you are doing, and why you are doing it was more effective in getting people to agree to participate in my study than “cold calling” on people.

I posted flyers in several cities in North Carolina (e.g., daycare centers, college campuses, universities) and in several online venues (e.g., craigslist, Facebook, emails sent through contacts at a community college in North Carolina). I secured only two interviews through these advertisements. One responded to an email sent through a community college in North Carolina and the other to an advertised flyer on the campus of this community college. I also attempted to recruit men in four groups designed for stay-at-home and working-fathers that are organized

8 Several of my wife’s work supervisors fit the criteria for this study. However, I never asked them to participate. Doing so would create many ethical conundrums. Most importantly, there is too much uncertainty of how this could impact my wife’s job and relationship with her supervisors.
though the social networking website Meetup.com. I contacted administrators in each group to ask for interview referrals but received no response.

*Arranging Interviews*

I mostly communicated with my participants through emails. In fact, I arranged 32 of my interviews solely through email exchanges. This is because my referrals provided me with more emails than phone numbers as a way to contact potential participants. Additionally, I included my email address on the flyers advertising my study. In these instances, I emailed these men to solicit their participation and, after numerous exchanges, eventually arranged an interview. On average, I exchanged 10 emails over 15 days to finalize the logistics – meaning a time, date, and medium (e.g., in-person, telephone, or virtual interview). The shortest amount of time it took to schedule an interview was less than a day, the longest took 114 days. A referral provided me only a phone number in five cases. In these instances, I began my communication through a text message where I introduced myself, how I received their number, and why I was contacting them. On average, I exchanged 11 texts over 8 days to secure a time, location, and medium.

Arranging interviews was an unanticipated difficulty. It took multiple emails over two weeks, in most cases, to get these men to commit to a date, time, and medium. A minority neglected to return the consent and background information forms prior to their interview. They eventually did; but only after I sent multiple emails and texts asking for these forms. Some men also did not know how to download forms from their email, or how to electronically return them when completed. When it was necessary, I talked with them on the phone or emailed them instructions on how to electronically return scanned documents.

Literature on qualitative methods does not typically discuss the challenges of arranging interviews. The majority of qualitative research texts emphasize that, in general, this type of
research is time consuming because it takes long periods of time in order to reach “theoretical saturation” – the point where collecting new data do not yield new insights into the field or research questions guiding the study (Gilgun, Daly and Handel 1992; Maxwell 2005). Gaining access into field settings, finding people who fit your study criteria, transcribing interviews, and coding and memoing are some of the clearest examples of why people point out this type of research is time consuming (Arksey and Kinght 1999; Berg and Lune 2012; Lofland et al. 2006; Maxwell 2005; Singleton and Straits 2010). Rightfully so.

An important addition to this is that arranging the details of an interview takes time. People live busy lives. Emergencies pop up which alter plans. Some people simply do not show up during the arranged time. All of this is especially true for people with children. It is not easy, therefore, for many people to set aside a block of time for an interview. In fact, one man I interviewed requested his interview to occur in two, 30-minute sessions because of his busy work and family schedule. Not to mention, researchers have their own professional and personal schedules they have to balance in order to secure an interview.

I would be remiss, however, if I did not point out how arranging interviews is a perfect illustration of mental labor. I wrote a memo early in my data collection about my frustrations on how it took most men two weeks to schedule an interview. I made a note in jest that it took a long time for some to commit to an interview, or to return forms, because they – and not their wives – had to perform the mental work of arranging the interview. As I was developing this concept it dawned on me how much mental effort goes into scheduling the logistics of data collection – for me and for participants. A tremendous amount of social planning, on both sides, was required in order for each interview to take place. As I argue later, men in my study rarely take up this type of labor and it typically befalls to their spouse to complete. It would have been
interesting to see how arranging the logistics of the interview would have changed if I also interviewed women married to these men. I suspect the length of time it would take to arrange an interview would reduce dramatically.

_In-person, Virtual, and Telephone Interviews_

I arranged as many face-to-face interviews as possible. Due to financial and time constraints, I limited my face-to-face interviewing to men who lived within a 90-mile driving radius. I provided men the option of a virtual (e.g., skype, facetime, or google hangout) or telephone interview who lived outside of this radius. In the end, I conducted six in-person interviews, 12 virtual interviews, and 19 telephone interviews.

In-person interviewing is the gold standard in qualitative interview research. This is because you can see non-verbal cues, which helps to establish rapport and shapes the pacing of the interview (Berg and Lune 2012; Weiss 1994). Taken together, these types of data cue the researcher into participants’ worldview and helps towards gaining a deeper understanding of the social process under study (Arksey and Knight 1999; Berg and Lune 2012).

Only relying on in-person interviews, however, creates constraints. The biggest being it confines who you can interview to within a geographical location (Berg and Lune 2012). This was a particular concern I wanted to address in my study because of the close correlation between region and people holding conventional views on gender (Powers et al. 2003; Ruppanner and Maume 2016). I addressed this concern by utilizing virtual and telephone interviewing. This enabled me to interview men living in all areas of the United States.

I was able to secure interviews with men in 11 different states by conducting virtual and telephone interviews. As previously mentioned, men could choose between a virtual or

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9 These states were California, Colorado, Massachusetts, Nebraska, Ohio, Pennsylvania, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, and Washington.
telephone interview if I was unable to interview them in person. I did this as a way to give men some agency during the research process. Schwalbe and Wolkomior (2001) suggest engaging in strategies like this in order to provide men some control during the interview. Doing so, they argue, allows for a better interview experience because it can reaffirm any sense of masculinity they perceive to lose during an interview. Additionally, I wanted men to feel comfortable with how I interviewed them. I felt this would facilitate a more relaxed process and would, hopefully, enable them to be more forthcoming in their responses. At the end of our interviews I asked men to reflect on their preference of interview medium.

The primary reason 12 men requested a virtual interview is to be able “to see” me. These men expressed a desire to see my physical reactions during the interview. This helped them to be more at ease during the interview. They also discussed using virtual interviewing as part of their job, it was easier for them than a telephone interview, and viewed it as a substitute for “the real thing” (i.e., an in-person interview). The 19 men who preferred a telephone interview cited convenience. During many of these interviews men were in-route to, or from, their job, running personal errands, or doing something with their children. For example, while I interviewed Donald he made dinner and took his oldest daughter, Brooklyn, to soccer practice. Men who declined a virtual interview often cited technological issues. Such as, not having a skype account (or remembering a password), unaware of how to use virtual interviewing, and being in a location with an unreliable internet connection. These men also preferred an in-person interview but commented they still enjoyed being interviewed.

*Background Information Form*

I provided a brief questionnaire to participants one day before the interview to collect demographic information (see Appendix B). This questionnaire asked men to identify their
gender, race, nationality, highest level of education, political and religious affiliation, employment status, income level, current age, and age at marriage. It also asked for men to identify their breadwinning status and to estimate how many hours per week they and their spouse each spend on housework and childcare tasks.

The background information form had multiple functions. It was an effective way to gather essential contextual information prior to the interview. Rather than spending precious time during the interview asking for demographic information I already had these data collected. This allowed more time for content-specific questions during the interview.

I was also influenced by Pesquera (1997) who also administered a form when interviewing professional, clerical, married, and blue-collar Chicana workers about the household division of labor. She discovered during the interviews that women over-reported the number of hours their husbands spend completing housework. Similarly, I used men’s responses to questions about housework and childcare as a way to probe about their experiences and views with these tasks; and to also compare the stories men told about what they do in the home versus what they reported doing.

The background information form also became an effective way to ease into the interview. For example, Miles’ comment at the end of our interview is illustrative of other men’s perspectives, “Once I saw the form I felt better about the interview because I knew what questions you were going to ask.” Unexpectedly, many men reported feeling more at ease with the interview upon seeing the questions on the background form. Doing so, they said, made the interview “less stressful” because they had some idea of the specific topics we would likely discuss.
At the same time, sending men the background information form before the interview may have influenced their responses during the interview. I was concerned they may overestimate the hours they spend doing housework and childcare tasks. Previous research is rife with examples of men overestimating the number of hours they spend in these tasks (Newport 2008; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Yavorsky, Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015).

Ironically, as I detail in Chapter 5, *men reported their wives spending more hours per week in housework and childcare tasks*. These differences become exacerbated when comparing the hours per week by breadwinning, occupational, and parental status. Even if men overestimated how many hours they actually spend in these tasks, *they still report doing less than their wives*; which is telling in-and-of itself about men’s perceptions of the gender imbalance in household tasks. Additionally, men were very candid during the interviews about their underestimation of how much their wives do and were firm in their beliefs that, despite their wives working more hours per week in housework and childcare tasks, these arrangements are fair. Taken together, I feel the insight gained by sending the form prior to the interview outweigh the limits.

*Semi-Structured Interviews*

I used interviewing in-lieu of other research methods because the goal of my study was to gain deeper insight into the experiences and meanings of household work among heterosexual, married men. As I argued in Chapter 1, men’s perspectives on household work is a growing area of scholarly interest. Beyond discovering what men say they are doing in the home, analyzing men’s accounts of household work contributes to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of how gender inequality is maintained and contested within the home. Interviewing is the best method
to meet this goal because it provides an opportunity to gain deeper insight into the experiences and meanings people attach to their behaviors (Arksey and Knight 1999).

Interviewing is also a useful tool to probe into one of the most intimate social settings in society – the family. Conducting research on any family intrudes into their intimate and private lives. This presents a major obstacle for anyone conducting research on the family (Greenstein and Davis 2013), especially for those conducting qualitative research. It can be unsettling for people to divulge their feelings, thoughts, and stories about family members to a stranger; especially for men (Schwalbe and Wolkomir 2001). Interviewing, however, can ease these concerns because the researcher is connected directly to the participant (Arksey and Knight 1999). This direct connection can foster rapport-building with participants who are more likely to view the researcher-participant interaction as a “conversation,” which is more likely to produce rich data (Arksey and Knight 1999).

Finally, interviewing is a tool for developing detailed and holistic descriptions. It can help to describe processes, uncover how people interpret events, bridge intersubjectivities, identify variables, and frame hypotheses for quantitative studies (Weiss 1994). Additionally, interviews are well suited to analyze the emotions of participants. This can cue the researcher into the “cultural schemas” participants invoke in order to make sense of their social reality (Pugh 2013). Sociologists extensively use interviews to deeper our understanding about complicated issues with family life. For example, how social class shapes practices and beliefs about mothering (Edin and Kefalas 2011; Hertz 2006), how parents talk about sex and sexuality with their teenage children (Elliott 2012), how parenting practices of families differ across racial and class backgrounds (Lareau 2011), the gendered division of household labor (Hochschild and
Machung 2012), and how men from various social classes and racial groups express what it means to be a father (Kaufman 2013).

I conducted semi-structured, in-depth interviews. Semi-structured interviews enable researchers to re-order questions in an interview guide to fit the flow of a conversation, adjust the wording of questions, incorporate probes for unanticipated topics, and delete questions which do not produce rich data (i.e., questions that yield yes/no answers) (Berg and Lune 2012). I valued the flexibility in this type of interview because I entered the field with certain questions in mind but wanted to incorporate questions for unanticipated topics. For example, exploring who manages household finances became an unanticipated, but prominent theme over the course of data collection. Therefore, including some standardized questions, but leaving the interview open to explore unanticipated themes and topics was the best approach for my study.

Study Criteria

I set four criteria to guide eligibility for my study. Men had to be:

1. Married for at least one calendar year.
2. Willing to identify their breadwinning status (e.g., non-breadwinning, equal-earning, breadwinner).
3. Identify as heterosexual.
4. At least 18 years old.

I wanted to interview men who were married for at least one year so that some time could pass for patterns in the household division of labor to emerge. As I found out later, most men said how they complete household tasks has not changed much from when they were first married, or (in some instances) from when they cohabited with their spouse. I required men to identify their breadwinning status because I wanted them to reflect on how their economic position within their marriage shapes their perceptions and experiences of household work.
One limitation of this purposeful sampling is that I excluded homosexual, married men from this study. I did this because I wanted to begin my analysis of household work with men from heterosexual couples. This is not to diminish, nor suggest, that homosexual men’s experiences are not important or valid. In fact, this is a needed contribution towards understanding the dynamics of housework and childcare; especially in light of the legalization of same-sex marriage, only as recently as 2015 in the United States (see Obergefell v. Hodges 2015). As I discuss in Chapter 6, future research needs to address how men married to men experience mental labor.¹⁰

For this study, however, my analysis begins with heterosexual men. I wanted to explore how men in these types of relationships “do,” or potentially “undo,” gender through their purported participation in housework. Recent studies point to men’s increasing involvement in childcare and willingness to embrace a “father” identity as indicators of increasing gender equality in the home (Coltrane, Parke, and Adams 2004; Kaufman 2012; Kramer and Kramer 2016; Luke, Xu, and Thampi 2014; Townsend 2002). But the same cannot be said for other aspects of unpaid work (i.e., housework). This is still largely constructed as “women’s work,” and thus, not what “real men” do (Banjeree 2015; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Naples 1994; Quadlin and Doan 2016; Tichenor 2005).

¹⁰ When I began interviewing I attended a birthday party with my wife for one of her co-workers. The party was at a local brewery in Elizabethtown. While exchanging pleasantries and “get-to-know-you” conversations, I met a lovely gay, married couple. They shared stories of biking through Europe, good places to eat in Elizabethtown, and marital advice (my wife and I were engaged at the time). After explaining I was a graduate student and doing my dissertation on men’s perspectives of housework and childcare, they were intrigued. “Does this include gay men,” Jerry asked. “Unfortunately, not right now,” is the only response I could muster. What stays with me is the disappointment in Jerry’s eyes. “Oh, okay. Well, let me know if you do because we would love to be interviewed.” This stays with me because I felt that I offended Jerry and his husband, Stephen. I felt that I unintentionally signaled their experiences were not valid because they are married men. This experience also reminds me of the marginalization of gay men (and other sexual minorities) in studies on family life. I am not the first person to point this out. But, it was a stark reminder to me that regardless of the results of this study, it will be incomplete until we can learn more about how gay men experience and view the household division of labor.
Analyzing how heterosexual men talk about their involvement in both childcare and household work can address a contradiction in the literature where men embrace childcare tasks, but not household chores. This is a perplexing dynamic when considering both were once considered the sole responsibility of women. I am curious as to why men embrace some aspects of the household division of labor, and not others. Additionally, analyzing how men experience and view housework and childcare can address larger concerns about how men contribute to reproducing gender ideology and patterns of inequality within the home; or, perhaps, how they disrupt it.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

From March – August 2017 I conducted 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with heterosexual, married men. Table 2.1 presents demographic information of my research sample. The average age of men in my sample is 39, with a range in age from 28 to 63 years old. Of the 37 men I interviewed, 19 identified as the breadwinner, 13 as the non-breadwinner\(^\text{11}\), and five as an equal-earning spouse. These men work in a variety of occupations. Most work in white collar jobs (e.g., sales) and only one worked in a blue-collar occupation (e.g., farmer). Three men were currently not working, although two of these men identified as “freelancing” as their occupation instead of “unemployed.”

I altered the names and occupations which appear in Table 2.1 in order to protect the identity of the men I interviewed. These occupations are a close approximation to ones discussed

\(^{11}\) One participant, Morgan, did not return the demographic information form. I determined his breadwinning and parental status, and income information through the interview transcript. When discussing how he and his wife manage the household finances Morgan said, “I mean a few years ago I made barely 30,000 a year, now I make like 55 [thousand]. She’s, I’d say late 50s or early 60s, money wise.” I classified him as a non-breadwinning spouse. His income is between $50k-$59K and his wife, Anna, earns between $60k-$69k. I placed Anna into this income bracket because the median income in 2016 for registered nurses was $68,450 (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017).
during the interviews. I also estimated some of the men’s income when they declined to identify how much they make. I did this in order to gain a better understanding of the demographics of my sample and to help inform my recruiting efforts. In these instances, I used the median income as reported by the most recent data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics to estimate men’s income (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2017).

I then used this information to categorize men in my sample into social class standing (e.g., lower, middle, and upper). I did this by utilizing data gathered by the Pew Research Center (Fry and Kochar 2017) which estimates American’s social class by factoring in the state a person lives in, the metropolitan area of that state, combined household income, and number of people living in a household. To be consistent and conservative with my estimation of men’s social class, I used the low-end number of their designated income. For example, when someone indicated they make between $50,000 and $59,000, I used $50,000 as their income in the social class generator.

While not an exact representation of social class, I used this categorization to aid in my recruiting process so I could work towards getting a diverse sample of men from different occupations and social class standings. It was important to do this in order to direct my sampling and to produce as much heterogeneity across social class as possible, because men’s economic position within a marriage influences their level of involvement in housework and childcare activities (Demantas and Myers 2015; Banerjee 2015; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005).

My intention in categorizing men into these categories is not to reify conceptions of social class (or race). The goal is to understand how men from different social locations view and experience the household division of labor. Having a diverse sample is a crucial component to
### Table 2.1: Sample Characteristics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Income</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Breadwinner?</th>
<th>Parent?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Laboratory Technician</td>
<td>$20k-$29k</td>
<td>MS</td>
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<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anthony</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Physician</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>JD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Film Editor</td>
<td>$70k-$79k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>General Contractor</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>MBA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brandon</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
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<td>Carlos</td>
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<td>Independent Contractor</td>
<td>$50k-$59k</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Colton</td>
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<td>White</td>
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<td>$80k-$89k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>Equal Earning</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cory</td>
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<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Information Technology</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Craig</td>
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<td>*</td>
<td>Investment Banking</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>MBA</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Daniel</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Recruiter</td>
<td>$30k-$39k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dennis</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
<td>$80k-$89k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devin</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Economist</td>
<td>$70k-$79k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>Equal Earning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dexter</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Interior Designer</td>
<td>$40k-$49k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Donald</td>
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<td>Native American</td>
<td>Small Business Owner</td>
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<td>Equal Earning</td>
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<td>Douglas</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Medical Equipment Sales</td>
<td>$80k-$89k</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethan</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Teacher</td>
<td>$30k-$39k</td>
<td>MS, MA</td>
<td>Equal Earning</td>
<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeffery</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Below $10k</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Jeremiah</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Public Health Analyst</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Joel</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Consultant</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<td>Jonathan</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Black</td>
<td>Special Education Teacher</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>BA</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Josh</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Architect</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>MA</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Julian</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Civil Engineer</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>BA</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kaleb</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Musician</td>
<td>$30k-$39k</td>
<td>MM</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keith</td>
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<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Professor</td>
<td>$50k-$59k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kenneth</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Asian/Pacific Islander</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>$30k-$39k</td>
<td>MS</td>
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<td>No</td>
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<tr>
<td>Kyle</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>Some College</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Lester</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Human Resource Manager</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Marvin</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>*</td>
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<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>MS</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>*</td>
<td>Analytic Manager</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>MA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<tr>
<td>Miles</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Software Engineer</td>
<td>$80k-$89k</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Mitchell</td>
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<td>White</td>
<td>Healthcare Administration</td>
<td>$90k-$99k</td>
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<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Morgan</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>Quality Assurance</td>
<td>$50k-$59k</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>No**</td>
<td>Yes**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patrick</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Advertising</td>
<td>Above $100k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raymond</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Independent Contractor</td>
<td>Below $10k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Financial Planner</td>
<td>$70k-$79k</td>
<td>BA</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timothy</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
<td>Food Scientist</td>
<td>$60k-$69k</td>
<td>PHD</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walter</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>Insurance Agent</td>
<td>$30k-$39k</td>
<td>High School Diploma</td>
<td>Equal Earning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* = Preferred not to answer

** = Answers derived from interview; did not return demographic information form
my study because I did not want to assume that all men view and experience housework and childcare the same. This made it important for me to interview men who identify as being either the breadwinner or non-breadwinner in their marriage. Additionally, including a small sample of equal-breadwinning men offered a theoretically interesting comparison group for the breadwinning and non-breadwinning men in my study. This provided a richer understanding of how men, from varying social class locations, experience and explain issues related to the enactment of gender through household work.

My research sample is primarily comprised of upper class (n=12) and middle class (n=23) men (see Table 2.2). Only two men are in the working class. This sampling complements the limited body of research on men’s perspectives of the household division of labor. Many of these studies examine how working and lower-class men (Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Sherman 2009) understand and explain their involvement in the household division of labor.

Some studies explore how unemployed men make sense of, and justify, their involvement in household work (Banjeree 2015; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Naples 1994; Tichenor 2005). My sample is unique in that I interviewed many men from highly-educated and above-average dual-income earning households, who work in white collar jobs. Only a handful of studies which interview men about the household division of labor contain men from white-collar and middle/upper class standing (Deutsch 1999; Hertz 1986).

My sample was also comprised of men from diverse geographical, political, and religious backgrounds. I interviewed men from 11 different states who self-identified with a
range of political and religious views. Over half of my sample identified with some form of form of Christianity (n=19). The other half was comprised of men who identified as Atheist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.2 Research Sample by Social Class</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadwinners</td>
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<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Class</td>
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<tr>
<td>N</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

(n=6), Agnostic (n=2), unsure of what they believed (n=2), having another form of religious belief (n=2) (but did not specify), or as Spiritual (n=1). A small number (n=4) declined to answer. Men’s political identity varied from Democrat (n=12), Independent (n=10), Republican (n=6), and Libertarian (n=5). Two men declined to answer and one identified as a “New Democrat.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2.3 Research Sample by Race/Ethnicity</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Breadwinners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<tr>
<td>Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American/American Indian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No Answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of my respondents were white (n=21). I gained a small, but respectable, number of interviews with non-white men (n=11). Six men identified as being
Hispanic/Latino, two as an Asian or Pacific Islander, two as Black, and one as Native American or American Indian. Four declined to answer.

Taken together, my sample is diverse across age, region, political ideology, religious beliefs, parental status, and race. This is a highly-educated sample from different parts of the country, with stable jobs, and who earn a decent income. Many of these men are in dual-income earning households (n=27) and are married to women who have gone to college and also work in white-collar occupations.

This sample is limited by not having more men of color, those without a college education, blue-collar workers, stay-at-home fathers, and unemployed men. Additionally, I did not conduct any interviews with married men identifying as homosexual. These experiences are also valuable and future studies need to explore them. These different conditions may yield additional insight into how men conceptualize and experience housework and childcare. Future research needs to consider how gay men negotiate household division of labor.\(^\text{12}\)

Lastly, I did not collect data from women in this study. While important towards understanding household work and childcare, the focus of my study was on men’s experiences and perspectives. As discussed in Chapter 1, qualitative research has explored what women do and say in regards to the household division of labor. While this review was

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\(^{12}\) Recent studies examined how the negotiations over household labor occurs in lesbian households. Most notably, Marueen Sullivan’s (2004) and Mignon Moore’s (2011) research on lesbian families address the intersection of sexuality, gender, parenting, and family (and race in Moore’s research). These studies deepen our understanding of the shifting landscape in American families and challenge conventional thinking on how the social processes affecting all families, such as dividing up household work, are experienced differently and to what effect within these families.
not exhaustive, I highlighted how this rich body of literature documents how and why women continue to get the short end of the stick in household labor. The point of my study was to examine how their partners, many of whom are men, experience unpaid labor in family life and justify their involvement. Or, the more likely scenario, their lack of involvement. Future research should focus more on how women experience mental labor and explain their views on the mental work associated with household labor.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. I wrote fieldnotes before every interview detailing the length of communication I had with participants, how I secured an interview with them, and the time, location, medium, and date of the interview. I also wrote “jottings” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) of what people said during the interview, unique phrases used by participants, and unanticipated topics that were discussed.

I immediately captured my impressions of the interview after each interview concluded. I spoke directly into my digital recorder to capture my recollection of the participant’s demeanor, non-verbal cues, body language, interview content, and other fleeting thoughts about the interview. I referred to them later for deeper reflection and to help inform future data collection practices. Additionally, they helped me to detect emerging patterns, unanticipated topics, and contradictions which I explored in subsequent interviews.

I transcribed interviews as soon as I had the opportunity. This, however, proved to be a difficult task. One of the challenges I faced during data collection was keeping up with the frenetic pace of arranging interviews. Because many of these men worked office jobs, there
were constant, and prolonged, email exchanges. There were several instances where in-between conducting an interview, I was communicating with three men simultaneously through email. Another major challenge I faced was balancing my teaching duties as an adjunct sociology instructor. While I was collecting data, I was teaching multiple sections of an Introduction to Sociology course. This too was time demanding and required a lot of attention.

I completely transcribed ten interviews by the end of July. During the transcription process I wrote memos about the interviews. I reflected on the effectiveness of my interview guide, probing questions, background questionnaire, and other thoughts pertaining to how I conducted the interview. This was an important step to take because qualitative researchers are the “research instrument” (Maxwell 2005: 79). Thus, it was imperative to constantly evaluate how I conducted the interviews, phrased questions, followed up on “markers” (Weiss 1994), and other relevant issues related to interviewing. I sent the remaining transcripts and interview reflections to a professional transcription service at the beginning of August.

I used NVivo to analyze my data. I used this program to code interviews, write in-process memos, and analytic memos. I begin coding once the transcription of an interview was complete. In this round of “initial coding” (Charmaz 2006: 47) I categorized each line of data with gerunds in order to preserve the actions and processes discussed by participants. While tedious, this round of coding is important to identify concerns, assumptions, and explicit statements made by my participants. It also grounded my analysis of the data in what participants actually said about the household division of labor. I then moved into a second
round of coding called “focused coding” (Charmaz 2006: 57). In this round of coding I took the most prevalent initial codes and grouped them into more abstract codes in order to organize, condense, and make sense of the data. This allowed me to think conceptually about the data, compare data across interviews, and informed future data collection.

The steps I outlined above, however, did not proceed in a linear fashion. One of the many characteristics of qualitative data collection is that it is dynamic. Consequently, I engaged simultaneously in data collection and analysis in order to collect rich data from the participants. Moreover, analyzing data from the early interviews was imperative in guiding my future interviews on emerging themes, exploring unanticipated topics, and viewing the data from different vantage points.

ETHICS & POSITIONALITY

The greatest ethical concern during my data collection was the overall wellbeing of participants during the interview. We discussed very personal matters and, sometimes, the interview ventured into unanticipated areas of their lives. For example, Michael began our interview talking about the daily routine of his children by saying, “When we had four children…” I asked him what he meant when he said “had” four children. We then spent the next 30 minutes discussing how their first child, Eva, died from a debilitating disease. Michael explained how even though Eva “is no longer with us,” they still talk about her because “she’s still part of our family.” When the interview concluded, Michael thanked me for asking about Eva.
I tried to assuage men’s feelings in instances where I perceived they were experiencing emotional discomfort or if I asked or said something which unintentionally was the source of their discomfort. For example, Jonathan agreed to an interview after a month of email exchanges. Our communication, however, suddenly stopped just before we arranged the logistics of the interview. I contacted him three times over the course of the following week inquiring about a date, time, and medium. Jonathan responded a week later and explained he returned from a close family member’s funeral and this was the reason he suddenly stopped communicating.

I was mortified and immediately racked with guilt. We exchanged several more emails, in which I profusely apologized, and finalized the logistics of the interview. When we began our telephone interview I again expressed my condolences and apologized for any stress I added during his time of loss.

Before the interview began I reminded Jonathan, and all of the other participants who appeared to have some emotional difficulties, we could pause the interview anytime at their discretion. I also reassured everyone their confidentiality and wellbeing were of the utmost importance; we could pause the interview, they could decline to answer any question, or they could stop participating immediately.

The final ethical concern during this project was my positionality. In some respects, I mirror some men in my sample which created an insider status to the men in my study. I am white, middle-class, highly-educated, heterosexual, and male. During the course of this research I became married and turned 30 years old. I am also not the breadwinner of my
family. This could have enabled better rapport and a greater willingness for some men to participate in my study.

In other respects, I diverge from most men in my study. I do not have children, younger (the average age of my sample was 39), and make far less than virtually all of the men in my study. Consequently, this creates an outsider status to most men in my study. These differences came out typically during men’s discussions of being a father and specific childcare tasks. I was also acutely aware of class differences when men from the middle and upper classes discussed cleaning services. It seemed being an outsider in these instances prompted men to explain in greater detail their experiences and perceptions. For example, Julian, a breadwinning, 32-year old civil engineer, who makes over $100,000 a year, described how even though he and his wife, Brenda, have a “cleaner” it is a “shame” because he still has to “pre-clean.” When I asked what he meant by this he responded:

Julian: Obviously, you’ve never had a cleaner.

Scott: No, I haven’t.

Julian: [laughing] So, I'll educate you. Say this table here, we have a messy table in front of us. Is our goal for the person [domestic worker] to clear (emphasis added) the table? Or, is our goal for them to clean (emphasis added) the tabletop? Generally, the cleaner is to do things like cleaning the tabletop. Not necessarily like a maid might be if they lived in your home to clean, or to clear the stuff [on the tabletop]. So, in order for a cleaner to come in and clean the tabletop or the floors, or the bathrooms, or vacuum, or whatever, you need to ensure that the immediate premise is clear of debris for someone to come in and clean the surfaces. Those are the rules they've primarily been. So, bathrooms, cleaning the floors, cleaning countertops. They'll put a dish away here or there. They'll put a few sheets on the bed. But, primarily, you have to remove debris, or at least pack it in a corner to have the cleaner be able to come in and do the things that they do. And that comes from even when I was a child. I always hated it [“pre-cleaning”]. Because,
“Mom, we're paying somebody to do this, why am I doing this when they're gonna come in and do it right after me?”

Julian saying “I’ll educate you” is how many men, especially fathers, seemed to approach our interviews. When topics arose in which they assumed I had no experience they seemed to relish the opportunity to “educate” me.

Coming to this study as a feminist, middle-class, non-breadwinning husband created strong feelings for me about what men should and should not do in home. It was challenging to swallow snide comments (such as the way Julian “educated” me on “cleaners”). It would be naïve and disingenuous to say that these experiences do not influence my perspective on this topic, or how I felt towards the men I interviewed. In fact, a rich debate concerning epistemological approaches in qualitative research highlights how one cannot be truly objective (Brinkmann and Kvale 2015; de Gialdino 2009; Lucas 2014; Roy et al. 2015). Regardless of topic, qualitative researchers cannot divorce themselves from their social location in the field (Kleinman and Kolb 2011). They bring with them their lifetime of social experiences and perspectives which, in turn, shapes their analysis. However, this does not mean that any resulting conclusions are invalid. What this means is that during data collection and analysis, you must engage in constant and intentional actions of reflexivity in order to grasp how your social location shapes your perspective on the field and those you are interviewing (Kleinman and Kolb 2011).

It was important, therefore, for me to assess how I felt about the accounts of my participants. For example, Jeffery discussed how being interviewed was, “unusual for Pebble Village…] [because] most people around here have fairly traditional attitudes [about
“In this instance, I “felt” for him because of our similar circumstances (living in areas where many people hold traditional gender beliefs) (Kleinman and Copp 1993). This sympathy was problematic because it did not make me as alert for inconsistencies, whether conscious or unconscious, in their accounts and views about household work. Moreover, as others have argued, it is important to document how you feel towards your participants in order to assess how they impact your ability to relate to others, think, and analyze your setting (Kleinman and Kolb 2011).

Consequently, I wrote memos throughout the entirety of my research. I captured ideas about the setting, what I saw, what I heard, questions which developed from the setting, and contradictions in what people said (Charmaz 2006). I wrote “early process memos” (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011) to record my initial expectations about my interviews and how my status as a non-breadwinning husband may have impacted my analysis. As my research progressed I wrote “in-process memos” to explore early analytic insights and themes and “analytic memos” to explore on a more abstract level what I thought the data suggested regarding my research questions (Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw 2011).

I also wrote personal reflections after each interview. The time immediately after an interview concludes is an important moment to record fleeting thoughts about the interview. To seize upon the moment, I recorded my thoughts and emotions about the interview into my recorder. Once I transcribed these recordings I wrote follow-up thoughts and comments about the interview. In this way, I reflected on my data, while I collected it, so that I could follow-up with unanticipated topics and flesh out emerging themes.
Finally, as a way to avoid being “trapped by sympathy” (Kleinman and Kolb 2011) I bracketed unique words and phrases used by participants. Howard Becker (2007) argues that using the language of the people you study impedes your ability to maintain analytic distance. Bracketing the unique words and phrases of participants helps to ensure that I do not passively accept their worldview. This strategy can also make you more aware of what words and phrases are being said, to whom, for what purpose, and the conditions in which they are spoken (Kleinman and Kolb 2011).

CONCLUSION

I detailed in this chapter how I collected and analyzed data for my dissertation. I presented the research questions guiding my study and discussed the methods I used to address them. Specifically, I conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with heterosexual, married men (N=37) about their experiences and views on the household division of labor. My sample was comprised of highly-educated men from different parts of the country, with stable jobs, and who earn a decent income. Many of these men are in dual-income earning households (N=27) and are married to college-educated women who also work in white-collar occupations. I concluded this chapter by discussing ethical concerns posed by this study and how my insider/outsider status impacted my study.

In Chapter 3 I present the concept of mental labor. The major theme which emerged from my interviews is that men overlook the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated with household labor. I describe in the following chapter what mental labor is, what it looks like, and how it appeared in these interviews. I conclude by
demonstrating why it matters in understanding the household division of labor and men’s avoidance of this labor contributes to reproducing gender inequality within the family.
CHAPTER 3: “MY WIFE IS THE BUSINESS MANAGER OF OUR FAMILY”:
MENTAL WORK IN THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter is about mental labor – the cognitive work required to recognize, plan, and execute the demands of living in a family. Mental labor is an essential component towards understanding how married couples manage the daily, mundane tasks associated with household chores and childcare. Using men’s narratives on their involvement in housework and childcare, I analyze what mental labor is, what it looks like, and why it matters in understanding how gender inequality is reproduced within the home.

I often thought of my childhood dog during my data collection. Max suffered from otodectescynotis (Bowman 2014). This is when ear mites live in the ear canals of dogs and cats. His ears were always inflamed and he constantly scratched them. He also frequently shook his head in an attempt to dislodge the mites living deep inside his ear canal.

My father discovered Max’s condition one weekend when my mother, brother, and I were traveling. He took Max to our veterinarian to see why he was constantly scratching his ears and shaking his head. When we returned home that weekend, my father instructed everyone on how to treat Max’s ear problem. He showed us how to swab out Max’s ears with cotton balls, insert medication into his ear canals, and gently rub his ears. We had to repeat this process until we used all of the medication. “Since this is your dog, it is your responsibility to keep up with Max’s ears,” I remember my father telling my brother and me.
My mother ended up being the one to care for Max’s ears. After cleaning his ears a few times I remember her venting frustration to my brother, father, and me. “I’m the only one giving Max his medication,” she began. “If it weren’t for me, nobody would even notice that he wasn’t getting his ears cleaned. It’s not just about cleaning his ears, but it’s the thought behind it which counts.”

I never forgot my mother’s words. Loving and caring for a family pet is more than just your physical involvement; it is also about your mental involvement. It was certainly not fair that the men in my family (including me) relied upon my mother to physically complete this task. It was also not fair that we relied upon my mother to keep track of Max’s medication schedule, to see how he was responding to the recommended dosage, how much medication was left, and if his condition was getting better or worse. The way my brother, father, and I relied upon my mother to complete the mental labor in this particular task (and admittedly, many others) is how many men in my study relied upon their wife to complete mental labor in a host of tasks related to housework and childcare.

I divided this chapter into four sections. First, I briefly review how previous literature defines and discusses mental labor. In doing so, I add to this scholarship by specifying how to conceptualize mental labor.

Second, I present the four dominant themes where mental labor appeared in men’s narratives on housework and childcare. Planning meals, planning family vacations and social functions, arranging the logistics of childcare, and managing household finances are the four dominant ways mental labor appeared in men’s narratives of the household division of labor. I also illustrate how each theme connects to my conceptualization of mental labor.
Third, I illustrate why mental labor is important in research on the household division of labor. How people accomplish mental labor is essential towards understanding the complexities associated with the household division of labor. Men’s narratives on housework and childcare reveal that cognitive work related to these tasks is, arguably, more difficult to complete than physical tasks. Despite this stated importance, however, most men defer to their wife to complete mental labor. While men openly embrace doing physical and emotional tasks related to housework and childcare, it is oftentimes at their wife’s behest. I argue this is problematic because it leads to men “redoing” rather than “undoing” gender within their families.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings. I situate my findings within previous research on the household division of labor.

WHAT IS MENTAL LABOR?

*Previous Research*

In Chapter 1, I reviewed previous research on the household division of labor. I argued that while previous research focuses on how people complete physical tasks, there is more to running and maintaining a home. People must also complete “invisible labor” (Daniels 1987). Typically, as with physical labor, women disproportionately shoulder the burden of this type of labor. One type of invisible labor is “emotion work” (Hochschild 1979). Over the past several decades, however, a growing body of literature focuses on another important dimension of invisible work within families – mental labor.
Generally, mental labor refers to the invisible, mental work required to run and maintain a social institution. This requires people to have a working knowledge of the daily needs of the institution itself, personnel within the institution best suited to complete these tasks, resources at the institution’s disposal to complete these tasks, and time and effort required to complete these tasks.

In one of the first studies of mental labor Margolis (1974) examined the gender division of labor in local Democratic and Republican party organizations in a small New-England town. Through fieldwork and interviews with 13 women and 23 men across these parties, Margolis found that women took it upon themselves to ensure they completed the logistical needs of their respective parties. These tasks included planning meetings, ensuring workers printed mailing lists, and arranging fundraisers. This required them to work twice as many hours as their male counterparts. Men, on the other hand, spent their time talking with voters, candidates, and local party clubs; all of which required less time to complete. Consequently, women performed the invisible, mental work required to run and maintain the local political party operations, while men performed the visible work. Such arrangements not only hid contributions women made to ensure the smooth operation of these parties, but rewarded women and men differently. Men received more praise and were in better position for promotion than women. Additionally, people justified this gendered division of labor by essentializing gender differences in that women are better suited for planning and organizing than men.

Such is the consistent finding when examining mental labor within the family. For example, DeVault (1991) interviewed how 30 women and three men in Chicago approached...
feeding and caring for their families. While seemingly innocuous, feeding the family requires more than just being able to physically perform these tasks (e.g., cooking). It requires knowing the dietary needs and food preferences of family members, ensuring meals are both nutritious and delicious, planning what to cook and when, retaining a working knowledge of the ingredients at home and what needs purchasing, and rotating meals so people do not become bored with the household menu. Not only did women do more of this type of labor but justified doing the majority of meal planning because they are “naturally” better suited at organization and planning than men.

Other studies find similar results where women shoulder the burden of mental labor within their family. For example, Walzer (1996) argued that in families with newborns, women shouldered the burden of mental labor in childcare. Among the 25 couples she interviewed women worried more about their babies, processed solicited and unsolicited advice on the best practices to care for children, and managed the baby appointments and supplies while trying to “entice” fathers to become involved in infant care. Because women performed more of this type of work they changed their paid work hours, quit, or reduced their work hours to meet the increased mental work associated with infant care. Women also perform the majority of mental labor in maintaining family calendars and child’s activities (Zimmerman et al. 2002), manipulating their paid work schedules to meet organizational demands of family life (Daly 2002; Hessing 1994), scheduling family activities while balancing and delegating household tasks for husbands to complete (Coltrane 1989; Coltrane 1996), and planning their own wedding (Sniezek 2005).
Expanding the Conceptualization

Despite a growing body of research on the centrality of mental labor in family life, defining this concept remains elusive. Even though Margolis (1974) conducted one of the first studies on this phenomenon there was never a clear conceptualization of mental labor in her study. Nor was there ever any specific use of the words “mental labor,” despite the fact that her study laid the groundwork for future studies on this topic.

Coltrane (1989) came close to defining mental labor when analyzing how 20 dual-earner couples with school-aged children talked about sharing childcare and housework. He argues these couples created a “manger-helper” dynamic in dividing household labor, where women were the “managers” and men were the “helpers.” He delineates between these ideas by saying:

“Helper husbands often waited to be told what to do, when to do and how it should be done. While they invariably expressed a desire to perform their "fair share" of housekeeping and childrearing, they were less likely than the other fathers to assume responsibility for anticipating and planning these activities. Manager-helper couples sometimes referred to the fathers' contributions as "helping" the mother” (1989:480).

It is not clear from this conceptualization, however, what type of labor is applicable to the manager-helper dynamic. Throughout this study, Coltrane does not specify if this pertains to physical, emotional, or mental labor, or some combination of the three.

DeVault (1991) also came close to defining mental labor in her study on how people manage the logistical aspects of feeding their family. In describing “feeding work,” she argues more cooking for the family requires more than the physical act of cooking. Rather, feeding a family also requires, “thoughtful foresight, simultaneous attention to several
different aspects of the project, and a continuing openness to ongoing events and interactions” (1991: 55). She contests that only relying upon time use studies to document disparities in the household division of labor misses out on, “…the planning and coordination involved in household work, as well as the constant juggling and strategizing behind the physical tasks” (1991: 56), which women are often left to perform.

It is here that a more crystallized definition of mental labor appears. Among many important contributions, DeVault (1991) provides a clear, detailed insight into how “feeding the family” is more than just cooking – it also requires mental work. Despite this valuable insight it is unclear to what extent other aspects of household labor share similar processes as “feeding work” (i.e., requiring the same type of mental work).

Although not the first to identify the phenomenon, Walzer (1996) was the first to use the term “mental labor” when examining how 25 couples talked about caring for their infant. According to Walzer, mental labor:

“…is meant to distinguish the thinking, feeling, and interpersonal work that accompanies the care of babies from physical tasks, as has been done in recent studies of household labor. I include in the general category of mental labor what has been referred to as "emotion" work, "thought" work, and "invisible" work; that is, I focus on aspects of baby care that involve thinking or feeling, managing thoughts or feelings, and that are not necessarily perceived as work by the person performing it” (1996: 219).

Walzer’s conceptualization of mental labor is an important step in distinguishing it from other types of labor which families need to complete. Specifically, she calls attention to the innumerable ways people must perform labor related to “thinking, feeling, and interpersonal work that accompanies the care of babies from physical tasks.” She complicates her definition, however, by including emotion work into her definition of mental labor. To be
fair, mental and emotion work share many similarities. They both are invisible types of labor, are “not necessarily perceived as work by the person performing it,” and are expected of women. Nonetheless, it is important to know in what ways mental work differs from emotion work, how it manifests within the division of household labor, and how people approach this type of work.

As I argued in Chapter 1, previous research on the household division of labor focuses on physical and emotional work. Indeed, it is important to know what tasks people are doing within the home and how often. Yet, there is more to housework and childcare than what people do with their bodies and emotions. How people recognize, plan, and execute tasks related to housework and childcare is a vital component in family life. We need deeper insight into how all types of household labor (physical, emotional, and mental) work independent from, and in connection with, one another. Doing so can help scholars, policy makers, and the lay public alike to develop a fuller understanding of how gender inequality is reproduced within the home.

The aforementioned studies highlight scholars discusses mental labor. What unites these definitions is that mental labor is invisible, performed in private, an essential feature towards understanding a division of labor, and largely performed by women. To date, there is no known research which clearly articulates the constituent components of mental labor. As such, I expand upon how previous research discusses and defines mental labor by only focusing on the cognitive tasks relating to both childcare and housework. Broadly, I define mental labor as the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated
with the household division of labor. Specifically, this type of work can refer to some, or all of the following:

1. Recognizing a task needs to be accomplished.
2. Strategizing how to complete a task in the most efficient way possible.
3. Researching how to complete an unfamiliar task.
4. Planning a day and time to complete a task.
5. Knowing other family member’s schedules in order to plan when, where, and how to execute your plan.
6. Organizing resources and materials to complete a task.
7. Initiating discussions with family members on what needs to be done and when.
8. Assigning duties to family members to aid in completing a task.
9. Soliciting input from others on the best way to complete a task.

There are a few important clarifications when I say “cognitive work.” This does not refer to: understanding the chemical processes which occur in the brain when an individual completes a task. Nor does this mean an individual’s intellectual ability or capacity to solve tasks related to housework and childcare. When I use “cognitive work” I am referring to: how people come to recognize what tasks need completing in the home, when, how often, to what extent, and for what purpose.

WHAT DOES MENTAL LABOR LOOK LIKE?

In this section I present four dominant themes in how men discussed mental labor in the housework and childcare tasks they do, or do not do, in their family. Planning family meals, planning family vacations and social functions, arranging the logistics of childcare, and managing household finances were the tasks where mental labor appeared most in men’s narratives of the household division of labor. In presenting each theme I also illustrate how
they relate to one, or several, of the constituent components of mental labor as I outlined above.

*Meal Planning*

Meal planning is a good illustration of mental labor. When people plan a meal they must, at least, engage in four aspects of mental labor:

- Strategize how to complete it in the most efficient way possible.
- Know other family member’s schedules in order to plan what to eat, on what day, and at what time.
- Initiate discussions with other family members on the meals you have planned.
- Solicit input on what, if any, meal preferences they have for the week.

While not exhaustive, men’s narratives on how family meals are planned clearly reflect these aspects of mental labor.

Virtually all of the men in my study discussed cooking. Almost every man that I interviewed openly embraced having to cook if they needed to or if their wife asked them. Many, in fact, expressed an affinity for cooking. I estimated that 57 percent (21/37) of the men I interviewed said some variation of “I like cooking.” They provided a great amount of detail when I asked them to elaborate on their cooking practices (e.g., what dishes they make, how often they cook, how long they have been cooking). They discussed how they discovered their love for cooking in adulthood, yearned for regional food, wanted to recreate favorite childhood meals, or like to do it as a hobby.

Dexter is a good example of how men in my study described cooking. Dexter is 29 years old, an interior designer, and the sole-income earner in his family. His wife, Angela, is a stay-at-home mother to their 1-year old son, Jacob. After describing chores that he “hated doing” during his childhood he moved into his “love” for cooking:
Dexter: As far as cooking goes, I love to cook and so that's one of those things where like, she doesn't, I'm, like, fighting to get into the kitchen. Just because it's a time to relax and get away from things. *Cooking is one of those things I love to do and that's never anything that I have to be reminded of or told to, "Hey, can you do this?"* (emphasis added) That's one of those things that I enjoy. *But the rest of the housework it's definitely one of those things where I have to be reminded.* (emphasis added) She's always kinda, she doesn't let it end up being the nagging wife, she always feels bad and kinda wants to make sure that she's not becoming overbearing or anything like that.

Like other men in my study, Dexter emphasizes his “love” for cooking (“I’m, like, fighting to get into the kitchen”). This is because, “Cooking is one of those things I love to do and that’s never anything that I have to be reminded of or told to, ‘Hey, can you do this?’” That’s one of those things that I enjoy.” Because he enjoys cooking, likes to do it, and uses it as “a time to relax and get away from things,” it is no wonder why he, and the other men in my study, say they enjoy cooking.

We can also see from this quote how Dexter both simultaneously engages in and eschews mental labor in the household division of labor. While he is willing to engage in mental labor for activities that he likes (cooking), he does not do it “for the rest of the housework.” In these instances, he “has to be reminded of” or “told” to complete tasks outside of cooking. Moreover, by saying, “She's always kinda, she doesn't let it end up being the nagging wife, she always feels bad and kinda wants to make sure that she's not becoming overbearing or anything like that,” Dexter tacitly acknowledges that Angela completes the majority of the mental labor in their family.\(^{13}\)

\(^{13}\) Some of the men I interviewed invoked the cultural trope of “the nagging wife.” This figure of speech is a fixture in American society as a way to caricature how women behave once they become married. Culturally, it is meant to demonstrate that, from men’s perspective, women are incessant in their demands of their husband, or other family members, to complete a task related to the household. As Dexter’s case illustrates, “nagging” typically arose during my interviews when men admitted to not engaging in some aspect of mental labor. No
It is not surprising that virtually all of the men in my study cook and over half of them (57 percent) say they enjoy cooking. This fits into larger national trends of men reporting more time usage in cooking than ever before. For example, the proportion of men who cooked for their family significantly increased from 29 percent in 1965-1966, to 42 percent in 2007-2008 (Smith, Ng, and Popkin 2013). Over this same time period men significantly increased the amount of time they cook from 37.4 minutes to 45 minutes a day. The proportion of women who cooked significantly declined from 92 percent in 1965-1966 to 68 percent in 2007-2008 (Smith, Ng, and Popkin 2013). Also, the time that women spent on cooking decreased from 112.8 minutes a day in 1965-1966 to 65.6 minutes a day in 2007-2008.

What is surprising is that men do not describe meal planning with as much gusto and affection as they do with the actual act of cooking. They typically describe meal planning as something they and their wife (or sometimes, children) “do together.” Most could not, however, provide an example or the most recent time this occurred.

Men overwhelmingly perceived women as the ones who typically come to the table with ideas about what meals to cook, on what days, and then ask family members for suggestions. Additionally, their wife was more likely to make grocery shopping lists and they were more likely to “stop by the store on the way home.” Even though men credit themselves for being physically involved (i.e., doing the actual grocery shopping), their wife activated their involvement. Women initiated men’s involvement by planning meals, making a list, and

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man considered how their wife’s “nagging” could be a result of their wife perceiving them to be unable, or unwilling, to engage in mental labor. Thus, it is important to consider how “nagging” is related to mental labor. To do so fully, however, requires data from both people within a marriage.
then asking their husbands to get what was on the list “on their way home from work,” or “on their way home from picking up (child’s name) at (child’s extracurricular activity/school/daycare).”

Kyle perfectly demonstrates how many men outsource mental labor in meal planning to their wife. He is 35 years old, the sole-income earner for his family, and works in sales. Trisha, his wife, is 33 years old and a stay-at-home mother to their two children; 2-year old Kelsey and 7-year old Ryleigh. Here is how he responded to my question, “Who would you say is picking out what meals to eat and who’s planning what meals to eat on which days of the week?”:

Kyle: Trisha. I mean sometimes it’s a choice. She’ll say, “I have this, this, and this. What are you in the mood for?” (emphasis added) The big one for her that is, I guess I kind of got her trained on asking [me] what I had for lunch. There’s a lot of times I’d come home and she’d already have dinner made or dinner planned or she’s cooking dinner. (emphasis added) And I go, “Hey, what are we having?” “We’re having chicken and rice. And then she’ll say, “what did you have for lunch?” I’m like, “Chinese [laughing]. So, I’m pretty full.” And that will drive me nuts. I don’t mean to be mean or anything like that. But there’s a lot more conversation with that now. Like she’ll either give me a choice or she’ll tell me the night before or maybe in the morning. Like, “Hey, we’re gonna have this tonight. So, coordinate your lunch accordingly.” (emphasis added) So a lot more conversation with that. And that’s good. [It’s] Something that we’ve worked through for sure. But that’s another thing that we definitely – you get into this routine of the same things over and over and it’s like you wanna mix it up.

Without hesitation Kyle credited Trisha as the one responsible for meal planning. The italicized text above demonstrates how Kyle, and many of the other men, outsource meal planning to their wife (“I guess I kind of got her trained on asking [me] what I had for lunch). What typically happens is that women will plan meals themselves (e.g., “There’s a lot of times I’d come home and she’d already have dinner made or dinner planned or she’s cooking
dinner.”) or they will ask their husbands “What are you in the mood for?” It is ironic to hear Kyle say that a challenge to meal planning is, “you get into this routine of the same things over and over and it’s like you wanna mix it up,” because he is not the one planning meals. This is also interesting because it is not that Kyle, and the other men in my study, are oblivious to mental labor in meal planning; it is that they do not want to do it. Consequently, they rely upon their wife to complete this invisible work.

Men from affluent families also outsource meal planning by relying upon home food preparation services (e.g. Blue Apron, Plated) or simply “eating out.” While not very common, a small number of men in my sample discussed food preparation services as a way to avoid engaging in mental labor related to cooking. For instance, Colton, is 32 years old, an administrator in higher education, and identifies as an equal-earning spouse. He is married to Chelsey, who works full-time in a non-faculty position within a mid-size university and is 36 years old. They are a childless couple with no immediate plans for becoming parents. Like the majority of men in my study Colton enjoys cooking. For him, however, this is mostly due to receiving uncooked, home-delivered meals from a home food preparation service.14 Prior to this project I never heard of these types of services. Curious, I asked Colton, “So all the ingredients and all the shopping it’s already done for you, and it’s in the box?”:

Colton: “Yeah. But then we still end up going shopping anyway because there's other things that we want and [then there’s] breakfast to worry about and those sorts of things. It doesn't save a whole lot of shopping time really, but it encourages us to try things we wouldn't otherwise. That's the main thing that it does. And it's a hobby because we end up cooking together which is nice. And which we wouldn't—it's a lot better than putting a frozen pizza in the oven or something is how we feel about it.”

14 I withheld the specific company Colton uses to protect his identity.
Scott: “And there are instructions for each one of the meals?”

Colton: “Yeah.”

From Colton’s perspective, this particular home food preparation service is a worthwhile investment because it provides a variety of dinner meals (“it encourages us to try things we wouldn’t otherwise”) and is a healthier option than buying store-bought food (“it’s a lot better than putting a frozen pizza in the oven”). In essence, this service completes the mental labor associated with cooking for Colton and others who this type of service. Indeed, these services market themselves as a way to complete mental labor associated with meal planning. For example, Blue Apron markets their service by saying, “Blue Apron is a fresh ingredient and recipe delivery service that helps chefs of all levels cook incredible meals at home. We take care of the menu planning and shopping (providing you with fresh, locally sourced ingredients in pre-measured quantities), so all you have to do is cook and enjoy” (Blue Apron 2018). [emphasis added]

My findings echo previous research on how families cook and plan family meals. In particular, DeVault (1991) found that many of the women she interviewed described meal planning as, “a mental puzzle,” “invisible work,” and something which “must be solved every day.” Moreover, this work only becomes visible when it is not completed (i.e., dinner is not ready at the usual time) or to a family member’s liking (as the excerpt from Kyle’s interview demonstrated). While many of the men in my sample described meal planning in a similar way as the women in DeVault’s (1991) study, my data also show that men admit to relying upon their wives, or market solutions, for meal planning.
Planning family vacations and social functions is the second way mental labor appeared in men’s narratives on the household division of labor. When considering the constituent parts of mental labor these activities illustrate that, at least, people must:

- Strategize how to travel to a planned vacation locale or social function.
- Plan what day and time (and where) to travel for the vacation or social function.
- Know other family member’s schedules in order to plan the vacation or social function logistics.
- Organize resources and materials in order to take a vacation or participate in a social function.
- Initiate discussions with family members on what logistical tasks need to be met in order to have a vacation or social function.
- Assign duties to family members in order to meet these logistical tasks.
- Solicit input from others on where they would like to travel or what social functions they would like to engage in.

Men rarely planned family vacations (i.e., traveling to the beach or abroad) or social functions (i.e., eating out with friends). I estimated that 68 percent (25/37) of men perceived their wife as the one to initiate and/or arrange the logistics of family vacations and social functions. “My wife is the planner,” “my wife is the business manager of the family,” or “my wife is the quarterback of our family” were common ways men would explain how they deferred to their wife to complete the mental labor related to this aspect of family life.

For instance, here is how Michael and Patrick explained the planning of family vacations and social functions in their families. Michael is 47 years old, an analytic manager, and a breadwinning father of four. Patrick is 52 years old, works full-time in advertising, and is the breadwinner in his family:

Michael: My wife is the business manager of our family. So, for the bills, the groceries, vacations, all that, she runs point on that. I used to have some
involvement in that, but then I would screw things up, so she has all the purview over all that.

Patrick: She’ll take the lead and decide what we’re gonna do for one of the kids’ birthdays. My son’s birthday—Porter—was just at the beginning of May and I guess that was kind of low key just because they were having finals and stuff like that but she might be like, “Hey, I talked to Porter and he was psyched about having this at home” or “going out to X restaurant to eat so we’re gonna go out on Friday night.” I’m like, “That’s fine. I’m okay with that.”

For Michael, describing his wife as the “business manager” of the family emphasizes how he outsources the cognitive work related to “the bills, the groceries, vacations, all that, she runs point on that,” to his wife, Kim. Moreover, by saying “she runs point on that” and “I used to have some involvement in that, but then I would screw things up, so she has all the purview over all that,” is an explicit acknowledgment of the mental labor associated with these tasks. But, rather than investing in the cognitive work required to meet this demand in the household division of labor, he relies upon Kim to complete this work because of his alleged inability to perform this type of work. For Patrick, he uses Porter’s birthday party as a way to illustrate how his wife, Kendra, “takes the lead” when planning family social functions. Additionally, it appears his only involvement in planning social functions is to acknowledge how Kendra completed the cognitive work with this task (“I’m like, ‘I’m okay with that.’”). Michael and Patrick argue later in their interviews that they are comfortable with their spouse completing these tasks because “they are better at it” than they are.

What all of these metaphors (i.e., “my wife is the planner,” “business manager,” “my wife is the quarterback of our family”) have in common is that the person occupying this role must take on the burden of the mental labor. Otherwise, if we run with men’s metaphors,
nothing in the family will be planned. The business cannot function because no one is there to manage the work, workers, schedules, and direction of the company. The quarterback cannot know which receivers to throw the ball to, at what time, and where during an offensive series.

These findings correlate to previous research demonstrating women’s central position in planning a family’s social calendar. For instance, Shaw’s (2008) review of family literature demonstrates how women often plan family leisure time and often end up having less personal leisure time than their husbands. Sniezek (2005) found an uneven division of labor in wedding planning among a group of 20, heterosexual couples. While the couples emphasized each person complemented the work of the other, women often completed the “mundane work” (e.g., information gathering for various aspects of wedding; managing information in binder) and kin work (e.g., managing emotions, dietary needs for people attending wedding). In discussing how 47 couples divided family organizational tasks (i.e., maintaining family calendar, managing the household, and organizing children’s activities, schedules, and care), Zimmerman and colleagues (2002) found that women managed the family’s calendar, ensured the completion of household work, and organized activities for their children. Similarly, Thorstad and colleagues (2006) wanted to know how spousal support (from a man) helps women manage stress from juggling roles as a wife, mother, and professional. Among 30 women working as college professors, many women expressed they were the ones in charge of worrying, preparing, and managing their family’s needs (i.e., doing the majority of the mental labor).
For the most part, men in my study do not see an issue with their wife performing the majority of the mental labor. They mostly see themselves providing an ancillary role. As previously discussed, this is what Coltrane (1989; 1996) calls, “the manager-helper” dynamic where husbands view themselves as the “helper” and their wife as the “manager.” Consequently, this means husbands expect their wife to tell them what to do, when to do it, and how it should be done.

The way men in my sample discussed vacations and social functions clearly demonstrated the “manger-helper” dynamic. Here is how Michael elaborated on how the planning of family vacations and social functions happens in his family. This excerpt comes from when he described how he feels coming home after a “long workday”:

Michael: *I wanted to disappear in my own little world and not think about the other things going on [with our family].* (emphasis added) As such, I let Kim take the lead. *I'd much rather Kim not ask me, “What do you want to do? Do you want to do this? Do you want to do that?” Tell me what you want me to do.* (emphasis added) For example, family trips. So, we've got a packed car, we've got a loaded car. No one in that family will start loading that van until they've checked with Mom. “Mom, do you have everything you want?” “Yup. Cooler A. Cooler B.” Because if you load anything too fast Kim's like, “Hold on.” She's got a process. Let Mama Bear get what she needs lined out, and then we'll get the bulk [of the stuff] and start moving things around. *And when it comes to the house yeah, I could be more—I could have more initiative I think on some things. But I just see that as her purview and I will do what she wants me to do, but it’s her plan.* (emphasis added)

“I will do what she wants me to do,” and “it’s her plan” illustrates how many of the men in my sample see themselves as the “helper” when it comes to tasks related to the household division of labor. Michael also emphasizes how he does not want to be involved in the mental labor for family vacations. “I wanted to disappear in my own little world and not think about the other things going on [with our family],” “I'd
much rather Kim [ask me], “What do you want to do? Do you want to do this? Do you want to do that?,” and “Tell me what to do” all demonstrate how Michael explicitly avoids mental labor associated with planning family vacations.

Interestingly, and as previously stated, Michael’s position also demonstrates that men in study are aware of mental labor in the household division of labor. They not only acknowledge the centrality of this type of labor for planning family vacations and social functions, but also that they have the capacity to perform this type of labor. They would rather rely upon their wife, however, to complete it. This is largely due to the presumed belief that mental labor is women’s work (“But I just see that as her purview and I will do what she wants me to do…”). Later in the interview I asked Michael, “Have you ever said to her, ‘Kim, I'll take the lead on this. I'll plan this vacation for us.’ Or, like having friends come over for dinner, because you said you like to host, ‘I'll plan the party.’ Do you ever want to take the initiative in instances like that?”:

Michael: *I should do it more.* (emphasis added) There are times I do that. We had a big family vacation last year. And I said, “I'm taking this. I'll do this and that.” “Great.” And I thought it went great. There were better vacations. It was a week in [western state] going to San Ravenir, San Jarazno. *But I know I should do it more.* (emphasis added) I mean I yield—I think my fear of getting something wrong sometimes. It is that deference that leads to her doing more than her fair share of the load… *And here’s my logic.* So, *I'm a data analytics manager.* I'm talking to people all day long. Organizing and presenting and whatever. *Cheerleading.* And when *I get home I don't want to cheerlead anymore.* (emphasis added) I want to decompress so I don’t have as much of networking anymore. But when I get home she’s like, “Well, you’re missing it, because, Michael, I actually want to network. I do want to get out of the house because I’ve been talking to 12-year-olds all day.” So as such, I have taken a circuitous route to answer your question here. I deferred to her a lot with the social stuff that we do only because I just want her to be happy and if
that’s what she wants to do, then I want to go with that one. Because I exit my world and when we get to her world I kind of don’t want to be calling the shots. I call the shots here it seems like half the time. I just prefer not to call the shots when I get home. (emphasis added)

As this quote illustrates, Michael is capable of performing mental labor. He cited a recent trip that he planned for his family to San Ravenir and San Jarazno in a western state as evidence of his ability to take on aspects 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 of mental labor. He also cited his ability to perform mental labor in his job as a data analytics manager (“I’m talking to people all day long. Organizing and presenting and whatever. Cheerleading.”). While he acknowledges that he “should do it more” (i.e., mental labor) for his family, he cites multiple reasons for not doing so.

One, is logistical (“I think my fear of getting something wrong sometimes. It is that deference that leads to her doing more than her fair share of the load.”). Although he, nor any of the other men, elaborate on what “getting it wrong” looks like for them.

Another is that Michael, and many of the other men in my study, do not disrupt their gendered assumptions that mental labor is women’s work (“Because I exit my world and when we get to her world I kind of don’t want to be calling the shots. I call the shots here it seems like half the time. I just prefer not to call the shots when I get home.”). The delineation between “her” and “my” world illustrates how many men in my study are not disrupting how they think about gender and, subsequently, the behaviors which correspond to gender. While Michael, and other men in my study, emphasize their physical involvement (i.e., packing the car in Michael’s example), they do not take on the cognitive tasks required to ensure that vacations (i.e., traveling and lodging plans) and social functions (when, where, at what time,
and how to get there) happen. More broadly, by not disrupting how they think about
gendered tasks in the home, specifically that women are better suited to complete mental
labor, they are complicit in reproducing a gendered division of labor.

Logistics of Childcare

I spoke with many fathers who are actively involved in their lives of their children. They spoke with great reverence and admiration for their children. Many, in fact, shared detailed information about the physical (i.e., cooking food for their children, taking them to and from their child’s extracurricular activities, reading their child’s favorite books before bed) and emotional work they do with their children (e.g., encouraging children to come to them with questions about forming and maintaining romantic relationships). The majority of these men embrace their fathering identity and shared rich stories illustrating an idiosyncratic aspect of their child’s personality which they find endlessly endearing.

Few of these fathers, however, describe being the one to arrange the logistics of caring for their children. Arranging the logistics of childcare requires a person to complete most, if not all, of the constituent components of mental labor. This is especially true for middle- and upper-class families who, as Lareau (2003) argues, create highly regimented and densely-packed after-school schedules for their children. Because the majority of my sample is middle- and upper-class, they exhibit many of the characteristics of parents rearing their children in the style of “concerted cultivation” (Lareau 2003) – especially enrolling their children in many organized activities. Thus, many fathers discussed the difficulties associated with “keeping up” with their children’s busy schedules. Not surprisingly, few actually engaged in the cognitive work to “keep up” with their children’s schedules.
I estimated that 74 percent of fathers in my sample (17/23) perceived their wife as the one who manages the mental labor associated with childcare. Only 22 percent (5/23) indicated they were responsible for this type of labor. I was unable to identify in one case (Craig) which spouse does more mental labor than the other when it came to arranging the logistics of childcare.

Typically, men viewed their wife as the one to coordinate and organize the logistical aspects of childrearing. After their wife performed the majority, if not all, of the mental labor, men said they would “do their part” by following their wife’s instructions. This process typically unfolded in two ways.

First, men often relied upon their wife to tell them what childcare tasks they should complete. For example, after describing their division of labor associated with childcare tasks, I asked each father, “How did you and your wife arrive at this arrangement of childcare tasks?” Here are some typical responses:

Michael: …she’s really air traffic control for the [last name] family…I'm blessed that Kim is my extra set of antennas to let me know what's actually happening in the world with them [their three daughters].

Miles: It's usually Jacqueline sitting me down and saying, "I need you to do this, or I need you to do this"…For the most part it's been like Jacqueline saying, "Here’s what needs to happen."…So, I mean, that's how we've always done it. It's a negotiation but it's started by Jacqueline.

Dennis: A lot of times she'll guide me. “This needs done. This needs done.” So, she's pretty in charge of that kind of stuff.

As these examples demonstrate, most of the fathers I interviewed often wait to be told what to do when it comes to their children. By describing their wife as, “air traffic control for the [last name] family” (as Michael did), being the one the start a “negotiation” (as Miles did),
and “guiding” them (as Dennis did) works from the assumption that the cognitive work associated with childcare is women’s responsibility. Additionally, as I discuss in Chapter 4, because many of these men justify this action by arguing their wife is “better at it than me,” or “more organized,” reproduces a gendered and unequal division of labor within the home where they are doing less than their wife.

Complicating the matter even further is that many fathers see their physical involvement in childcare tasks as a demonstration of their progressiveness. Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 5, when men compare their level of involvement (in terms of hours spent per week on childcare) to their father they see their involvement as being “fair.” To be certain, being physical and emotionally involved in childcare is an important aspect of fathering; and, as previously discussed, men are spending unprecedented amounts of time in childcare (Bianchei et al. 2012) and embrace their fathering identity (Doucet 2006; Kaufman 2013; Parker and Livingston 2016) as compared to previous generations of men.

Yet, it is important to understand what initiates men to engage in parenting practices. Most men that I interviewed see this practice (i.e., someone telling them what to do) as addressing long-standing issues related to gender inequality within families. They are willing to be physically involved in childcare tasks, someone (i.e., their spouse) just needs to tell them what to do. Or, “all my wife has to do is to ask.” Doing so, they believe, positions themselves as the vanguards of progressive men who are dismantling gender inequality within the family. But, if they have to be told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it when it comes to childcare tasks, what is this really changing? Deferring cognitive work to
their wife, or assuming their wife will complete the mental labor associated with childcare, does nothing to change how these men think about the intersection of gender and childcare.

Second, men often described their wife as the one who安排s the mundane, daily, logistical needs for their children. Typical examples included arranging transportation for events related to children’s daily schedule, ensuring all materials (e.g., clothes, books, alethic gear) were packed for a child’s extracurricular activity, maintaining a working knowledge of their child’s daily whereabouts, inquiring about any pressing concerns (i.e., difficulties with schoolwork, troubles with friends, physical and emotional wellbeing, happiness with their daily schedules) their children might have, managing doctor’s appointments, setting up meetings with school teachers, ensuring there were no scheduling conflicts, and researching daycares or after-school programs.

Lester, whom I introduced in Chapter 1, illustrated the second process of arranging the logistics of childcare. While describing how he and Amber divide childcare tasks, he said that Amber is usually the one who stays home with their children if one of them is “really sick” (i.e., requiring a visit to the doctor). Lester recalled, however, that he will take them to the doctor if Amber’s work schedule does not permit any flexibility:

Lester: Now if you want to talk about children then that's where she takes over, and I prefer her to manage the babies and the children, and I'll take care of some of the other things… [As a] Matter of fact, I will take the kids to the doctor [and] she will text me a list of things like the medicines they're on, how often [they take them]. I will just say, “Can you text me all these details so when I get to the doctor, I can explain what's going on?” So, we've done that before too.

Lester’s comment about taking one of his sick children to the doctor’s office is typical of how men described their involvement in the logistical needs of their children. In this
example, Lester completes the physical work (i.e., takes one of their children to the doctor), but he is not equally engaged in the mental labor associated with this task. Because he asks Amber to send him a text message with, “…all these details so when I get to the doctor, I can explain what's going on,” Lester indicates he is not abreast with the requisite knowledge required for a typical trip to the doctor’s office (i.e., what are the symptoms, how long have they noticed their child feeling ill, what medications are they taking, what dosage, for how long). Nor does his comment indicate that engaging in mental labor is his responsibility. He explicitly states, “…I prefer her to manage the babies and the children, and I'll take care of some of the other things…” which means that he sees the mental labor as Amber’s responsibility, not his.

Antony is another good example of how the majority of fathers I interviewed relied upon their wife to manage the logistics of childcare. He is 36 years old, identifies as the breadwinner in his dual-income earning marriage, and works as a physician. He is married to 35-year old Michelle, a lawyer specializing in international law. Together, they have three children, 7-year old Christina, 5-year old Glenda, and 4-year old Thomas. Because they both work in time-demanding jobs, and can afford to do so, they hired a nanny to help care for their children during the schoolyear. During the summers, however, they typically send their children to “camps”:

Anthony: This summer, like when we are not out of town on vacation, I think there is only maybe one week when they are not in a camp of some sort. Or

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15 Lester did not describe a specific example of when he did this. I am also uncertain if part of the “details” he asked Amber to “text” him include questions one might ask in preparation for a doctor’s appointment. Such as which doctor will we be seeing, where the office is located, what time the appointment is, does this doctor carry their insurance, and so on.
maybe a little bit more than that. I don’t know, probably two weeks. But my wife typically is more on top of this than I am.

Scott: Could you tell me a little bit more about what you meant by your wife is “more on top of these things.” What did you mean by that?

Anthony: I would say just, generally speaking, she is much more proactive and takes more responsibility for scheduling stuff for our kids outside of like their typical school day. Whether it’s summer camps, or play dates with their friends, or whatever else it might be. Like, gymnastics. Both of my girls do that.

In this exchange it is clear how important engaging in mental labor is for Anthony’s family. On top of their busy and demanding work schedules they also juggle their children’s numerous school and extracurricular activities. By Anthony’s own admission, however, Amber “is more on top” of this type of work and is more “proactive and takes more responsibility” for engaging in the mental work associated childcare logistics. As he indicates towards the end of his statement, and like the majority of fathers in my study, Anthony relies upon his wife to “schedule stuff” for kids outside of school.

This is part of what Hochschild and Machung (2012) argued women face in the “second shift.” When working mothers come home they face seemingly innumerable tasks related to childcare and housework. While some argue there are only modest differences between women and men in the amount of time they spend on domestic tasks (Bianchi et al. 2006), Anthony’s discussion of his family’s summers illustrates a type of labor which Hochschild and Machung (2012) do not clearly articulate in the conceptualization of the “second shift.” Moreover, this can also point to qualitative differences in how women and men spend their time in childcare, which some argue is an important contribution towards understanding gendered time patterns in childcare (Lareau and Wininger 2008). Thus, while
Amber, and many of the other women in this study, may not bear the burden of physical or emotional labor in the second shift, it does appear they do with regards to mental labor.

**Managing Household Finances**

The last prominent way mental labor appeared during my interviews was men’s discussion of who manages their household finances. Most lamented the unrelenting nature of this task. While many took pride in being able to “pay the bills,” they abhorred many of the constituent components of mental labor associated managing household finances. For instance, managing the household finances requires a person to:

- Recognize that bills are due.
- Strategize how to pay the bills in the most efficient way possible.
- Plan when and how to pay a bill.
- Organize financial resources (e.g., make sure sufficient funds are in an account, checks are made out to the correct party, electronic accounts are set-up properly) in order to pay a bill.
- Initiate discussions with family members to ensure all charges are correct.
- Solicit input from other family members on the best way to pay, or lower, a bill.

I estimated that in 33 out of the 37 interviews I conducted men explicitly discussed the management of household finances. Among these men, I estimated that 58 percent (19/33) said their spouse managed the household finances, 24 percent (8/33) said they manage household finances, and 18 percent (6/33) argued that “both” managed the household finances.

Take Devin for instance. He is a 40-year old economist, identifies as an equal-earning spouse, and has two children, Avery and Dustin, with his wife, Tammy. She is 37 years old and works full-time as journalist. Devin’s response to how they manage their household finances was typical for the majority of men in my study:
Devin: Yeah. So, it's pretty simple. Tammy tells me how much money I owe to the joint account every month and I put it in there. I mean I'm kind of joking, but that's kind of how it goes. She's got her software that she uses to, you know, most of our bills are paid automatically. Although, interestingly enough, I do, I manage all the accounts. I do all of the setting up of, if we're gonna switch from ExpressTV to cable, I do all the research and I tell Tammy what I think we should do and then I do it. All the accounts are under my name. I get all the emails that our bills are due and I just forward it to her and she takes care of all of them. And again, she really does say, "Please put in, you know, $3,500 into the joint account."

Devin relies upon Tammy to tell him “…how much money I owe to the joint account every month and I put it in there.” Even though Devin says “I manage all the accounts,” and he is the one to “research” which deals are the best, it is actually Tammy who manages their accounts on a daily basis. By his own admission, “she really does say, ‘Please put in, you know, $3,500 into the joint account.”

What this represents is how Devin, like other men in my study, is tenuously involved in mental labor. Devin plays a part in his family’s household finances by engaging in tasks which he wants to and only requires a temporary involvement (e.g., “I do all of the setting up of, if we're gonna switch from ExpressTV to cable, I do all the research and I tell Tammy what I think we should do and then I do it.”). However, Devin indicates that the requisite knowledge required to carry out the typical, day-to-day, taken-for-granted chores associated with household finances (i.e., which bills are due, on what date, and how much) befall to Tammy. In fact, he is rather explicit in this by saying, “I get all the emails that our bills are due and I just forward it to her and she takes care of all of them.” What this means is, rather than engaging in the cognitive work to decipher what bill an email relates to, if they are billed accurately,
is their account current (i.e., they have not missed any payments), are there sufficient funds to pay for this bill, and so on, Devin defers to Tammy to perform this type of labor.

When I asked men how they and their spouse arrived at their current arrangement of household finances many cited their wife as being “better organized,” “meticulous,” “really good at keeping things in order,” and “believing” in a “very strict budget.” For instance, here are some typical ways men explained how they arrived at their spouse being the one to primarily manage the household finances:

Jeffery: Martha does that…I think typically when the bills come in, Martha has some organizers on her desk where she can stand the envelopes up and keep the ones that are due right up front. As a better organized person, I think that that job fell to her because of the need for timeliness on it.

Donald: She's much, much better about making sure things are paid and on time. Making sure we're not running through money, or I'm not—so that's one thing as a—I do spend it [money] as fast as I make it. But I really, really, tried to learn from her. She's much better at that than I am. She is meticulous about things.

Jonathan: She’s just really good at keeping things in order. She’s really, really good at being organized, and making sure everything is done to a T, and I’m not. I’m more of, “Oh, I’ll get it done, oh, I can do this a little bit later.” I’m more laid back about that and that’s not always good especially when it comes to bills and stuff.

Brandon: Lisa believes very strongly in a very strict budget and that stresses me out…She has a spreadsheet and she tracks how much we spend on groceries and gas and all of our bills and how much we have in savings and how much we spend on each one of those things. When we first got married it was very stressful to me because I think, together, we were both making – like we’re both making like $10,000 a year on grad student money. We had so little money living together at the beginning and she kept saying, “We’re spending too much money on food.” And I’m like, “We’re not spending that much on food. We’re eating simply.” But she’ll track all of that spending and then just kind of what we’re spending and what we’re saving. And she tracks
most of that through credit card statements. Because the credit card statements divide that out pretty nicely.

While these men see their wife as being inherently more “organized” and “meticulous,” this connects to larger cultural conceptions of essentiatlized differences between women and men. Rather than looking at these differences as a result of social processes, most men in my study think there is something inherent to women being better suited to perform the daily, tedious task of monitoring the household finances. There is a rich body of sociological research demonstrating how the socialization process for women and men early in their childhood cultivates skills (i.e., organization) which many people associate with gender. Other research demonstrates how women have to be more organized than their husband, cognizant of completing chores, and meticulous when approaching tasks related to the household division of labor because they feel that their husbands will not (Thorstad et al. 2006; Walzer 1996). Additionally, as DeVault (1991) argued about meal planning, the only time that men do seem to realize that the household finances are not addressed is when something goes awry (i.e., past due notices arrive in the mail).

I cannot verify the accuracy of what these men said about their household finances. For instance, I do not have a way to confirm if, in fact, the estimations I provided above about who manages the family’s finances reflect what actually happens in these families. The goal of this study, however, is not to determine who is managing the household finances. Rather, what is relevant to this study is how men frame their involvement in the management
of their household finances. This can provide insight into how gender inequality is produced within the home.

How married couples negotiate and manage their financial obligations and difficulties is a popular topic of interest for the layperson and social scientist alike. Numerous websites, books, and advice columns provide advice to married couples on how to manage their finances.\(^{16}\) Scholars are also fascinated with how couples allocate and control the household’s financial resources (Heimdal and Houseknecht 2003; Pahl 1995; Sonnenberg 2005; Skogrand et al. 2010; Yodanis et al. 2007), decide to pool their money or retain separate accounts (Burgoyne et al. 2007; Humplova et al. 2009; Vogler, Brockman, and Wiggins 2006), view household finances (Musala 2018; Zagorsky 2003), and fight over them (Chethik 2006; Ross et al. 2017).

What is interesting about my sample is that how men talk about household finances contradicts their outward rebuke of traditional conceptions of masculinity. Men in sample want to work with their wives in making joint financial decisions, especially over big household purchases (such as a new car, appliance for the home, retirement planning, or paying for their children’s school). Many often discuss how their father, male friends, or “other men,” having sole control over the household finances leads to a path of marital discord. For the men in sample, they often describe who manages the finances as a matter of preference, skill, and interest. Regardless of who primarily manages the money, men often

\(^{16}\) For instance, I performed a simple google search for “how to manage money in your marriage.” In under one second I received over 12 million results. Time to start reading.
emphasized that no one person dominates control over the financial resources. Doing so, they believe, demonstrates their progressive beliefs about gender egalitarianism in the home.

However, analyzing how men describe their wife’s involvement in managing household finances complicates claims they make towards enacting gender equality within the home. As I have argued up to this point, most men rely upon their wife to manage the household finances because of their underlying belief that mental labor is women’s work. The majority of men in my sample attribute their wife “taking the lead” on this task to their views that women are inherently “more organized,” “pay more attention to detail,” and are “more tedious” than men (see Chapter 4 for further discussion of men’s rhetorical strategies).

WHY IS MENTAL LABOR IMPORTANT?

I have argued thus far that mental labor is a vital, but understudied, aspect of the household division of labor. I used four areas of family life – planning family meals, planning vacations and social functions, arranging the logistics of childcare, and managing household finances – to illustrate prominent ways that mental labor appeared in men’s narratives on the household division of labor. In doing so, I argued that the majority of men in my study largely relied upon their wife to complete this type of labor. I now discuss two reasons why mental labor is important in understanding the household division of labor.

*An Organizing Feature of Family Life*

Mental labor is a central organizing feature to the family life of the men I interviewed for this study. During the course of our interview men recognized the importance of mental labor in running and maintaining a home. Their responses indicated that prior to our
interview few considered how essential it is to many of the housework and childcare tasks they discussed during the interview. Additionally, completing this type of labor is, arguably, more difficult to complete than physical labor. Mostly because one cannot complete any household chores or tasks related to childcare unless they engage in the cognitive work to realize there are tasks which need accomplishing.

Men’s realizations about the importance of mental labor typically came towards the end of each interview. Jeffery’s reflection on mental labor, and its importance, is indicative of most men in my study. He is 56 years old, identifies as the non-breadwinning spouse, and is currently unemployed. He decided to return to school as a full-time student at a local community college, because he “needed a new career” that is “more interesting” than his old job as a dental hygienist. He is married to 57-year old Martha, who works full-time as an executive director for a nonprofit, Christian organization. Together, they have one child, Lyndsey, who recently graduated from college and is now living in the mid-west. Here is how Jeffery responded to my question, “Is there anything else you think I should know to understand housework or childcare better?”:

Jeffery: Well, I have much that I need to understand better. I’m not surprised at all that you asked about who does the planning in the family and I see actually that I could, but I haven’t. If I knew that crucial factor in running a household then I would have a better life, a better future, that would be something for me to work on, understanding the money.

During our virtual interview, Jeffery left his kitchen table (where he set-up the laptop for the interview) and walked into an adjacent room to ask Martha how they handle their household finances. By the end of the interview, he acknowledged how he has not been as engaged in mental labor as he is with physical labor by saying, “If I knew that crucial factor in running a
household then I would have a better life, a better future, that would be something for me to work on, understanding the money.” Thus, for Jeffery, and other men in my study, it appears that being aware of this type of invisible labor may change how they approach the division of household labor in the future.

Colton, whom I introduced earlier in this chapter, also demonstrated how many men recognized the importance of mental labor and the difficulty in completing this type of work. Here is how he responded to my question, “Is there anything that you might have not thought about marriage, housework, or childcare before that occurred to you during this interview?”:

Colton: I think another important portion of household labor is the planning and decision-making thing, and we're both so involved at work and work is so—both all-consuming but also brain powered work and she works in media, audience development and I'm a college administrator, so there's a lot of conceptual work.

Colton and Chelsey work in jobs requiring a lot of mental labor. He describes both of their jobs as “all-consuming,” “brain-powered work,” and “conceptual work.” Consequently, as he argues below, it is difficult to perform mental labor in the home because he is already exhausting a lot of his executive functioning for his paid work. He uses a recent example to illustrate how completing mental labor is difficult, typically befalls to Chelsey, and how he feels guilty about this practice:

Colton: A couple weeks ago I was driving to work, and a rock hit the windshield and cracked the windshield pretty bad. I knew it had to be replaced and I was trying to talk with the car insurance and the people at Secureguard to get the windshield replaced. The thing was I didn't have time to figure it out and work was too busy and I just couldn't make it work. I unloaded all of that at Chelsey and said, “I feel super stressed. I don't feel there's time to get this appointment in.” She was like, “Why don't we just make an appointment Saturday morning. We'll drop it off there we'll find to place nearby to get something to eat while we wait. And it'll be fine.” “I was trying to get it done
during the week so that it didn't interfere in the leisure time on the weekend.” And she was like, “No, no, no. We'll just do this and we'll be done, and it's taken care of.” So, she took over the decision-making there.

He uses this anecdote to underscore his belief that planning to complete tasks, like auto-maintenance, is harder than actually carrying out the task. This is largely because of the time and cognitive demands required to completed mental labor in the home after working in their white-collar occupations. While both Colton and Chelsey work long hours, Colton discusses how he, “didn't have time to figure it out and work was too busy and I just couldn't make it work.” Thus, rather than solving this puzzle himself, he “unloaded all of that at Chelsey.” Which may explain why he feels guilty. Even though Chelsey also works in a job requiring “brain-powered” and “conceptual work,” she ended up completing the mental labor in this instance. He concludes by arguing that it is “unfair” for any one person to do all of the mental labor:

Colton: And I think that's an important part of the household labor is deciding how things are going to get done and it's been hard. That's where we really get hung out and stressed because we're trying to find the most efficient ways to do things. It would be unfair if one person was taking on all of that I think. It would also exclude the other person if that was the case. I think that would be bad. If I was managing all the money and we were never having conversations once a month on the couch where we both look at the spreadsheet together that would problematic I think or unfair.

Like Jeffery, Colton came to this conclusion (“an important part of the household labor is deciding how things are going to get done”) only towards the end of the interview. For these two, and the other men in my study, it seems that is only when called to account for who completes the cognitive work related to the household division of labor do they realize that it is typically their spouse. Moreover, it appears that only after this realization do men express
feelings of “unfairness” or “guilt” in the allocation of the mental division of labor within their family.

Josh and Dexter also echo this point. Josh is 54 years old, identifies as the breadwinner in his family, and works full-time as an architect in his dual-earner family. He is married to 48-year old Leah, who works full-time as a physical therapist. Together, they have three children, 20-year old Esther, 18-year old Ivan, and 16-year old Grant. When I asked Josh who plans their family vacations and social functions he said, “You know I’m more than satisfied that she does it, I probably wouldn’t want to do it. I’m perfectly happy just her telling me where I need to be or what I need to do to help out.”:

Scott: Could you tell me a little bit more about that? What is it about just being told what to do that you like more than actually doing the planning?

Josh: Well, I think because, I feel like I’m helping out. I’m making things easier for her and for the family. But I never really thought about, but I think leaving me off the hook for the planning stages… Okay now I feel guilty. I feel a little guilty now.

Scott: Do you think planning requires more work and effort than actually doing the physical part of picking people up or showing up, at this certain time, at this certain place?

Josh: I think it does. Probably. I never really thought about it before, but I think it does. I think actually putting the plans in place and making sure you’ve got the resources to execute it takes a little more effort than just the execution of it… Upon reflection of some of our discussion I realize how – I guess dependent might be the word. I rely on my wife Leah to handle all the logistics, you know? I kind of pride myself on helping out a lot, but then I realized the logistics part of it pretty much always falls to her.

This exchange highlighted how Josh grappled with his engagement in physical labor and non-engagement with mental labor. While he expressed his belief that Leah telling him “where he needs to be” or “what he needs to do to help out” makes “things easier for her and
for the family,” he seemed to consider in real-time (“But I never really thought about, but I think leaving me off the hook for the planning stages… Okay now I feel guilty. I feel a little guilty now”) how much effort is required to plan vacations and social functions. Consequently, because he typically relies on Leah, “to handle all the logistics,” he expresses feelings of guilt for not being involved in mental labor associated with vacations and family social functions.

Dexter, whom I introduced earlier in this chapter, also demonstrates how men come to realize the importance of mental labor, how their wife typically does it, and why they argue they do not want to do it:

Dexter: I know her being a stay-at-home mom makes my life a ton easier. Because I can go out, do my work, focus on my work and not have to worry about, “Ahh man, are they taking care of Jacob at daycare? Is he sick? Is he gonna need something?” I don't have to worry about that. I can just focus solely on my work and know that when I come home everything's gonna be just like it was when I left. And then we can kind of go from there. That's kind of how it works for me and my thought-process.

Like Josh, Dexter prefers his wife to perform mental labor. Like Colton, he acknowledges that because his wife does this type of labor, it allows him to direct his cognitive resources to his paid work. Indeed, for the other fathers in my study whose wife is a stay-at-home mother, this was a perceived benefit of having their wife being the primary caregiver. Many American families, however, cannot afford to live off one income. Thus, one challenge for many married couples is how to complete mental labor associated with the home when both parents work. Most men in my study solve this by delegating this work to their wife. The more affluent men in my study turn to market solutions (e.g., Blue Apron, home cleaning services). Yet, what explains this pattern of behavior? Why do these men, seemingly,
embrace the physical and emotional labor in the household division of labor, but not mental labor?

*Reproducing Gender Inequality*

Men’s reluctance, and sometimes outright refusal, to engage in mental labor is a potential way they are reproducing gender inequality within their family. As I discussed in Chapter 1, “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) is the theoretical lens through which I am interpreting my data. The fundamental idea to this theory is that gender is not a naturally occurring phenomenon. It is not “found” in nature, nor did anyone “discover” the perfect amalgamation of economic, cultural, political, and historical forces which define, with absolute certainty, the fundamental features of being a “man” or “woman.” Rather, gender is an evolving, socially created aspect of social interactions. In our day-to-day lives, people act and are held accountable to act, in ways which affirm socially held, and culturally specific, ideas about what it means “to be” a “woman” or “man.”

While seemingly innocuous, the result of “doing” gender is that people are inclined to believe that socially created differences between women and men are the result of natural, biological differences. Thus, resulting social patterns emerging from these interactions become a taken-for-granted part of social reality. Socially constructed differences are then viewed as naturally occurring processes, rather than the product of social forces. This can then, in turn, be used to reinforce and justify patterns of social behavior which benefit men at the expense of women.

Gender scholars are pushing future studies to explore if people are “undoing gender.” If gender is a fluid concept, constructed through how people act, interact, and held
accountable to act in particular ways, can people engage in behavior which works towards dismantling the resulting power differences between sexes? Some scholars argue this is possible and research needs to document and analyze how people challenge prevailing gendered norms in social interactions, the conditions under which people subvert gendered expectations, and potential ways structural and interactional levels interact to dismantle gender inequality (Deutsch 2007; Risman 2009). Others argue while people can act in gender atypical ways, this does nothing to address the accountability structures which result from people “doing” gender. Consequently, rather than undoing gender, people are doing gender in a different way, or what West and Zimmerman (2009) call “redoing” gender.

Studying mental labor can provide a theoretical way towards understanding how gendered patterns of behavior which justify inequality within the home are (re)produced. What is unique about my study is how men simultaneously rebuke and reproduce hegemonic ideologies of masculinity.

The stories that men tell themselves is that their involvement in housework and childcare is how they are undoing gender. They see their involvement in physical and emotional tasks as diminishing, if not eliminating, the boundaries between masculinity and the household division of labor. Engaging in tasks such as cooking, packing cars for family vacations, picking their children up from school, and working to provide financial resources as indicators of their commitment to undoing gender. Because they view their physical and emotional involvement in their household division of labor as what “modern men” do, they hold themselves up as rebuking hegemonic masculine ideals – power, dominance, and control.
In this respect these men are undoing gender. If we believe these accounts at face value, these men are challenging prevailing gendered norms. They embrace the physical and emotional labor associated with the household division of labor. They subvert gendered expectations by embracing and engaging in long-perceived feminized tasks (such as cooking). Considering this, it appears that the men in my study are dismantling how they are doing gender in their purported physical involvement in housework and childcare.

These men, however, are redoing gender. They are not engaging in mental labor and largely construct this as women’s work. Consequently, they are redoing gender in ways which enable them to opt-out of a very essential aspect in the household division of labor. As I have demonstrated in this chapter, men’s narratives on the household division of labor reveal that they construct and engage in behaviors which illustrate that mental labor is women’s work. Or, that women are simply “better” at doing this type of labor. By doing so, however, these men are not eliminating the boundaries which define this type of work as “women’s work.” Nor are they challenging the underlying beliefs and assumptions about gender which ultimately guides their behavior (i.e., women are better at mental labor because women are more organized than men). Moreover, by accentuating their involvement in physical and emotional labor, and tenuous involvement in mental labor, they reify traditional ways men approach the household division of labor – power, dominance, and control. Because they do not see housework and childcare as their primary responsibility and wait for instructions or invitations on what to do, they have the freedom to opt-in and out of this work whenever they please. Thus, any contribution they make to housework and childcare is evidence of their underlying feminist beliefs. Approaching the household division of labor in
this way repeats long-standing patterns of gender inequality within the home where unpaid work is optional for men, constructed as women’s work, and ultimately women’s responsibility to ensure that men are involved.

One limitation to this study is that I do not have women’s perspectives. Future research exploring mental labor needs to explore how married couples describe mental labor related to housework and childcare and who accomplishes these tasks. An important aspect to doing gender is how people are held accountable to act in accordance with cultural constructions of gender. What remains unanswered from my study is how women hold men accountable to perform tasks related to the household division of labor. As I discuss in Chapter 4, men provide a variety of reasons to justify their gendered division of labor which many argued they created in conjunction with their wife. If this is true, we need to see how women enable their husbands to opt-out of mental labor in the home. Or, conversely, we need to see how women hold men accountable to perform which specific types of labor within the home.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored mental labor. Previous research on the household division of labor focuses on how people complete physical and emotional tasks. However, there is more to running and maintaining a home. People must also complete mental tasks as well. While previous research does explore mental labor in select aspects of family life (Coltrane 1989; Coltrane 1996; DeVault 1991; Sniezek 2005; Thorstad et al. 2006; Walzer 1996; Zimmerman et al. 2002), no study clearly outlines the constituent components of this concept. As such, I
define mental labor as the cognitive work required to recognize, plan, and execute the
demands of living in a family. This type of work can refer to some, or all of the following:

1. Recognizing a task needs to be accomplished.
2. Strategizing how to complete a task in the most efficient way possible.
3. Researching how to complete an unfamiliar task.
4. Planning a day and time to complete a task.
5. Knowing other family member’s schedules in order to plan when, where, and how
to execute your plan.
6. Organizing resources and materials to complete a task.
7. Initiating discussions with family members on what needs to be done and when.
8. Assigning duties to family members to aide in completing a task.
9. Soliciting input from others on the best way to complete a task.

In this chapter I demonstrated four prominent ways mental labor appeared in men’s
narratives on the household division of labor. First, while the majority of men in my sample
embraced cooking (57 percent), many also said they do not do the meal planning in their
family. Second, most men (68 percent) do not take the initiative when planning or arranging
the logistics of family vacations or social functions. These men viewed their contributions to
these social events as following the instructions laid out by their wife. Third, almost three-
quarters (17/23) of the fathers I spoke with perceived their wife to be the one who manages
the logistical aspects of childcare. Even when men detailed their physical and emotional
involvement in the lives of their children, it appears only a slight minority (22 percent)
engage in the cognitive work related to the logistics of childcare. Finally, most men (58
percent) described their wife as the one who manages the household finances.

Discussing these examples illustrates how mental labor is an essential component
towards understanding the household division of labor. The interviews I conducted reveal
that men largely focus on their physical and emotional contributions to each of these tasks.
Yet, by not engaging in mental labor related to these and other household and childcare tasks, these men are not disrupting underlying assumptions that it is women’s primary responsibility to complete or delegate these tasks. Describing their involvement in mental labor as “doing what I am told” enables these men to lay claims to outward expressions of gender egalitarianism without having to engage in the mental work associated with these practices. Put differently, while these men physically and emotionally subvert and challenge traditional conceptions of masculinity, they do not appear to do the same when it comes to mental labor.

In the next chapter I analyze the rhetorical strategies men use to justify their engagement in the household division of labor.
CHAPTER 4: “I ACTUALLY LIKE DOING IT THIS WAY”: MEN’S
JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THEIR (NON)INVOLVEMENT IN THE HOUSEHOLD
DIVISION OF LABOR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter analyzes how men justify their involvement in the household division of labor. All of the men I interviewed rejected the idea that housework and childcare is “women’s work.” They pointed to their, purported, involvement in household and childcare tasks as evidence of their commitment to feminist practices within the family. When describing how they came to be involved in specific tasks, however, they relied upon central features of “patriarchal ideology” (Connell 2005) – rationality, logic, and essential differences between women and men – to account for their arrangement of household labor. While seemingly gender-neutral, the underlying logic in these justifications are rooted in traditional thinking about the household division of labor. Consequently, this lays the groundwork for these men to justify any resulting inequalities in the household division of labor and perpetuate gender stereotypes within the home.

Not long after I began data collection, a friend of mine asked, “Who cares how men talk about what they do in the home? As long as they are actually doing something, that’s what really makes a difference.” I have to admit that at first, I agreed with my friend. It is tempting to think that regardless of how men come to rationalize their involvement in the household division of labor, their actual participation in completing housework and childcare tasks is what really matters in reducing gender inequality within in the home.
This is also a point implicitly stated in a rich body of literature on the household division of labor. As I discussed in Chapter 1, many scholars document how much time men spend, and on which specific tasks they complete, in the home. Among many insights we have learned that, over time, men are doing more housework than ever before. Additionally, and as I discuss further in Chapter 5, analyzing men’s actual involvement in the household division of labor is one way to measure gender inequality in the home. Presumably then, what matters most in reducing the amount of inequality within the home is to get men to spend more time, and complete a wider array of tasks, in the household division of labor.

I realized, however, that my friend’s perspective is short-sighted. It matters that men are actually spending as much time as their partner in the household division of labor and how they come to be involved in these tasks. As I argue in this chapter, hearing how men justify their involvement in the household division of labor yields interesting insights into how men are coming to grips with modern conceptualizations of masculinity. Many of the men I interviewed for this study are either part of Generation X\(^\text{17}\) and Generation Y\(^\text{18}\), or “Millennials.” As Gerson (2010) points out, these men are the “children of the gender revolution” – a time marked by women’s increased labor force participation, a greater number of women seeking college degrees, reductions to gender discrimination, men’s increased participation in household division of labor, the legalization of abortion, widespread usage of birth control, and women’s increased presence in leadership positions within politics and businesses (among other events). Considering this, and the other

\(^{17}\) Those born during the early 1960s to late 1970s.

\(^{18}\) Those born during the early 1980s to early 1990s.
demographics of my sample (which I discussed in detail in Chapter 2), I anticipated that many, if not most, of the men I interviewed would have progressive views when it comes to enacting gender equality within the home.

The interviews, however, reveal a more complex story. All of the men I interviewed believe “everyone” is responsible for housework and childcare – regardless of a person’s gender, breadwinning, or employment status. How these men rationalized their involvement in unpaid work, however, did not challenge traditional conceptualizations of the household division of labor. They did not disrupt their underlying assumptions that unpaid work (i.e., housework and childcare) is women’s work – despite outwardly rejecting this cultural prescription. Men’s purported belief and commitment to feminist ideals within the home (e.g., “everyone” is responsible for housework and childcare) did not appear to steer them to engage in housework and childcare. Rather, rational and logical responses to work schedules and maximizing essential differences between women and men (i.e., because men are inherently stronger they should do labor-intensive tasks) guide their motivations for being involved in housework and childcare. Ultimately, these rationalizations reveal that rather than “undoing” gender (Butler 2004; Deutsch 2007: Risman 2009), these men are “redoing” gender (West and Zimmerman 2009) which maintains a gender status quo within their family.

I divided this chapter into three sections in order to demonstrate why it is important to consider how men justify their involvement in the household division of labor. First, I briefly summarize my review from Chapter 1 of previous research on men’s perspectives of the
household division of labor. I contribute to this body of research by demonstrating how men justify their involvement in the household division of labor.

Second, I present four major ways that men justified their involvement in the household division of labor. *Time availability, having a different skillset, preferences for tasks, and differences in approaches* to cleaning (and/or caring for children) were the four major rhetorical strategies men utilized to justify their involvement in the household division of labor. I highlight how each theme connects to men redoing gender (West and Zimmerman 2009) in order reproduce gender inequality within the home.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings. I discuss how these findings complement existing research on the household division of labor.

**WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT MEN’S PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR**

*Previous Research*

How men talk about the household division of labor is important because they have a hand in perpetuating, or disrupting, traditional gendered ideologies within the home. What they say about childrearing and housework and how they are motivated to participate, or not, in these tasks can provide deeper insight into how men think about the intersection of work and family. More broadly, these narratives can provide larger insight into the worldviews men have about gender, work-family balance, and how gender inequality is produced within the home.
In Chapter 1, I reviewed previous research which examined how men described their involvement in the household division of labor. I argued there are two emerging themes from this limited, but growing body of literature. First, there is evidence that suffering a job loss will make some men more active in fathering but not in household chores (Banjeree 2015; Chesley 2011; Demantas and Myers 2015; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Naples 1994; Tichenor 2005). Second, some men will engage in household work if they are willing to confront hegemonic ideals of masculinity and negotiate with their partners over the allocation of tasks (Chesley 2011; Chesley 2016; Deutsch 1999; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005).

My dissertation contributes to this body of literature by exploring the conditions under which men identify as being the breadwinner or non-breadwinner in their family and, in turn, how their breadwinning status shapes their view of the household division of labor. This is an important contribution because previous research suggests that for most men suffering a job loss is an essential mechanism to get them involved in household labor. Additionally, if men are willing to rebuke traditional conceptualizations of unpaid work as “women’s work” and negotiate with their partners over household labor, they are more likely to be involved in housework and childcare tasks.

A New Direction

What is novel about my study, and what serves as the focus of this chapter, is that I highlight how men justify their involvement in the household division of labor. I explore how these men reconcile their breadwinning status with their view of unpaid work. Doing so offers a nuanced understanding into how men conceptualize the household division of labor.
This extends recent research which shows that even in favorable institutional settings where men have access to supportive work-family polices, they are likely to favor relationships which maintain their status as the primary breadwinner (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015; Thébaud and Pedulla 2016).

Moreover, how these men justify their involvement, or lack thereof, in childcare and housework addresses the contradiction in the literature where men embrace selective aspects of the household division of labor. As I discussed in Chapter 1, it appears that men are selective in which tasks they complete. As such, to unpack how men come to justify which tasks they are involved in, my focus in this chapter is to analyze how they justify what they do in the household division of labor. Comparing how breadwinning and non-breadwinning men justify their level of involvement provides additional and more nuanced insight into how economic positioning within a marriage shapes men’s views on the household division of labor. This is important because previous studies indicate that some men’s views of housework can change, but only after suffering a job loss. It is not because of a newfound sense of commitment towards feminist ideals. It is because of men’s vulnerabilities as not being the breadwinner that they refashion their involvement in housework as a “compensatory act of masculinity” (Demantas and Myers 2015; Schrock and Schwalbe 2009).
HOW MEN DESCRIBE THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR

Time Availability

Most men base how much time they dedicate to specific tasks, or in general, on *how much time they have available* outside of their time commitments to the paid labor force. In fact, 86 percent (32/37) of my sample described *time availability* as the major factor determining their involvement in the household division of labor.

Interestingly, men’s perspectives on *time availability* held across breadwinning status. The breadwinning status of a man did not appear to change his view that *time availability*, and not breadwinning status, is more important in shaping the extent of a person’s involvement in the household division of labor.

Marvin and Joel are good illustrations of how the majority of men in my study used *time availability* as the main rationale for being involved in the household division of labor. Marvin is 52 years old, identifies as the non-breadwinner in his marriage, is an environmental engineer, and the father of two, 20-year old Sophia and 15-year old Haley. During our interview I asked Marvin, “How do you and Cynthia work out who’s gonna do what when it comes to childcare responsibilities?” He initially responded that he has more “flexibility” in his job than Cynthia, but she can “get away” from her job if needed. I followed up by asking Marvin, “I’m curious about the flexibility. If there’s an instance where, say for example, Haley gets sick in the middle of the day at school and someone needs to come pick her up. Who would be the person to go do that?”:
Marvin: Well, again it depends on what the—as I said, I’m an environmental engineer. If I don’t have anything going on right then [in the office], I have two assistants and I could just run to school, it’s about 25 minutes away. If she [Haley] just says, “I have a cold and I’m not feeling well” or has a fever, I’ll take her home, make sure she has what she needs, and I’ll go back to work. If it’s something more serious that she needs to go see the doctor about, usually what happens is I’ll go pick her up, Cynthia will probably call the doctor, set the appointment, and she would try and make it. If it’s right then I’ll take her. Or if it needs to be the next day or something, we’ll make arrangements around that. All that depends on just what’s going on. As an environmental engineer my schedule is weird. It’s never really set. There’s things that come up. There’s meetings that come up, we have different sites to visit throughout the year that I have to be at, and in the evening sometimes too. She has the flexibility as a professional in her career to say, look, “I have to take care of my kid,” because it’s what happens with the other people she works with too. Stuff happens. So, we have enough flexibility to just be able to have a conversation about it and say, “Well, I have this at 2:00, it would be great if you could go get her then, I’ll meet you at home and take her to this.” We just have a conversation and work it out.

Marvin’s case illustrates how many men talk about time availability. Rather than assuming that childcare is the primary duty of their wife, they see it as something they have to be actively involved in. In this case, Marvin says he and Cynthia communicate during the day in order to figure out how to deal with an unexpected issue that Haley is experiencing.

Interestingly, as I discussed in Chapter 3, Marvin follows a similar pattern as the majority of men in my study where he completes the physical work (“I’ll take her home, make sure she has what she needs”) and Cynthia does the mental work (“Cynthia will probably call the doctor”). In instances like this, it does appear that men attempt to work through the complications and logistical difficulties of balancing the demands of their career, their wife’s career, and parenthood.

Joel’s perspective on time availability also illustrates how this was the most important factor for men in determining a person’s level of involvement in the household
division of labor. Joel is 35 years old, identifies as the non-breadwinning spouse, and works full-time as a consultant. Although he acknowledged that he is looking to change careers and will soon be unemployed. He is married to 36-year-old Whitney, who works full-time as a chemist. At the time of our interview they were expecting their first child. During our interview I asked Joel, “Do you feel compelled to do more housework than Whitney does because she is the primary breadwinner?”:

Joel: Probably, but it's less about being the breadwinner, though we'll certainly joke about that. The running gag is that I will have her cocktail ready by the fireplace and her smoking jacket and her evening newspaper ready for her when she comes home. That is the gag. But for me it's less about her being the breadwinner than my being around the house more. [emphasis added] Because she's out for a full day of working in the lab. That's eight to ten hours plus whatever her office hours are that she has to do. And I'm there. And I'm not about to leave something waiting to be done to have her do it. Because then you're a jerk. “Hey, you just got home after being in the lab for ten hours, how about you throw in a little laundry that I could have thrown in?” And I had that opportunity today. I expect I will pick up more domestic duties when I'm not working full-time. But I'm way okay with that. To me it's less about who is winning bread and who isn't than it's about who is there at that time because it fluctuates over time. [emphasis added] I'll get a job and not be home as much. Then she'll pick up stuff. So, it's not as set in stone permanently but [I'm] more than happy to do domestic work when she's winning bread.

As this excerpt from Joel’s interview demonstrates, many men reached the time availability argument as a rational conclusion to their labor force circumstances. Meaning, for Joel, as for the majority of men who discuss time availability, “it’s less about her being the breadwinner than my being around the house more” and “it’s less about who is winning bread and who isn’t than it’s about who is there at that time because it fluctuates over time.” From Joel’s perspective, it is logical for him to spend more time completing housework than Whitney. In fact, he estimated that he spends 4 hours per week completing housework while he estimated
she does not do any housework. This is because he is “around the house more” and, thus, has more opportunities to complete housework than Whitney. Moreover, to expect Whitney to complete household chores “after being in the lab for ten hours,” would make him a “jerk.”

Joel’s statement is also interesting because he does not acknowledge how completing invisible labor is just as important in the home as visible labor. While he was very adamant about taking the initiative in physical labor associated with the household division of labor, he did not appear to do the same when it comes to mental labor. Later in our interview I asked Joel, “Could you tell me a little bit about who manages the household finances?”:

Joel: Yeah, she does. Whitney does money. And that is a very conscious decision on my part. I will manage Amazon purchases and confirm with her on these things. Like, “Do we have money for this?” and stuff like that. But in terms of setting up bill pay and making sure the heat is on, Whitney does that. And that is something conscious on my part because, one, I don't want to touch it. Two, that's another thing that comes from my parents and my father. It was always—let's say he wasn’t abusive about money, but close to [it] and very much wielded money as a means of control for the family. And it's [money] just not something I want to touch. It's something at this point I have no experience paying bills as an adult, so I'm not sure I would be qualified to touch it even I wanted to. But it's—that is something that is very much what Whitney does, and I say “thank you,” and I help out when I can, and we talk through things like, “how on earth are we ever going to pay our student loans?” which spoiler alert, we're not. Stuff like, “can you remind me to pay the water bill?” “Yes.” “Can we do this? Can we not spend this money?” “Yes. Yes. Yes.” I'm happy to help however I can, but in terms of the actual dealing with the account, she does it. And that is something willful on both of our parts.

This excerpt is similar to points that I made in Chapter 3 regarding mental labor. Joel is unique from other men I interviewed in that he does not want to engage in managing the household finances because of his observations of how his father, “wielded money as a means of control for the family.” However, Joel is also like many of the other men in my
study in that he relies upon his wife to complete the mundane tasks associated with managing the household finances. *Moreover, this excerpt further illustrates that most men do not view, or recognize, mental labor as a central feature to the organization of the home.* Not viewing mental labor as work can potentially influence men to underestimate their wife’s contribution to the household division of labor, create a skewed perspective on the tasks which need to be completed in order to run and maintain a home, and overlook how inequality is reproduced within the home.

Richard echoed many of the points made by Marvin and Joel. He, however, identifies as the breadwinner in his marriage. Richard is 31 years old and has been married to his wife, Jodie, for three years. They are first-time parents to Ryder, their 1-year old son. They are in a dual-income earning family and work full-time. He is as a financial planner and Jodie (whose age he declined to provide) works full-time for a small, family-owned business. He described a typical day as an intricate dance where in-between each of them “getting ready for work” (i.e., showering, dressing, and eating breakfast), she cares for Ryder (i.e., waking, dressing, and feeding Ryder) and he “takes care of the dog.” Since her workday starts earlier, she leaves before Richard and, consequently, he takes Ryder to daycare before going into work. He finished his description of a typical day by stating:

Richard: She gets off work about 4, 4:30. She'll go pick him up from daycare, [and] take him home. I usually get off work somewhere between five and six on a normal day. When we get home, I don't do anything work-wise for a couple of hours. We'll play with Ryder, feed him, he needs a bath, whatever. It's just family-time, basically. Cook dinner, whatever we need to do. Then we put Ryder down to bed sometime between 7, 7:30. Usually we will eat after he's put down. Then, Jodie goes [and] gets ready for bed around 8:30, at which point we both go back to the bedroom. She's getting ready for bed and I'll watch T.V. and work. She'll go to sleep about 9, 9:15. And I'll work until,
usually, sometime around 11. Just answering emails and reviewing portfolios
are usually a responsibility of mine at work. Til’ about 11, then it's lights out.
Repeat.

While seemingly mundane, Richard’s description of his typical day represents how
most men, both breadwinners and non-breadwinners, in my study described their
typical day. Richard and Jodie’s typical day is structured around their involvement in
the paid labor force and caring for Ryder. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the majority of
my sample is comprised of middle- and upper-class men who work in white-collar
occupations. Consequently, many men, like Richard, discussed having to devote
“family-time” to work – which typically took the form of answering emails,
reviewing documents, and other work which they complete remotely. Additionally,
Richard’s description of his typical day paralleled how the other 26 fathers in my
study described their typical day. While the ages of children ranged from 18 months
to adult children in their early 30s, all of the fathers discussed how their children’s
activities and lives either directly, or indirectly, shapes their daily routines.

This is not a novel or surprising finding – people’s days are structured around
their work lives and needs of their children. Nor is it novel to hear that parents cite
time availability as a major factor in deciding who spends more time completing tasks
related to housework and childcare. There is a rich body of literature examining how
parents allocate time towards certain tasks in the household division of labor. What
we know from this body of research is that these arrangements are unfair for women
in that they are more likely to spend more time per week in the household division of
labor then men (Bianchi et al. 2012; Bianchi et al. 2006; Bittman et al. 2003; Brines
Additionally, what happens in the home is deeply connected to the structure and culture of the American workplace. For instance, work schedules (Craig and Powell 2011; Craig and Brown 2017; Hewit, Baxter, and Mieklejohn 2012; Presser 1994; Wharton 1994), workplace leave policies (Hochschild 1997; Noonan, Estes, and Glass 2007; Williams 2010), and lack of governmental support as compared to other Western, post-industrial societies (Cooper 2014; Fuwa and Cohen 2007; Jacobs and Gerson 2004; Pugh 2015) are just some structural issues which partly explain how inequitable divisions of household labor arise within families. Culturally, if a woman becomes a parent she is held to incredibly high standards of being a mother (Hays 1996). Many, in fact, are pressured to devote their lives to their children and to make their careers a secondary interest, which influences many women to leave, or reduce their involvement in, the paid labor force (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1996; Stone 2007). Additionally, workers feel that devoting long-hours to their job (Blair-Loy 2003) and not fully utilizing family leave policies at their occupations (Hochschild 1997; Minnotte, Cook, and Minnotte 2010) are ways they have to signal they are a “hard worker.” Signaling their devotion in this way, presumably, leads people to believe they will have more job security because their long workdays are an indication of being a devoted worker.

Despite recognizing how the workplace influences their time availability, men in my study articulated that the division of labor within their family is the result of a
“natural” process. Rather than seeing what happens in their daily lives as a complex interaction of structural and cultural forces, both breadwinning and non-breadwinning men described what happens in their home as the result of an organic process. For instance, after describing his daily routine, I asked Richard, “How did you all come to decide who’s going to do what during the day?”

Richard: *It kinda naturally unfolded, along with some conversations.* [emphasis added] Essentially, Jodie has to be at work by 8. So, with everything else she does she can't also take him to daycare and still be at work by 8. I can get to work whenever. I'll take him to daycare, that's not a problem. She gets off work first, and early, she goes, "I'll pick him up." Getting him up in the mornings, she's usually ready before I am, so she usually takes that. There's some days when she's in a hurry, or behind, or something. She's like, "Hey, I need you to get him up." "Not a problem.” *But, for the most part, that was just kind of the natural order of things.* [emphasis added] Now at night, we take turns putting him to bed. Because either of us could do that. It's not fair for one person to do it all the time. Especially when we both want to.

Like other men in my study, Richard does not link what happens in his family to the structure of the workplace. By emphasizing their agency in developing a division of household labor (“It kinda naturally unfolded, along with some conversations” and “But, for the most part, that was just kind of the natural order of things”) these men underestimate how the patterns within their homes are shaped by external forces. Moreover, arguing that the division of labor is the result of “natural” processes enabled these men to reconcile the fact that they report spending less time per week in housework and childcare tasks.19 Richard, for example, reported spending less time in childcare per week than Jodie. In fact, while he reported that

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19 I discuss this theme – that men in my sample report spending less time per week in housework and childcare than their spouse – in Chapter 5 in greater detail.
Jodie spends more than 20 hours per week on childcare, he estimated spending 15 hours per week. When I asked him if he thought this arrangement was fair he said:

Richard: Oh yeah. I mean, I would like to do more. She just has more time to spend with him. My work's very demanding [emphasis added]…Occasionally I work from home…I try to shut that off from the time I get home until, 8:30, 9 o'clock at night. Which is about when he's in bed. But, again, she picks him up at 4:30 in the afternoon so she's got a couple of hours to spend with him. She's having to take care of him before I even get home. It's not a burden to her [emphasis added]. We could easily leave him at daycare until 6 o'clock at night. Daycare's open [un]til 6:30. She prefers to pick him up early because she can have time to spend with him.

Richard’s perspective is telling of how most men in my study justified their involvement in childcare. Men see their work as more demanding their wife’s work. “My work’s very demanding,” “Occasionally I work from home,” and “She just has more time to spend with him” are how many men viewed the demands placed upon them by being in the paid labor force. They cited having to work longer hours, remotely, and their wife’s greater time availability as evidence of their occupational demands which, ultimately, accounts for them not spending as much time in childcare as their wife. In doing so, however, they do not acknowledge how their wife also experiences a time crunch in balancing paid and unpaid work. These findings confirm other research which shows that women often report as being the one who is more likely to adjust their work schedule in order to meet demands of unpaid work (Deutsch 1999; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Sherman 2009).

*Having a Different Skillset*

*Having a different skillset* was the second most common way men rationalized their involvement in the household division of labor. That is, how they and their wife divided housework and childcare is the result of a difference in ability to complete a given task. I
estimated that 49 percent (18/37) of the men I interviewed cited *having a different skillset* as the primary way to justify what they do in the home. In doing so, however, they relied upon traditional conceptualizations of gender when invoking a *difference in skillset* rationale.

Take Jeremiah for example. He is 40 years old, a public health analyst, identifies as the breadwinner, and is married to Catherine. She is also 40 years old and a stay-at-home mother. They have two children together, 14-year old Michelle and 11-year old Norman. His response to my question about who takes out the trash demonstrates how many rationalized their involvement in household chores:

Jeremiah: Right, so usually that's me. Because I'm usually the one filling it and it's usually heavy so I'll take that out. It's just once a week taking out the garbage and the recycling. Over the course of the week there's also empty out the little garbages around the house. And so that's split up among the various people so the kids will do their rooms and Catherine will usually do the bathrooms or the kitchen. But the actual act—physical act of taking it once a week, that, I'll do because just pragmatically it's easier.

Jeremiah did not explicitly state that because he is a man he is inherently stronger than Catherine which, therefore, makes it is easier for him to take out the garbage. He implied this by saying, “…it’s usually heavy so I’ll take that out” and “But the actual act—physical act of taking it once a week, that, I'll do because just pragmatically it's easier.” The implication is that because this specific action requires brute force it is a task best suited for him to complete. Because, as a man, he is inherently stronger and more capable of doing this task than Catherine or his two children. To be fair, Jeremiah could mean that it is “easier” and more “pragmatic” for him to take out the trash because he does so on his way to work. Perhaps he and Catherine have worked out an arrangement where everyone in their home helps to corral “the little garbages around the house” and then he takes the garbage to the
larger trash-bin sitting outside of their home. Fundamentally, however, Jeremiah rationalized this *difference in skillset* as relating to biological differences between women and men as the reason why he does this task.

Other men were more explicit in relying upon biological differences as the reason there is a *difference in skillset* with their wife. Lester, whom I introduced in Chapter 1, represented this point clearly when he responded to my hypothetical question, “Do you feel compelled to do more work in the home to make up for the fact that you're not making as much as she is?”:

Lester: I think women and men both can do housework. I don't think women are physically capable of doing some of the yard work that is available. Now as far as getting weeds out of the garden and those types of things, yes. But as far as taking an ax to a tree or even a chainsaw and just having the stamina- I think we're [men] genetically engineered to be outside. I can't think of anything in the house that Amber can't do that I would need to do, beyond some major repair or something like. Even fixing plumbing. She can do plumbing, but she don't need none of that skillset and doesn't have to have that skillset.

These men reproduce a number of inequalities within the home when they justify their involvement in the household division of labor as linked to biological differences. For example, by only seeing his “skills” as best suited for outside work, Lester devotes less time per week to housework than Amber. This is because yardwork and outside work is more infrequent than inside work. Second, if called to account for this disparity, Lester can tell outsiders, and himself, that this arrangement is fair because it is simply a reflection of inherit, genetic differences between women and men. Even though Lester, and virtually all of the men I interviewed, saw themselves as being progressive by explicitly stating housework is not just women’s responsibility (“I think women and men both can do housework”), their
actions and views indicate that they still do not want to disrupt the gendered order because they benefit from it. That is, men do not spend as much time on the more frequent, less labor-intensive tasks because they have “skills” which are best suited for the infrequent, more labor-intensive tasks.

To be fair, most men framed their involvement in less dogmatic ways. They were subtle in citing genetic differences as the explanation for having a different “skillset” than their wife, which, in turn, influenced their involvement in certain tasks and non-involvement in others. For instance, men often discussed how their wife has “knowledge” over a certain task, or array of tasks, which makes them better suited to perform the task in question. Conversely, men cited themselves as having a different type of “knowledge” which makes them better suited to perform some tasks than their wife (i.e., completing small-repairs in the home).

Take Carlos for instance. Carlos identifies as the non-breadwinner in his marriage and indicated he works part-time as an independent contractor. Yet, at the time of our interview he discussed being unemployed for several years. He attributes this to discrimination in the hiring process. “I'm a Latino that wants to work in IT (information technology). I have an accent. My name is not ‘Patel.’ I have a bunch of friends that are Patel and they all get in (hired) and people don't complain about their accents. I've heard a bunch of recruiters complain about my accent.” Consequently, Carlos is a stay-at-home father while his wife,
Carly, is the sole-income earner for their family. Carly is working part-time as a college instructor until she finishes her doctoral work. Carlos declined to provide their ages. Together, they have one son, 7-year old Stefan. Carlos’s discussion of Carly’s ability to “save money” demonstrated how men extend the differences in skillset rationale to mental labor:

Carlos: Carly takes care of the things that require a different kind of knowledge. Meaning, a whole other knowledge. She knows which stores are the ones that sell proper clothes for Stefan. She knows where the things are that have to be, the local knowledge. I mean, the clothes are local knowledge. Some of [where to buy] the food [is local knowledge], but not really. She knows how to save money, I don't. Like, I’ll say, "We'll go to that place to get this." [Carly will say], "No, we'll go to the store with the super-inexpensive one, it's gorgeous."

From Carlos’s perspective, Carly is better at “saving money.” Not because he does not value this skill or does not attempt to save their family money. In fact, he indicated that he is willing to help shop for Stefan’s clothes or for food for their family (I’ll say, “We’ll go to that place to get this”). Carly overrides his suggestions, however, because she has a “different kind of knowledge” and “knows which stores are the ones that sell proper clothes for Stefan.” Interestingly, Carlos did not seem to question how Carly came to acquire the type of knowledge of what the “proper clothes” look like for Stefan, which local stores carry these items, and where they can be cost-efficient in purchasing these clothes for Stefan. Moreover,

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20 I interviewed three men who were stay-at-home fathers and one (Keith) who once identified as a stay-at-home father before returning to work. One, Carlos, did not identify as being a stay-at-home father, but due to his prolonged absence from gainful employment (several years at the time of our interview) he was by all measures a full-time parent. Two, Austin and Raymond, identified as being a stay-at-home father. Interestingly, despite identifying in this way, both men emphasized the contributions they make to the paid labor force. It is beyond the scope of this study to explore the experiences of stay-at-fathers. However, all of these men emphasized their desire to re-enter the labor force and contributions to their family’s income while still being a stay-at-home parent.
rather than trying to learn how to invest in this type of knowledge (i.e., mental labor) in order to “properly” dress Stefan, he left this work for Carly.

Preferences for Tasks

Citing preferences for tasks was the third way men rationalized their involvement in the household division of labor. In fact, 30 percent (11/37) of the men I interviewed argued that their preference for completing a certain task determines their involvement in household labor. This rhetorical strategy enabled men to justify what tasks they complete, the time they spend on these tasks, and the frequency in which they complete these tasks. Consequently, any resulting inequalities in the household division of labor stem from the tasks people volunteer for, how often they want to complete them, and how well (i.e., the quality) they complete these tasks.

Kaleb’s discussion over the division of household chores with his wife, Courtney, illustrated the preferences for tasks argument. Kaleb is 48 years old, a musician, and identifies as the non-breadwinner in his marriage. Courtney is 42 years old, a research scientist for a state agency, and is the breadwinner for their family. They are a childless couple by choice and have been married for over 20 years. Here is how Kaleb responded when I asked him, “Can you tell me a little bit about what type of housework you do in your current household?”:

Kaleb: I'm sort of reactive at everything. If I come in and the kitchen, well, the kitchen is sort of my thing, just to be completely honest. I've always had an aversion to floors. Like, cleaning [the] floors. And from day one, I've always said, "I hate to vacuum, I hate to mop, I hate to sweep," I just despise those activities. We've never talked about it because, you know, she's just like, that's her thing. She knocks out floors. And I'm in the kitchen, like, if the countertops are a little off, I'm the one polishing the granite and scrubbing out
the sink with Comet and things like that. I pay a lot of attention to the kitchen. But I'm pretty reactive, definitely. I see something and I'm like, "You know, that's not gonna fly," and I'll get to it. If I spill something on the floor I don't call her and say, “Hey, the floors-“ if I make a mess I'm gonna clean it up.

Kaleb rationalized his involvement in household chores as a matter of preference. For instance, he cleans in the kitchen (“I'm the one polishing the granite and scrubbing out the sink with Comet and things like that”) because “the kitchen is sort of my thing.” However, he does not appear to do much else inside the home because he, “hates to vacuum, I hate to mop, I hate to sweep.” Because he “always said” he hates doing these chores, and because “those activities” are “her thing,” Kaleb justified their division of labor as a result of the two of them engaging in tasks that they prefer to do.21

The preferences for tasks argument also applies to childcare. Especially when discussing the mundane aspects of parenting. For example, Douglas is 31 years old, works full-time in medical equipment sales, and identifies as the breadwinner in his family. He is married to 31-year old Amy, who is a stay-at-mother to their two children, 5-year old Arianna and 2-month old Lydia. During our interview Douglas said that Amy, “has a much harder job than I do.” When I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by this he said:

Douglas: This job is kind of second nature. I don’t feel like it’s all that difficult. Whereas having the patience to deal with a 5-year old and a screaming 2-month old all the time and basically catering to their every need and want [is difficult]. Meanwhile, the day is consistently, it’s gotta be emotionally, mentally draining, let alone physically [draining]. Just chasing around a 5-year old can be exhausting at times let alone taking care of the

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21 It also interesting to hear Kaleb describe his involvement as “reactive.” As I discussed in Chapter 3, this is an indication that he is not engaging in mental labor to the same extent as Courtney. In fact, later in our interview he described how they approach household chores as, “she's very proactive and I'm so reactive.” Meaning, Courtney often pushes Kaleb into action when it is time for them to complete their division of labor; unless there is a spill which requires immediate attention. In these instances, Kaleb he pushes himself into engaging in household labor.
baby as well. She is a trooper. She - that would not be my first choice, taking care of - being a stay-at-home dad. I would rather come to an office job than having to - not that I don’t love my kids. I do by all means. It’s just that I don’t feel horrible about having to go to work to bring home some money for us.

Douglas’s views on the mundane aspects of parenting young children (“catering to their every need and want” and “chasing around a 5-year old can be exhausting at times let alone taking care of the baby as well”) represented how many fathers described parenting. While fathers of older children face different concerns (such as talking with their children about dating and sex), all are united in expressing, “that would not be my first choice, taking care of- being a stay-at-home dad.” They prefer that their wife be the one to assume the responsibility for childcare. This is ironic considering many asserted their wife has a “harder” and “more important” job completing the mundane tasks associated with parenting. As Douglas’s quote illustrates, many men view parenting as “difficult,” “emotionally, mentally draining, let alone physically [draining]” and their wife as being a “trooper.”

Opting out of parenting is something many sociologists have pointed to as a form of male privilege. While working fathers are expected to remain in the workplace, working mothers are held accountable to act in accordance with what Sharon Hays calls “intensive mothering” – a cultural ideal where women are expected to, “expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children” (1996:x). The double-bind for working mothers is that they are expected to be ambitious and driven to succeed in their jobs, while also being highly-nurturing and selfless when it comes to rearing their children. What plays out in the everyday life of working mothers is that they are confronted with conflicting messages over how they “should” behave and where they “should” devote their time – to
their careers or to their children. Moreover, there are many ways the workplace (Blair-Loy 2003; Budig and England 2001; Stone 2006) and family leave policies in the United States (Hochschild 1997; Noonan, Estes, and Glass 2007; Stone 2007; Williams 2010) push women out of the workforce and into the home in order to care for children. At the same time, men are not expected to care for their children, nor pushed out of the workforce, in the same way as women.

The preferences for tasks argument is problematic for two reasons. One, as I discuss further in Chapter 5, men do not realize how the preferences for tasks argument contributes to disproportionate amounts of time people devote to the household division of labor. Because many men do not “prefer” to clean inside the house, or engage in the mundane aspects of parenting, this means their spouse is, most likely, the one who completes these tasks. As I discuss further in Chapter 5, while many men see this arrangement as “fair” (everyone is doing what they like to do), it is not “equitable” (women, on average, do more than men on a weekly basis). Second, the preferences for tasks argument does not disrupt men’s gendered assumptions about the household division of labor. Specifically, many men argue that their wife is “particular” about doing a task themselves or has a “certain way” that they like a task accomplished because of essential differences between women and men.

Ben’s discussion about the disagreements he and his wife, Robin, have over loading the dishwasher illustrates both of these points. Ben is 48 years old, identifies as the breadwinner in his marriage, and works as a general contractor. He is married to Robin, who is 49 years old, and unemployed. Together, they have three children, Erin, Drew, and Gloria whose ages I was unable to obtain. When discussing his involvement in household chores,
Ben mentioned that he does not load the dishwasher “anymore.” After probing by what he meant by “anymore” Ben said that Robin did not like how he loaded the dishwasher.

Scott: What is it about the way you load the dishwasher that she doesn’t like?

Ben: Basically everything. I would run the dishwasher every night half empty… I’m so damn tired after work. So, I don’t care if the dishwasher is half-filled or not, I’m going to run it. She does. She cares if the bed is made. [She] rush[es] around and makes the bed, “I’ll do it.” There’s a certain way she likes her sheets tucked in because she’s a woman. She’ll do it [and] if it’s not right she’ll go back and do it [again]. She doesn’t like the way I paint because I’m not a good painter. I don’t like the way I paint, but it was easier to paint the kid’s rooms than hire a painter. Plus, we had no money back in the good old days. Then I would get yelled at for painting a room not 100 percent. I just got my ass chewed out because some of the furniture that we moved into storage, and then from storage to an apartment, is scratched. I don’t know if I scratched it or not, but in her eyes, I did every scratch on that piece of furniture. She told me the next time we move, “You’re not touching the furniture.” Which I can’t be happier about. There is no glory in that. She would call me a bull in a china closet and I would call her something else.

Scott: What would you call her?

Ben: I would call her someone who reorganizes the dishwasher.

This quote illustrates how the preferences for tasks rationale can create inequality within the family. First, it enables men to justify their non-involvement in housework and childcare and leaves these tasks for others to complete. Men can attribute their non-involvement not to a lack of effort, but rather to their wife’s “preference” for completing a task “in a certain way.” For example, Robin critiqued Ben’s method of loading the dishwasher. Rather than learning how, and why Robin was “particular” about running the dishwasher “half-full,” Ben simply opted-out of performing this task. He believes that Robin’s idiosyncrasies for completing this task, and others (e.g., making the bed, painting, and moving furniture) “in a certain way”
exonerates him from having to engage in this type of labor in the future because he does not do it to her standards.  

Second, the preferences for tasks argument runs the risk of men not disrupting how they think about gender and how it is reproduced in the home. Most of these men believe that the purported “peculiarities” of their wife, and how they like tasks completed in “a certain way,” stem from innate differences between women and men. This led some men to believe that biological differences between the sexes creates differences in how people want tasks completed in “a certain way.” Any resulting inequalities in the division household labor, therefore, are the by-product of innate differences between women and men. For example, Ben stated the reason he does not make the bed in the morning is because, “There’s a certain way she likes her sheets tucked in because she’s a woman.”

Interestingly, when I asked these men if they tried to learn their wife’s preferences for completing certain tasks most said, “no.” One potential explanation for this is that because these men are benefitting from their family’s arrangement of household labor (i.e., they are not spending as much time per week as their wife) they do not want to upend this arrangement. Another possible explanation is that most of these men do not want to learn about their wife’s “preferences” because they do not want to invest in the mental labor associated with the tasks. Relying upon biological differences between genders enables some of these men to believe that the reason there are differences in which tasks are done, how

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22 Doing the laundry was the other chore I found that elicited men’s ire. Many cited how their wife is “particular,” or has certain “preferences,” in how they liked to have their clothes washed. Consequently, some either refused to do any laundry or they only washed their clothes. This means in many instances women were the ones who washed their clothes and their children’s clothes. Some men even admitted their wife washes their clothes despite agreeing to wash clothes separately. I did not find one case where men reciprocated this action.
frequently, and to what extent is because of biological differences between the sexes.

However, *learning how to complete housework and childcare tasks are social actions.*

Consequently, for men to be more engaged in household labor means they must also invest mental effort, in addition to emotional and physical effort. Something which, as I argued in Chapter 3, most of these men were reluctant to do.

*Differences in Approaches*

The final way men justified their involvement in the household division of labor was by *citing differences in how they approach* the work associated with housework and childcare. In approximately 30 percent (11/37) of cases men argued their approach to housework and childcare, and the associated quality and quantity of the work, is different from their wife. Thus, any resulting disparities in how much time they each devote to the household division of labor stems from how they approach tasks related to cleaning and caring within the home.

Kaleb, whom I introduced earlier in this chapter, demonstrated the *differences in approach* argument later in his interview. Not long after Kaleb described how he “prefers” to clean the kitchen and Courtney “prefers” to do the vacuuming, mopping, and sweeping, I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by Courtney being “proactive” and he is “reactive” when it comes to cleaning. He responded by saying:

Kaleb: I'll sort of wait until I can do my initials on a surface. Because they're so dusty I'm like, "I need to dust that." Whereas she'll just dust every week because she knows it will pile up if she doesn't [emphasis added]. She's pretty proactive, for sure.
This rationalization for dividing the household chores is interesting for two reasons. First, it is a clear abdication of the physical work related to household chores. It is not that Kaleb did not engage in the mental labor associated with completing this task. Indeed, he waits, “until I can do my initials on a surface” before engaging in the physical work required to complete this labor. Kaleb acknowledges that a task needs to be done and has created a system to measure when this task needs to be completed. However, and secondly, he is not disrupting how he thinks about household work as being the primary responsibility of women. As he goes on to say, “she'll just dust every week because she knows it will pile up if she doesn't. So, she's pretty proactive, for sure.” What this quote represents is that for Kaleb, and the other men in my study, the way they approach household work is that it is not “their” job to be “proactive” about. Because they continue to construct housework as women’s work, this allows them to be “reactive.”

Because many people construct the private sphere as “women’s domain,” the status of the home (e.g., décor, organization, cleanliness) and children (e.g., behavior) is seen by many as a reflection of women’s ability to manage a home. In essence, if women do not take the initiative to ensure the chores in the home are completed, or children behave “appropriately,” they are held accountable to “act” more like a “real” woman or mother. The flipside to this cultural expectation is that it enables men to take a laissez-faire approach to housework. Relaxing their cleanliness standards, being “reactive” to what needs to be done in the home, or saying we have a “different approach” to housework and childcare is but one rhetorical strategy men employ to get out of doing their fair share of household labor.
Austin’s discussion of how he and his wife, Sarah, complete the laundry illustrates this point. Austin is 37 years old, identifies as the non-breadwinner in his family and as a stay-at-home father. He also indicated he works full-time as an independent film editor. However, it was not clear from our interview if he is currently employed. Austin is married to 38-year old Sarah, who works full-time as a retail merchandiser. They have one child, 2-year old Kyler. Here is Austin’s response to my question, “Who do you think is taking the initiative on laundry? It sounds like it’s not necessarily a set schedule but kind of as needed or when you realize you need something and it’s dirty”:

Austin: Yeah, I’d say her. Again, not because she feels that she has to, it’s more just, she’s on autopilot with that and for me it’s an afterthought.

Scott: When you say she’s on “autopilot,” what do you mean by that?

Austin: She’ll come home and just bang all that stuff out just because she doesn’t want the clutter or to deal with it. She’ll just throw the load in, get the meal going, she’s just efficient like that and then she can relax because everything is done. That’s what I mean by her approach is more “autopilot.” Like, “This is just part of my being efficient and making sure stuff is done.” For me it’s not. I’m thinking about work as much as I can because I have to… my head’s already stretched thin so I can’t let my mind get around too many things. Otherwise, I’m spread thin and nothing gets done right. I have to at least funnel and channel where I’m putting focus. That’s not to be mistaken for I don’t care about anything else. It’s more like if I have to clean everything every hour and I have to watch her, and I have to walk the dog, and I have to run a business, something’s going to fall flat so I have to really be choosy about that.

Similar to Kaleb, Austin talked about having a different approach towards completing household work than his wife. While Austin characterized Sarah as being on “autopilot,” he has to “funnel and channel” his focus. He cited his work as a film editor as conflicting with his ability to complete household work. This is because, “my head’s already stretched thin so
I can’t let my mind get around too many things. Otherwise, I’m spread thin and nothing gets done right.” Unlike Sarah, whom Austin viewed as being able to come home and get into “autopilot” and “just bang all that stuff out.” He has to be more “choosy” about what tasks he completes because nothing will get done “right.”

The irony seems lost on Austin, and other men in my study, who are in dual-earning families. Austin, who seems to be working sporadically (despite identifying as employed full-time on his background information form), does not consider how Sarah also exerts a great amount of mental labor as a retail merchandiser. She, and many of the wives in my study, also work in white-collar occupations which require them to complete a great amount of mental labor. Austin, however, does not seem to recognize how Sarah may also come home and feel “stretched thin.” Moreover, he seems to accept it as a biological given that Sarah can go into “autopilot,” or is more “proactive,” when she comes home from work.

A small minority of men, however, invest in learning how their wife approaches housework and do not reify gendered assumptions about the division of household labor. They see learning about their wife’s approach to housework as a positive, albeit laborious task. Mostly because they learned how to be more efficient in their cleaning practices.

Take Jonathan for example. He is 30 years old and works full-time as a special education teacher. He is married to 30-year old Jordan who works full-time as branch manager for a local bank. Jonathan identifies as the breadwinner in his dual-income earning marriage. They do not have children, although he indicated this is a possibility in the near future. During our interview I asked him how they wash the dishes. He responded by saying
he learned, “there is a different way to load the dishwasher.” I asked him to elaborate on what he meant by this and he said:

Jonathan: I would kind of just put stuff in there and be like, “Oh, it’s full.” Jordan would look and be like, “It’s full because everything is all over the place.” So, she reorganized things and moved things a bit. And over the years I’ve gotten pretty good at understanding how to load the dishwasher and basically making sure that all dishes are arranged and [there’s] no food on them when they go into the dishwasher because that’s also important. I didn’t know that. We’ve had our fair share of discussions about that.

Scott: Do you like doing it this way better or do you prefer doing it the way that you did prior to Jordan showing you the way that she wants it done?

Jonathan: I actually like doing it this way better because I can get more in there and the dishes get cleaned. The way I was doing it, when the dishwasher was done and I had unloaded or Jordan had unloaded, there’d be like, I would say, maybe about five or six dishes that didn’t get cleaned. Because maybe they were covered by something and the water couldn’t hit it or maybe they weren’t completely rinsed off before they went in so the food stayed stuck on there. Then you’ve got to rewash them or put them back in the dishwasher, which is a hassle because that’s less space for more dishes or you’ve got to take time off now, rewash something that should have been cleaned. So, yeah, it’s better.

Jonathan and Ben (whom I introduced earlier in this chapter) are similar in that both of their wives critiqued how they approached putting dishes in the dishwasher. While Ben responded to these criticisms as a way to get out of doing this task in the future, Jordan indicated he took the time to learn why Jordan was critiquing his approach. Learning her approach changed how Jonathan says he now approaches cleaning the dishes.

Jonathan’s response to Jordan’s critique of how he loaded the dishwasher represents a minority of men in my study who were open to changing their approach to cleaning and childcare. This is an encouraging sign because it illustrates how some men are challenging the underlying gendered assumptions about the household division of labor. Rather than
rebuking Jordan’s critique of his approach to loading the dishwasher and attributing this to a biological difference in how women and men complete a household chore (as Ben did with Robin), Jonathan engaged in mental labor associated with washing dishes. By investing in the mental labor associated with washing the dishes, and other tasks related to the household division of labor, some men were disrupting the underlying assumption that housework and childcare is women’s responsibility. Additionally, by changing their approach to housework they are also refusing to engage in a strategy that the majority of men I interviewed used to opt out of doing household work.

CONCLUSION

This chapter identified four major rhetorical strategies men utilized in their interviews to justify their involvement in the household division of labor. The most commonly cited way men described their involvement in housework and childcare was *time availability*. I estimated that 86 percent (32/37) of my sample predicate how much time they dedicate to specific tasks, or in general, on how much time they have available outside of their time commitments to the paid labor force. Second, 49 percent (18/37) of men that I interviewed cited *having a different skillset* as the major way that they and their wife divided chores within the home. Third, 30 percent (11/37) of men argued that they and their wife have *preferences for completing certain tasks* and completing them in certain ways which accounts for how they divide household labor. Finally, approximately 30 percent (11/37) of men cited how *differences in approaches* to housework and childcare accounts for the extent to which they are involved in household chores. While they do engage in household chores,
they do not do as much as their wife because their approach, and the associated quality and quantity of the work attached to these tasks, is different.

Taken together, how men rationalized their involvement in unpaid work did not challenge traditional conceptualizations of the household division of labor. I argued that while seemingly gender-neutral on their face, the logic underlying men’s rhetoric does not disrupt their underlying assumptions that unpaid work (i.e., housework and childcare) is “women’s work.” Even though men outwardly reject traditional conceptualizations that the private sphere is “women’s work,” what appears to guide their purported behavior in the household division of labor is not related to their belief and commitment to feminist ideals within the home. Rather, when describing how they came to be involved in these specific tasks they relied upon central features of “patriarchal ideology” (Connell 2005) – rationality, logic, and essential differences between women and men – to account for their arrangement of household labor. Doing so lays the groundwork for these men to justify resulting time differences in the household division of labor and perpetuating gender stereotypes within the home.

Additionally, these rationalizations justify, and exacerbate, gender inequality within the home. In the following chapter I analyze what equality means to these men when dividing the household division of labor. The rationalizations I discuss in this chapter will be important to keep in mind when considering how men account for weekly time discrepancies with their wife when it comes to housework and childcare.
CHAPTER 5: “YOU DON’T ALWAYS GET YOUR WAY”: JUSTIFYING INEQUALITY IN THE HOUSEHOLD DIVISION OF LABOR

INTRODUCTION

This chapter explores how men view inequality in the household division of labor. To hear the men tell it, what happens in their home is fair regarding the number of hours family members spend in the household division of labor. They say this despite the fact that, collectively, they report spending less time per week in housework and childcare tasks than their wives. When pressed to account for discrepancies in these reported time differences men continue to say these arrangements are fair.

Can the division of household labor be fair while also being unequal? In wrestling with this question, I soon realized how closely it parallels to my own division of household labor. For example, I spend more time washing dishes than my wife. I consider this to be a fair arrangement because I like cooking, I do not mind washing the dishes, and I dirtied the majority of the dishes. Another example is that my wife typically pays for our groceries, when we go out to eat, vet expenses for our family dog and many other necessities for our home (e.g., health insurance). She tells me this is fair because she works full-time, I am still a graduate student, and she has more money than me.

These examples are typical of how most couples view the household division of labor. Where one spouse does more of a certain task, the other will do more of another task. While some specialize, or typically concentrate their time and effort in a selection of tasks, others specialize in other tasks. In this ideal scenario, what spouses do within the home is
complementary. Most even believe that when it comes to their own arrangement of household labor it is fair. Yet, what does it mean to have a “fair” arrangement of household labor?

Timothy’s response is illustrative of how many men in my study view fairness in the division of household labor. Timothy is 51 years old and is married to this second wife, 41-year old Cassandra, who works part-time as an educator in higher education. Together, they have two daughters, 5-year old Zoe and 2-year old Brylee. For him, “unfairness” is, “someone that does a lot of work that they don’t like to do.” I was puzzled by his response. “So, it’s not necessarily someone who’s doing more. It’s just whether or not if they like it doing it?”:

Timothy: Exactly. Because then that comes up with a definition of work. But if I’m doing something that I don’t like, that’s a lot of work. If I’m doing something that either I like or I don’t mind, or at the very least it’s not really hard to do, even though it might take some time, that’s not unfair. I don’t think the time has to be equal. But if someone is doing – so we don’t have to do things we don’t care to do, right? But if someone’s doing a lot more of those things [that they don’t like to do], then that's not fair.

Scott: So, what do you think if someone were to do a disproportionate amount of things that they like to do, is that still fair?

Timothy: Yeah. If I like to mow the lawn, and then – yeah, I have no problem with that.

The men in my study do not use “equal” and “fair” as synonyms when discussing their arrangement of household labor. As Timothy’s response illustrates, “unequal” arrangements occur when people are doing tasks which they do not like doing. “Fairness” is related to people’s preferences for doing certain tasks in the home, or at the very least, do not mind
doing. Thus, *how people come to perform certain tasks* matters more than how much time, or how many chores, one person does when determining if the division of labor is “unequal.”

This distinction, however, clouds over the fact that the majority of men in my study spend less time per week in housework and childcare than their wives. Justifying these differences as a matter of preference ignores how weekly differences compound into huge time differentials in the household division of labor. Take Timothy for example. He estimates that, on average, he and Cassandra spend 12 and 15 hours per week, respectively, on housework. This means that on any given day Timothy spends 1.7 hours per day on housework compared to Cassandra’s 2.1 hours per day. Over the course of one-month (30 days) Timothy spends 51 hours per month on housework and Cassandra spends 63 hours. Over the course of one year, Timothy spends 612 hours on housework and Cassandra 756 hours. How do men justify the practices which can produce huge time discrepancies in their division of household labor?

I begin this chapter by analyzing men’s perceived estimates of time spent on household and childcare tasks. I present men’s estimates of their weekly involvement in the household division of labor and the degree to which they should adjust their involvement in housework and childcare.

I then outline three major ways men view the weekly distribution of hours in their household division of labor. First, most men distinguish between “equity” and “fairness.” Typically, men referred to “equitable” divisions of labor as relating to measurable differences in time spent on these tasks. Whereas “fair” referred to how they and their spouse come to the arrangement of who does what in the home, when, and how often. Thus, to these men,
arrangements of household work can be “inequitable” but “fair.” Second, many men utilize mathematical representations to justify time differences spent in the home. They use these representations as a way to underscore the distinction between “equity” and “fairness.” In doing so, however, many men position themselves as the one benefitting from unequal divisions in household labor. Finally, men often invoke comparison cases when justifying time differences in the household division of labor. Most commonly, they contextualize what they do in the home by comparing their involvement to their spouse, father, and mother. Within each of these discussions I ground the findings from my sample to other research examining men’s perceptions of inequality in the household division of labor. I conclude this chapter with a summary of my findings.

ESTIMATING AND ADJUSTING WEEKLY INVOLVEMENT IN HOUSEHOLD LABOR

I assessed how men viewed inequality in the home by asking them to elaborate on their answers to questions 12 through 19 in the background information form (see Appendix B). As I discussed in Chapter 2, I administered this form to men before their interview. Questions 12 through 19 asked men to estimate how many hours per week they, their wife, and children spend on housework and childcare tasks and whether they, their wife, and children should spend more, less, or the same amount of time in these respective tasks. During the interview I probed men on how they arrived at their responses.

The numbers reported here are not an exact measure of time allocation in housework and childcare within these families. Rather, they reflect men’s perceptions of time spent in
certain tasks and whether they believe people should adjust their time involvement. In many instances men reported spending less hours per week in housework and childcare than their spouse. Despite these weekly differences many of these men believed this is a fair division of household labor.

In the following section I present men’s estimates of the time they and their wives spend in housework and childcare. I start by analyzing the overall gender differences in time spent on housework and childcare tasks. I then compare how these estimates change when considering men’s breadwinning, family structure, and parental status.

**Housework**

As I discussed in Chapter 1, men are spending more time in the household division of labor than ever before. In 2015, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that men, on average, spend 1 hour and 25 minutes a day on household activities while women spend 2 hours and 15 minutes (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2015). This means that over the course of a week, men, on average, spend approximately 9 hours and 15 minutes and women spend 15 hours and 5 minutes on household tasks.

My sample is similar to recent national estimates on men’s weekly involvement in household work. As Figure 5.1 indicates, men in my sample estimate spending an average of 10 hours per week in housework while also estimating their wives spend 13 hours per week. This would be, roughly, 1 hour and 25 minutes per day for men and 1 hour and 51 minutes for women. If we were to apply these estimates to the course of one year (365 days), men in

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23 Activities in this analysis included: “maintenance, repair, decoration; lawn, gardening, houseplants; kitchen and food clean-up, household management; laundry; interior cleaning; food and drink preparation; and other household activities.”
my sample would spend approximately 517 hours per year on housework, while their wives would spend 675 hours. To put this in a different perspective, over the course of one year men estimate they spend almost 65 workdays (working 8 hours a day) completing housework while their wife spends a little over 84 workdays.

![Bar Chart: Men's Estimates of Housework](image)

**Figure 5.1.** Men's Estimates of Housework.

It appears that men in my sample are conflicted over how much time they should spend completing household work. Figure 5.2 shows how men responded to the survey question, “I should do (more/less/the same amount of) housework than I currently do.” While 45 percent said they should continue their level of involvement in household chores, 47 percent said they should do more. Interestingly, (not pictured here) a majority of men (56 percent) said their wives should continue to do the same amount of housework as they currently do.

Breadwinning status appears to influence how much time men estimate they and their wife spend, per week, in household work. Meaning, identifying as the breadwinner in a marriage seems to increase the odds of having to spend less time in household chores. For
example, breadwinning men estimate they complete 9 hours of housework per week, while their non-breadwinning wife completes 17 hours per week. Non-breadwinning men, however, estimate they do 12 hours of housework per week compared to their breadwinning wife’s 8 hours per week. These results are consistent with economic dependency models (Brines 1994), which argue that the non-breadwinning spouse does more housework than the breadwinning spouse. Additionally, (not depicted here) 17 of the 19 breadwinning men report spending less time per week than their wife and 7 of the 12 non-breadwinning men report spending more time per week than their wife. Interestingly, even though non-breadwinners spend more time per week in housework tasks, the payoff (i.e., getting their non-breadwinning spouse to spend more time completing housework) is greater for breadwinning men than breadwinning women.

![Figure 5.2. Men's Perceptions of their Housework Involvement.](image)

Another surprising finding is that men in equal-earning marriages estimate spending the least amount of time in housework compared to other men in my sample. The five men who identified as being in an equal-earning marriage estimated completing 8 hours of
housework per week, compared to the 9 hours for breadwinning men and 12 hours for non-breadwinning men. This is surprising given that some scholars argue that the less economically dependent women are upon their husbands, the less time they will spend in household chores (Brines 1994). This is because people within these marriages split their time between the public and private spheres and contribute equitable amounts of economic resources to the family. We would, therefore, expect them to evenly split how much time they spend in household labor because nobody is able to use their larger income as leverage to opt-out of doing their share of housework. This, however, does not seem to be the case for equal-earning spouses in my sample. Men report that their wife spends 5 more hours per week in housework.

There are no unexpected findings when considering how much time men estimate they spend in household work when considering their family structure. As I discussed in

Figure 5.3. Men's Estimates of Housework by Breadwinning Status.
Chapter 1, previous research shows that women continue to spend more time completing household and childcare tasks than men. In fact, some breadwinning women are more likely to do more housework than their non-breadwinning husbands (Bittman et al. 2003; Brines 1994; Evertsson and Nermo 2004; Greenstein 2000; Schnieder 2011; Thébaud 2010). Men report spending 11 and 8 hours per week completing housework in dual-income and single-earning households, respectively. Comparatively, they report their wife spending 12 and 15 hours per week completing housework in dual-income and single-earning households, respectively. Even though I find that men estimate larger time differences with their wife in household tasks in single-earner households than in dual-income earning households, men in both types of marriages report spending less time per week than their wife.

**Figure 5.4.** Men's Estimates of Housework by Family Structure.
Similarly, there are no unexpected findings when considering how much time men estimate they spend in household work when considering their parental status. Figure 5.5 shows that, regardless of parental status, men estimate spending less time per week in household tasks than their wife. Specifically, men with children estimate spending 9 hours per week engaged in housework compared to their wife’s 11 hours per week. Men without children estimate spending 10 hours per week in household tasks compared to their wife’s 14 hours per week.

Figure 5.5. Men's Estimates of Housework by Parental Status.

While there are 27 fathers in my study (see Table 2.1 in Chapter 2), I included only 23 in analyses for this chapter. The four men excluded from analyses in this chapter – Ben, Jeffery, Morgan, and Walter – did not provide any weekly childcare estimates. Ben and Jeffery’s children live in the cities where they attend college and only return home for visits. Walter has an adult son and step-son, Stephen and Kyle, who live with their own families in different states. Morgan, as discussed in Chapter 2, did not return his background information form.
In sum, Figures 5.1 – Figure 5.5 tell a similar analytic story to previous research on the household division of labor – but with a slight twist. Consistent with previous research, I find that men in my sample spend less time per week in household chores than their wives (Atkinson and Boles 1984; Bianchi et al. 2006; Brayfield 1992; Brines 1994; Demantas and Myers 2015; Geist and Cohen 2011; Greenstein 2000; Kan, Sullivan, and Gershuny 2011; Sayer 2005; Sayer et. al 2009; Tichenor 2005; Yavorsky, Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). Even when comparing men’s estimates of their weekly involvement in household work by their breadwinning, family structure, and parental status men in my study consistently report spending less time in these tasks than their spouse. The only exception is when men identified as being the non-breadwinning spouse.

It also appears that men in my sample are conflicted over how much time they are spending in housework. Almost half of my sample (47 percent) indicated that they should do more housework than they are currently doing. However, almost half (45 percent) indicated they should continue to spend the same amount of time in housework as they currently do. Only 8 percent of men in my sample said they should do more. This is similar to recent studies demonstrating that men across the United States are conflicted about how much time they should actually spend completing household tasks (Pew Research Center 2010b; Pew Research Center 2007; Quadlin and Doan 2016).

The overwhelming majority of men in my sample, however, view this unequal time distribution in housework as being a “fair” arrangement. This was true even for the small number of men who report spending more time in housework and childcare tasks than their spouse. Unlike previous literature examining men’s perspectives on their involvement in
household work (Atkinson and Boles 1984; Banerjee 2015; Demantas and Myers 2015; Deutsch 1999; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005), I find that men do not attempt to embellish, or hide, what, or how much, they do in the home. Rather, they employ several specific strategies to justify how much time they spend and how these time inequities are produced. I discuss these strategies later in this chapter. I now turn towards men’s estimates of childcare.

*Childcare*

As previously discussed in Chapter 1, since the 1960s, men have greatly increased the number of hours they spend on childcare. In 2015, the Pew Research Center (Parker and Livingston 2016) estimated that men spend 7 hours per week on childcare, compared to 15 hours per week for women. This means that, approximately, during the course of a day men spend one hour per day on childcare while women spend 2 hours and 9 minutes per day.

Fathers in my study (n=23) estimate spending more time in childcare tasks than the average man in the United States. As Figure 5.6 indicates, overall, fathers in my sample estimated spending 13 hours per week on childcare; almost doubling the amount of time the

![Figure 5.6. Men's Estimates of Childcare.](image)
average man in the United States spends on childcare during the week. Men reported their
wife, however, spends the same amount of time on childcare as the average mother in the
United States – 15 hours per week. This means that on a typical day, men in my sample
spend about 1 hour and 51 minutes on childcare tasks and women spend approximately 2
hours and 8 minutes. Additionally, the majority of men in my sample report spending less
time per week in childcare than their wife. In fact, 57 percent (13/23) estimate spending less
time per week than their wife, 30 percent (7/23) estimate spending more time per week,
and only 13 percent (3/23) report spending the same amount of time per week.

This weekly time difference, however, compounds into large time differences over
the course of one year. If we apply these estimates over the course of one year (365 days),
men in my sample would spend approximately 675 hours per year on childcare, while
women would spend 778 hours. To put this in a different perspective, over the course of one
year, men estimate they spend a little over 84 workdays (working 8 hours a day) completing
childcare while their wife spends a little over 97 workdays.

The fact that men in my study reported spending almost twice the national average on
parenting is not surprising when considering the strong correlation between education,
income, and increased involvement in childcare tasks (Bianchi et al. 2006). The majority of
men in my study have a college education (n=33) and many have advanced degrees (n=23).
Moreover, men had an average salary between $60,000 – $69,000, which, when combined
with women’s average salary between $40,000 - $49,000, positions many of these men
within the middle or upper class. Furthermore, as previously discussed in Chapter 1, major
cultural and structural changes have enabled men to embrace their fathering identity and to

Unlike men’s perceptions on housework, men in my sample do not appear as conflicted over their level on involvement in childcare tasks. The majority of men (61 percent) responded that they should continue to do the same amount of childcare that they are currently doing. An even higher percentage of men (83 percent) felt their wife should continue to do the same amount of childcare that they are currently doing (not depicted here). Only a small number of men felt that they should do more (30 percent) and only 9 percent of men felt they should do less.

There are many similarities between breadwinning status and men’s estimates of time spent on childcare as there are with breadwinning and men’s estimates of time spent on housework. Breadwinning fathers (n=14) estimate they and their spouse complete 11 and 16 hours of childcare per week, respectively. Non-breadwinning fathers (n=7) estimate doing 16

![Pie chart showing men's perceptions of their childcare involvement.](image-url)

**Figure 5.7.** Men’s Perceptions of their Childcare Involvement.
hours of childcare per week while their wife does 13 hours per week. Additionally (not depicted here), 12 of the 14 breadwinning fathers report spending less time per week than their wife and 3 of the 7 non-breadwinning fathers report spending more time per week than their wife. Similar to housework, the payoff (i.e., getting their non-breadwinning spouse to do more childcare) seems to be greater for breadwinning men than for breadwinning women. That is, breadwinning men spend less time on childcare (11 hours), then breadwinning women (13 hours). Interestingly, fathers in equal-earning marriages (n=2) estimate spending the most amount of time in childcare tasks. However, among the five equal-earning men in my sample, only two had children. Thus, it is hard to draw similar conclusions about men’s involvement in childcare as I did with men’s involvement in housework.

**Figure 5.8.** Men’s Estimates of Childcare by Breadwinning Status.

women (13 hours). Interestingly, fathers in equal-earning marriages (n=2) estimate spending the most amount of time in childcare tasks. However, among the five equal-earning men in my sample, only two had children. Thus, it is hard to draw similar conclusions about men’s involvement in childcare as I did with men’s involvement in housework.
There are no unexpected findings when considering how much time men estimate they spend in childcare tasks when considering their family structure. Regardless of whether fathers are in a dual-income (n=5) or single-earning household (n=20), they report spending less time per week in childcare tasks than their wives. Moreover, larger time differences exist between men and their spouse in single-earner households than dual-income earning households. Men report spending 13 and 12 hours per week completing childcare in dual-income and single-earning households, respectively. Compartively, they report their wife spending 14 and 19 hours per week completing childcare in dual-income and single-earning households, respectively.

In sum, Figures 5.6 – Figure 5.9 are consistent with previous research on men’s involvement in childcare. Men in my sample spend less time per week in childcare tasks than
their wives (Bianchi et al. 2006; Parker and Wang 2013). Additionally, there is a link between breadwinning status and the amount of hours men estimate they and their wife spend on childcare (Parker and Wang 2013). Generally, it appears that men in my sample perceive the breadwinner of the family to spend less time on childcare than the non-breadwinning spouse. However, breadwinning women were estimated to spend, on average, two more hours per week on childcare than breadwinning men. The only exception is when men identified as being the non-breadwinning spouse.

Interestingly, the majority of men in my sample report that the current practices of childcare that they share with their wife should remain the same. While men seemed more divided over their level of involvement in housework, there is more consistency in how men view their level of involvement in childcare. Generally, despite the average man in my sample spending 3 hours less per week on childcare than their wife, they feel these arrangements should continue into the foreseeable future.

Summary

These data are important to include for three key reasons. First, they provide essential contextual information towards understanding my sample as a whole. The numbers presented in this chapter reflect men’s own estimates of their, and their wife’s, involvement in housework and childcare. Though imperfect, they provide a window into how men from a variety of social locations reflect upon the common, taken-for-granted activities which occur in the home.

Second, what we see when looking into this window is that most of the men recognize that they simply do not spend as much time in housework and childcare tasks as
their wife. I do not doubt the devotion these men have to their wife and children. During the interviews many, if not all, expressed admiration and love to the women with whom they are spending their life. Many, in fact, expressed incredulity and guilt when realizing that they estimated their wife spends more time in the household division of labor. Despite all of this, however, most asserted that the division of labor should remain the same. Which leads me to my final point.

Finally, these data provide a partial window towards understanding how inequality is reproduced within the home. As I discussed in Chapter 1, only measuring physical time differences in the household division of labor misses how people experience and understand their place within a system of inequality. What is needed to gain a more well-rounded understanding of how inequality is perpetuated in the home is by examining the perspectives of those who benefit from inequitable divisions of labor. When considering this study, what remains unanswered is how do men, who by their own admission do not do as much as their wives and want this division of labor to remain the same, justify the existing inequality within their home? I now turn my focus towards addressing this question.

MEN’S VIEWS ON DISTRIBUTION OF HOURS

There were three typical ways men justified the amount of time they spend in the household division of labor – distinguishing between equity and fairness, using mathematical representations, and invoking comparison cases. While similar to the rhetorical strategies I identified in Chapter 4, men invoked these strategies to account for time discrepancies in their family’s division of labor. In the following section I present each way men viewed the
distribution of hours, the percentage of my sample which fell into each type of view, and the implications these views have for the reproduction of inequality within the family.

_Equity vs. Fairness_

I argued in Chapter 2 that inequality cannot solely be measured by the physical labor people perform in the household division of labor. Scholars must also account for how couples divide the emotional and mental labor that is required to run and maintain a home. We know from previous research, and from my findings in Chapter 3, that women spend more time thinking about and completing physical, emotional, and mental tasks in the household division of labor than men (Coltrane 1989; Coltrane 1996; Daly 2002; DeVault 1991; Hessing 1994; Hochschild 1979; Sniezek 2005; Walzer 1996; Zimmerman et al. 2002). Scholars have long used discrepancies in weekly involvement in housework and childcare tasks as signs of inequality in the family. But, how do people view “fairness” in the division of these tasks? What does a fair, or unfair, arrangement of household labor look like to married people?

During the course of my study I realized that men distinguished between “equity” and “fairness” when sharing their perspectives on housework and childcare. This distinction is important because it is one-way men justify, on average, not spending as much time per week in the household division of labor as their wives. *In conjunction with the rationales discussed in Chapter 4, men not only explained how the inequalities in household labor hours are produced, but how spending less hours per week than their wife is still a “fair” arrangement of household labor. In what follows I address how men distinguished between these two ideas.*
Equity

Approximately 57 percent (21/37) of my sample made a distinction between “equity” and “fairness.” When men used terms such as “equality,” “equal,” “equitable,” “unequal,” or “inequitable” they were referring to relative distinctions between what they and their wife do in regards to housework and childcare. When they used terms such as “fair” or “unfair,” they referred to the conditions under which people perform tasks related to the household division of labor.

In general, “equity” in the household division of labor meant finding a socially agreed upon balance between the proportion of time each spouse spent on household and childcare tasks. The time that each spouse devotes to these tasks is predicated upon one’s employment status, whether they work full-time or part-time, their daily work schedule, and the flexibility one has within their job. As many men argued, this means, inevitably, one spouse will spend more time completing certain tasks than the other.

Take Colton, whom I introduced in Chapter 3, for instance. While he estimates spending eight hours per week on housework, he estimates that Chelsey completes 10 hours per week. His response is illustrative of how many men explained what an “equal” arrangement of housework means to them:

Colton: I think there is both partners contributing an equal amount of effort. Not necessarily time, but effort relative to what works for them. But in balance with what they have going on at work too. So [for example] when things get easier for me with work in the summer, I'm happy to take on more stuff at home. It's easier to get the oil changes done and those things. And like I said, I cook more often. If things ease off for her at work at certain times when I'm busy with work, I will ask her to pick up some of the slack, and she'll do that. I think that kind of arrangement is equal.
As Colton quote emphasizes, *what matters for men in my study in determining an “equal” arrangement of chores is not the objective amount of time people spend in tasks, but the relative time someone should spend completing household chores when considering work schedules.* For example, Colton says that “things get easier for me with work in the summer” which enables him to spend more time on housework in the summer. Conversely, “if things ease off for her at work at certain times when I’m busy with work,” she will spend more time completing household tasks than him.

Thus, for Colton, and the other men in my study, this division of labor is “equal” because the time involvement is relative to their work schedules – even though he estimates Chelsey is still completing two more hours per week.

Conversely, an “inequitable” arrangement is when one person expects the other to do “all” of the housework. In this conceptualization, men point to the extreme instance of one person who does nothing and one person who does “everything” as an “unequal” division of household labor. For example, here is how Daniel, a 34-year old recruiter who is expecting his first child with his wife, Erin, responded when I asked him what an “inequitable” arrangement of household work looks like:

Daniel: I would say somebody that really doesn't do anything. They just expect to be served. You know, even if they go outside of the home to work, come home, and expect the house to be clean without helping. Expects to be fed. And that person [who expects to be served] is not doing anything to get–besides working, providing money. And even then, I can understand a person that has to work 15 hours a day not being able to do much around the house. But those times off they [should] do something. But if they do nothing then I don't think it's necessarily equal.
Daniel is among the 17 percent (6/36) of men in my study who report doing the same amount of housework per week as their spouse. Like Colton, he emphasizes that what matters most in determining an “equitable” relationship is a person’s effort (e.g., “I can understand a person that has to work 15 hours a day not being able to do much around the house. But those times off they [should] do something.”) rather than the actual time they spend completing tasks.

Doing so signals a person’s commitment to disrupting traditional gendered expectations in the household division of labor. By pointing to extreme distinctions in people’s involvement in the division of labor (e.g., “somebody that really doesn’t do anything,” “if they do nothing then I don’t think it’s necessarily equal”) Daniel subtly justifies his level of involvement. No matter how much he and the other men report doing, it is more than “nothing.”

Daniel’s argument also alludes to the potential deficits of the “economic dependency model” (Brines 1994). Specifically, the potential for the breadwinning spouse to lord their greater financial contributions over the non-breadwinning spouse in order to buy out of their involvement in household tasks. For Daniel, and for others in my study, this act is held with contempt because it reflects an outdated view of family life. Or, as Richard put it, “This ain’t the 1950’s, bro.”

\textit{Fairness}

In general, men typically described “fairness” as how tasks are allocated in the household division of labor. In other words, a “fair” arrangement means doing tasks that one does not mind doing, likes to do, and has the time to complete. Men typically
reported that they discussed with their wives about what tasks they like to do, and do not like to do (or, at least, do not mind to do). For example, during our interview, Alejandro, a 32-year old, childless, university laboratory technician, described what a “fair” arrangement of housework is with his wife, Dina. She is 34 years old and he declined to answer what she does as a part-time worker. He cited their cooking practices when I asked for an example demonstrating his view on a “fair” arrangement of household tasks:

Alejandro: For example, Dina likes mojito chicken or salmon or some other fish, but she doesn’t like to touch them when they are raw. She doesn’t enjoy to do that. But I don’t have any problem [touching the raw meat]. And commonly, for example, I clean the meat. Then I remove all the fat from the meat or from the chicken. I try to clean it up because it’s not yucky for me. But for her it is. Then I try to help with that too. I see everything like a team effort. Then I try to help with things that she doesn’t like to do since I know that the total load of work in cooking, for sure, she does the most. Then I try to assist in the things that she doesn’t like to do, for example.

Alejandro’s position reflects how many men in my study view a “fair” arrangement of household work. A “fair” arrangement of labor is when one person does a task that the other does not like to do. For example, Alejandro “cleans the meat” and “removes all the fat from the meat or from the chicken…because it’s not yucky for me.” In this way, many men will, as Alejandro says here, view the allocation of housework as part of “a team effort” and ultimately “fair.”

Using sport metaphors like this were not uncommon. In fact, Courtney (2009) argues that men’s usage of sport (and other) metaphors is a typical way men describe their involvement in the division of household labor. What is troublesome, however, is that this overlooks how much time people are actually contributing to “the team.” For instance,
despite saying their arrangement of housework is “fair,” Alejandro estimates completing 9 hours of housework per week while Dina does more than 20. Indeed, 61 percent of my sample (22/36) estimated spending less time per week in household tasks than their spouse. While I do not have women’s perspectives in my study, other research confirms that women consistently feel men are not equally contributing to “the team” (Hochschild and Machung 2012; Pesquera 1997; Sanchez and Kane 1996). I suspect that many of the spouses of men in my study might feel the same way as well.

Conversely, “unfair” arrangements of household work are when one spouse does tasks which they “hate” doing and, or, are assumed to do without being asked. Men rarely acknowledged that they, or their wives, like to clean or revel in arranging the logistical needs of childcare. Most, however, recognized that the division of these tasks becomes “unfair” when their spouse has to do tasks which they hate and when they are assumed to do these tasks without being asked.

Walter’s explanation of an “unfair” arrangement of housework illustrates how many men view “unfairness.” Walter is 63 years old, an insurance agent, and in his third marriage. His first marriage ended in divorce and his second from the unfortunate passing of his wife, Barbara. He is now married to Dorothy, who is also retired, 64, and widowed from her first marriage. Walter estimated he spends two hours per week on housework and Dorothy spends 20 hours per week. Walter is unique in that he exhibits a great amount of reflection over his involvement in the division of household labor between his three marriages. When describing his first marriage he said:
Walter: I did absolutely nothing at the home. I mean I did the outside. I mowed the grass and cleaned out the stuff out there. It would be outside stuff. But I had to get out of the young mentality of that's [housework] women's work. I learned with having a deceased—my deceased wife. I learned having a disabled person, or a disabled wife, how much housework that a woman does. And like I told you before, God bless the working mother. Because I don't know how they do it. I really don't.

Walter’s response echoes Daniel’s comment about an “unequal” arrangement when someone who “really doesn’t do anything.” Walter admits to doing “absolutely nothing” at home. But, he goes on to point out that his biggest challenge was to “get out of the young mentality” that housework is “women’s work.” He goes on to explain why making this assumption is false, because he was forced into being the primary caretaker and homemaker before Barbara’s illness and untimely death. This not only challenged Walter’s gendered assumptions about who should, can, and is able to do housework, but it made him realize actually how much work is involved with maintaining a home. In fact, he goes a far to praise working mothers by saying, “God bless the working mother. I don’t know how they do it.” Later in our interview, Walter uses his experiences in his previous marriages to illustrate how he does not assume that Dorothy (his current wife), by simply being a woman, will complete the majority of household tasks. He, like virtually all of the men that I interviewed, acknowledged that “having good communication” about housework and childcare is important towards ensuring a “fair” arrangement of household labor. Even though there is a huge discrepancy in how much time Walter and Dorothy spend per week he insists this is a “fair” arrangement because Dorothy, “loves being a housewife.”

Other research confirms the importance of couples coming to an agreement about what constitutes a “fair” arrangement in the household division of labor. For example, Neil
Chethik (2006) conducted a comprehensive study on men’s perspectives of marriage, sex, and housework. In his analysis of survey data from a nationally representative sample of married men in the United States (n=288) and in-depth interviews among 70 American husbands, household chores was listed as the third most cited reason which caused marital discord. He found that couples who came to an agreement about a “fair” arrangement of household work, “had more frequent sex, are less likely to seek marriage counseling or consider a divorce, and are more happily married overall” (2006: 116). Unfortunately, Chethik (2006) did not explore, or at least report, what a “fair” arrangement of household tasks meant to the men within his study.

Understanding how men distinguish between “equity” and “fairness” is important because it is one way they justified, on average, not spending as much time per week in the household division of labor as their wives. While seemingly innocuous, making this distinction was how men accounted for working less hours per week than their wife and arguing that this is still a “fair” arrangement of household labor. Another way men illustrate this point is by invoking mathematical representations.

Mathematical Representations

The second major way men justified time differences with their wife in the household division of labor was the use of mathematical representations. That is, men utilized proportional representations (e.g., a 60-40 share) or percentages (e.g., I do yardwork 70 percent of the time) to illustrate how they divide housework with their wife. I estimate that a

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25 The first was fights about how to spend and manage money. The second was trying to figure out how to strike a work-family balance.
little over one half (51 percent) of the men I interviewed invoked a mathematical
representation to justify discrepancies in the weekly estimates of the household division of
labor. Whether the actual proportional or percentage spilt accurately reflects the reality of a
family’s division of labor is not important. Rather, men’s usage of a mathematical
representation (whether it worked in their favor or not) demonstrates their overriding belief
that while their division of labor may seem “unequal,” it is still “fair.” Julian’s argument
captures this point beautifully.

Julian is 32, childless, identifies as the breadwinner, and works full-time as civil
engineer. He has been married for 10 years to his wife, Brenda, who is unable to work due to
an undiagnosed illness which prevents her from working and standing on her feet for more
than an hour at a time. This is a major feature shaping Julian’s perspective towards marriage
and how to share in the household division of labor. In fact, he reported that he completes
more than 20 hours of housework per week, while Brenda does not do any. When I asked
Julian, “What are some of the difficulties you've encountered with being married,” he
responded:

Julian: You don't always get your way. You have to be ok with that. Not that
I'm necessarily always good at that. But, compromise is a big part of that.
Some people say that when you get married it's 50-50. Which I think is
probably the worst advice ever.

Scott: Really?

Julian: I think it's terrible advice honestly.

Scott: Why's that?

Julian: Because sometimes marriage is 90-10. Sometimes it's 10-90.
Sometimes it's 50-50. You know, when my wife doesn't have the energy to get
up in the morning I would be an asshole to be like, "Well, do the damn dishes." Not that I don't want her to do the dishes and I would be ecstatic if she had the ability to do them. But, she doesn't. You know an[other] example might be finances. So, if you have a more egalitarian marriage you share finances. But if one person made more than the other person, and then you would say, "Well, it doesn't matter how much you make, you need to pay equal amounts." You know, that's unfair in some aspects. So, I think the same things applies when you're looking at getting your way or marriage needing to be, you know, a 50-50. If we have to meet each other halfway, I'm gonna screw that up a lot of times. She's gonna screw that up a lot of times. And all that it's gonna lead us to is us being upset with each other because we're expecting that you have to at least meet me here, and we're gonna fall short of that quite a bit.

Brenda’s extraordinary medical events shapes Julian’s perspective that housework in particular, but marriage more generally, is never equally shared. “Because sometimes marriage is 90-10. Sometimes it's 10-90. Sometimes it's 50-50.” Moreover, to expect a 50-50 relationship carte blanche ignores important contextual information in determining whether an objectively “inequitable” division of household work (i.e., someone who spends more time than the other doing chores) is really “unfair.”

Julian uses dishwashing and people’s financial contributions to the household as a way to bolster his argument. While he reports doing more housework than Brenda, it is still a “fair” arrangement of tasks because, “I would be an asshole to be like, "Well, do the damn dishes." Not that I don't want her to do the dishes and I would be ecstatic if she had the ability to do them. But, she doesn't.” Additionally, he argues that while it is objectively unequal that the spouse who makes more money shoulders the financial burden, it is still a “fair” arrangement because you cannot penalize one spouse for not making as much money as the other.
Surprisingly, many of the other men expressed similar sentiments, in a similar way, as Julian. Most of the men I interviewed exercised the same logic to justify times differences in housework and childcare with their wife. For example:

Anthony: I do more of, I think I’ll say me 70 [percent] and her 30 [percent]. She will do more planning, I guess, and I will do [the] execution of the planning and things like that. But when it is just sort of general upkeep commitments that is pretty much on me.

Cory: I would be lying to say that I do a lot of cooking. She does probably 95 percent of it, no, yeah, 90-95 percent of it. I sometimes cook on the weekends when I have more time. But, even then it's very sporadic. I probably have only cooked twice in, maybe two-to-four times in a month. Yeah. Very, very, very rare so far.

Josh: It’s (grocery shopping) probably a 60-40 joint venture. She does 60 percent of it. I mean I will think about things that we need, and I’ll put that on a list on the bulletin board.

There are three important points when considering mathematical representations. First, most men describe one spouse doing more than the other across a variety of tasks related to the household division of labor. Even though the ideal arrangement for most men is a “50-50 split,” they say it is rarely attainable. As other scholars have found, men cite the busy demands of their job, their wife’s job, children’s schedules, and daily demands of domestic life (e.g., cleaning, cooking) as reasons for imbalances in one spouse spending more time in some tasks than others (Becker and Murphy 1992; Blair and Lichter 1991; Ferree 1991; Kamo 1988). Additionally, men also employ the rationales I discussed in Chapter 4 (i.e., time availability, having a different skillset, preferences for tasks, and differences in approaches) to support their claims for creating disproportionate time splits across tasks related to the household division of labor.
Second, in the majority of cases where men invoke a mathematical representation the splits often favor men. That is, men typically describe themselves as the one doing less (i.e., the 30 of the 70-30 split). Again, there is no way to verify if these splits are accurate representations of the actual division of labor within these families. Thus, the numbers in-and-of themselves are not what matters. What matters is how people use these numbers to justify estimated time imbalances in household tasks; which often favors men.

Third, describing the household division of labor in this way suggests that most men view inequality in the household division of labor as inevitable. Men see the demands of paid work as being too much to overcome in order to achieve an even (50-50) split. Not surprisingly, none of the men I interviewed suggested changes in the workplace could aide in addressing struggles they were having to achieve a work-life balance. Even though many sociologists, and other social scientists, argue that the United States severely lags behind other Western countries in offering family-friendly policies (Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004), many of the men in my sample viewed this issue as a personal trouble. Thus, by negotiating what a “fair” arrangement of housework is with their wives, which often means spending less hours per week in these tasks, doing chores infrequently, or simply “being the assistant,” allows men to justify inequalities in the household division of labor as being “fair.”

*Comparison Case*

The final way that men justified time differences with their wife in the household division of labor was to invoke a comparison case. In fact, all of the men in this study invoked at least one comparison case during their interview. The three most commonly cited
comparisons were with their spouse, father, and mother. While every man compared and contrasted his involvement with his wife, I estimated that 73 percent of men (27/37) compared themselves to either their father, mother, or both.

It is also worth noting men did mention other comparison cases, but only in passing. They cited in-laws, siblings, friends, neighbors, “traditional men,” and “men in general” when describing what an “unfair” arrangement of household work looks like. However, they did not elaborate on how their current involvement compares to these particular groups. They drew comparisons to their wife, father, and mother in the majority of time when invoking a comparison case. Consequently, the focus of my analysis centers on how men discussed these three groups.

Regardless of who, or to whom, men compare themselves, the use of a comparison case highlights from men’s perspectives how their contributions to their family’s division of labor are “fair.” They typically discussed how their involvement in a specific task, or in general, is a “fair” contribution when considering to whom they are comparing themselves. By comparing and contrasting their involvement to a comparison case, these men contextualize both their involvement and justification for how much time they spend in the household division of labor. I believe this is a big reason why almost half of my sample (45 percent) responded that they should maintain their current level of involvement in housework and over half (61 percent) saying that they should maintain their current level of involvement in childcare tasks. I now turn my attention to the three main comparison groups that men in my sample invoked during their interview – spouses, fathers, and mothers.
Spouses

This is the most frequently discussed comparison case used by men in my study. In fact, all 37 men compared and contrasted their involvement in the home to that of their spouse. This is not surprising especially when considering that during the interview I asked men to evaluate what they do in the household division of labor over the course of a week in relation to their spouse.

There were primarily two ways that men compared and contrasted their involvement to their spouse. First, men used either one, or several, of the four rationales I discussed in Chapter 4 when accounting for reported differences in weekly time involvement. Second, men argued that this arrangement was the result of “communication,” “conversations,” and “discussions” with their wife about housework and childcare. Put differently, the work done by each other was complementary.

Richard’s (whom I introduced in Chapter 4) discussion of the “inside-outside” arrangement perfectly illustrates both points. He estimated that they each spend 10 hours per week completing housework, while he spends 15 hours per week on childcare and Jodie does more than 20 hours per week. When I asked Richard how he and Jodie divide up household tasks he said:

Richard: One thing that Jodie and I discussed early on before we were even married was, "Ok, we're living together. You take care of the inside, I'll take care of the outside." So, Jodie does pretty much all of the inside stuff. Back when I first bought the house, it was, you know, it was just kinda figuring out what responsibilities came along with owning a house and living in a house. It was like, you know, I got shrubs that gotta be trimmed, I got grass that's gotta be mowed. And she'll come out and help me with the yardwork and I'll do laundry from time to time, and do dishes, and things of that nature. I will pitch in from time-to-time. As far as like dishes and stuff after we cook, she will do
a lot of that. I know she would probably wish that I would do more of it. But, she’s sort of good at it [smirking]. She definitely does more of it than I do, I hate cleaning dishes.

Scott: Do you think the inside/outside arrangement is fair?

Richard: Yea. Because she does not wanna do yardwork. Like, that's just something that she does not want to do. I don't want to vacuum or clean the toilets. And that's something she's okay with doing. I mean, there's no, I don't know anybody on this planet that's just like, "All I wanna do is vacuum, I love it. All I wanna do is scrub toilets." Nobody really loves doing that. She's alright with doing it, but she does not like doing yardwork. She'll come out and help me bag leaves or something. But, she doesn't really get involved with the outdoor stuff. So yeah. I think it works well for us.

Richard’s quote represents how many of the men in my study justify their weekly involvement in household tasks. Not only does he employ preferences and skillset rationales (see Chapter 4), but he also points out this division of labor was the result of a discussion “early on before we were even married.” While Richard was unique in describing this arrangement as “inside-outside,” virtually all the men in my study described their household arrangements in the same way. This finding is interesting for several reasons.

To begin, “inside-outside” arrangements are inherently unequal. Inside-work needs completing more frequently than outside-work. Those tasked with primarily completing inside-work are, by default, spending far more time doing housework than those doing outside-work. Additionally, this division is deeply gendered. When men describe their involvement in inside-work as “pitching in from time-to-time,” this does nothing to disrupt gendered assumptions about who should be primarily tasked with completing housework in the first place. Not to mention that much of the outside-work is outsourced if families live in
rental houses, condos, apartments, or neighborhoods with a Home Owners Association agreement.

Second, this implies wives tacitly sanction any resulting inequalities in the household division of labor. After all, as I discussed earlier, men think it is “unfair” to assume, and expect, their wife will complete any task related to housework and childcare just because they are a woman. It seems, however, that as long as they “discuss” arrangements of household labor first, that any resulting inequality in the division of labor is “fair” because it was the “agreement” reached with their wife during their “discussions.”

Finally, Richard’s quote is reminiscent of the “upstairs-downstairs” arrangement Hochschild and Machung (2012) discuss in The Second Shift. In this seminal piece, Hochschild describes Nancy and Evan Holt as devising an “upstairs-downstairs” arrangement of household work where Nancy does the “upstairs” (e.g., living room, dining room, kitchen, two bedrooms, and two bathrooms) while Evan does the “downstairs” (e.g., garage) – which mostly was storage for his hobbies. Ultimately, Hochschild argued this arrangement was a “family myth” that the Holts told themselves to justify an unequal division of labor. Nancy was doing more chores and spending more time completing these chores than Evan. They both convinced themselves that since they “reached” this agreement (2012:45) what they do in the home is fair.

Unlike the families discussed in The Second Shift, however, men in my study do not attempt to create a “family myth” about the division of household labor. Rather, I find that men in my study are aware of existing inequalities in their home and argue that these household arrangements are still “fair.” Ironically, this was even the sentiment expressed by
the eight men who reported spending more time per week in household chores than their wives. For example, when I asked these men if they felt that their current arrangement of housework and childcare tasks were “unfair” they responded:

Mitchell: No, I don't think so. I think everything's pretty fair based on the understanding on who's doing what during the day.

Craig: No. I do it – it’s more out of availability and talking with her about who’s doing what. It’s not borne out of since I’m not making more money I should do more. It’s never been like that. It’s never been like that. I don’t feel that way at all. No. There’s not a direct correlation whatsoever.

Miles: I think it's fair. I feel comfortable with what I have to do. And I feel comfortable with it in relation to what Jacqueline is doing. The thing that would change my mind on that is if Jacqueline came to me and said, "Look, things aren't going the way I thought they were, or you're not carrying your weight.” And so, we have open a dialogue. But absent that, I feel like things are fine.

Mitchell, Craig, and Miles all estimate spending more time in the division of household labor than their spouse. Despite spending more time per week than their wife, these men, like those who report doing less per week, continue to think this arrangement is “fair.” One possible explanation for this is that these men rely upon the rationales discussed in Chapter 4 – especially time availability – to justify doing more than their wife. Another is that even though these men work full-time jobs, they viewed doing more as a result of their “communication” with their spouse. As each one of these quotes alludes to, these men are doing more than their spouse because of a shared “discussion” over what needs to be done, when, and by whom.

This finding relates to many of the couples in Halving it All (Deutsch 1999). Indeed, Deutsch’s main conclusion is that the married, dual-income couples in her sample discussed
the allocation of household labor which allowed them to achieve equality in their marriage. Thus, for the couples in *Halving it All*, and the men in my study, any resulting time differences in the household division of labor is an agreed upon difference with their spouse.

*Fathers*

Fathers were the second most frequently cited comparison group in my sample. I estimated that 57 percent of my sample (21/37) invoked their father as a way to justify what they do in the home, how they do it, how frequently, and how their actions will have a positive effect on their marriage or their children.

Take Kyle (whom I introduced in *Chapter 3*) for instance. This interview excerpt comes from when he was describing what being a father means to him. To justify his daily involvement with his youngest daughter, Ryleigh, (which he estimates to be “20 to 30 minutes” a day) he cites how it was more than what he received as a child. This, however, did not seem to sway the opinion of his wife, Trisha, that he was spending enough time with Ryleigh:

Kyle: See, I grew up – my dad was a truck driver and he wasn’t home during the week. Then my mom got a divorce when I was 6 years old. She lived in [mid-western state] and my dad lived in [northern state]. So, I’d go there [to his dad’s house] every other weekend. When you think about it I was basically raised by my stepmom, who my dad was sleeping with when he was with my mom. So, I already got the resentment there. It was hard to really ever get along with her [his stepmother]. Then I was seeing my mom every other weekend, my dad every other weekend. I just didn’t have the everyday touch of a parent. The one thing that we would fight about in Oceanville – Trisha was spending every waking minute with Ryleigh. And I come home from work, get 20 minutes to half [an] hour with her, I’m good. Like, I wanna watch TV, I wanted to – I know that sounds maybe horrible and selfish, but you gotta think this is 20 to 30 minutes more than I was getting when I was a kid. That’s even when my dad was home, he was a vegetable. He sat there.
We didn’t – I didn’t play catch with my dad. I didn’t do – he didn’t teach me how to work on cars, but that’s who he was.

This excerpt illustrates how the other 20 men in sample cited their father as a way to justify and contextualize their current level of involvement in childcare and housework. In this case, Kyle acknowledges how “20 to 30 minutes” may sound “horrible and selfish.” When comparing this involvement to his father, however, Kyle feels that the amount of time he spends with Ryleigh is more than enough.

A father’s lack of involvement, non-involvement, and even absence from their lives served as a way for many men to evaluate and justify their own behavior within their families. Dexter’s discussion of his level of involvement with his one-year old son, Jacob, is another good example. Dexter is 29 years old, an interior designer, and the sole-income earner in his family. His wife, Angela, is a stay-at-home mother which Dexter says, “has always been her dream.” Even though Dexter “looked up” to his father and said “he did a great job” being a parent:

Dexter: But I know if you talk to my sisters they’d be like, "He was a great dad and everything, but we wish he was a bit more present and around.” Like he'd be in the house and he'd probably be upstairs, like on the couch or something like that. He was like always in a position of having to be with all the church members, preach the sermons, so he got home and wanted to unwind. Just chill. I think my sisters wanted him to be more of the type of person where he was downstairs and playing and joking around all the time like my mom was. So I know for me that's one thing for me that I try to be a lot more mindful of. Because I know interior design, in the past definitely, consumes all of your time and your thoughts and responding to emails and all these different things. The fathering I've tried to get a lot more regimented with my schedule so I can devote time to him [Jacob]. But you know it's also a very important time in his life and his development and so I try to, as best as I can, and I still fail all the time, I'll be playing with and I check email. Like, ahh man, I checked email. I could've waited to check that email but it's just
one of those things that I have to try and constantly turn my mind off from work and hone in on being present with him.

Even though Dexter was satisfied with the level of interaction with his father, he realized that the same was not true for his sisters. According to Dexter, even though his father was “in the house,” his sisters wanted him to be “a bit more present and around.” Meaning, it was not enough for his sisters to have their father just be there, but to also “play and joke around” like their mom. This realization has greatly shaped how Dexter views his involvement with his son, Jacob. He tries to “be mindful” of paying attention to Jacob and interacting with him when he is at home because he knows it bothers Angela. Whom, as he later said in the interview, “still has to kinda get on me like every now and then. I'll be playing with him and again, I'm like talking on my phone and [she's] like, "Dexter, play with him!"” Dexter admits this is difficult because the lines between work and family are blurred. The demands of interior design “consume all of your time and your thoughts” which interferes with his ability to “devote time” to his son.

Indeed, family scholars have documented the various ways that lines between work and family have become blurred over the past several decades (Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 2004). For Dexter, and other white-collar professionals, the advent of smartphones, the internet, and a 24-hour global economy puts increased pressure on parents to work longer hours and be “on-call” after hours. This is why many families, especially working mothers, feel “squeezed” for time to spend with their families (Clarkberg and Moen 2001), feel they are overworked (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), and are not able to be present in the lives of their children (Stone 2007).
Nonetheless, by comparing their involvement in the household division of labor to their fathers is how many men in my study come to justify their actions. This, however, was not the only way.

*Mothers*

The third most cited comparison case for men was their mother. I estimate that 49 percent of my sample (18/37) discussed their mothers when contextualizing their level of involvement in the household division of labor. For instance, Keith, is 34 years old, identifies as a non-breadwinning spouse, and has three young children, Sienna, Dawson, and Luis, with his wife of seven years, Ashley. He is unlike most men in my sample in two ways. One, he spends twice the amount of time (10 hours per week) on housework as his wife. Two, he was the stay-at-home parent for the first three years of their marriage. He now works as a college professor. Keith attributes part of this discrepancy towards him having more flexibility in his job as a college professor than Ashley does as a tax attorney. However, he also attributes part of this to how devoted his mother was to being a stay-at-home parent. Ironically, during our interview he described his mother as being critical of him spending more time in housework than Ashley:

Keith: She was my biggest supporter and she’s the one who drove me the most nuts. Because she’d just say all these things about being a stay-at-home dad and how men couldn’t do things right and how – I don’t know. Just all sorts of snippy little comments that I found very challenging to deal with. Part of the problem is I think my mom believes that what me and my brothers do is too much because she did everything. My dad was never around. So us being around seems like a lot and so she feels like our wives have to do so much less than she did. But I feel like that’s a deeper issue than just an opinion for her.
Keith’s statement that his mother “did everything” was shared by virtually all of the 18 men who openly compared their level of involvement to their mother. While they were growing up, many men discussed how they perceived their mother as “doing everything” as being “unfair” to their mother. This was often used as motivation for them to become involved in doing things around the home. Thus, regardless of how many hours they might spend in the home they perceived this involvement to be more than what their mother received from their father.

Moreover, his mother’s criticisms also underscore an issue of external pressure placed upon men to “do” gender. As we can with Keith’s quote, his mother called into question the violation of gendered norms and lobbied for a correction (i.e., for Keith to do less and for Ashley to do more). While men remained steadfast in that their mother’s pressure did not alter how much time they spent in the household division of labor, this did present a case where an outsider’s opinion complicated their views on their involvement.

CONCLUSION

This chapter explored how men view inequality in the household division of labor. To hear the men tell it, what happens in their homes is fair with regard to the number of hours they and their spouse spend in the household division of labor. They say this despite the fact that, collectively, men report spending an average of 10 hours per week in housework and 13 hours per week in childcare, while their wives spend 13 and 15 hours per week, respectively, in these tasks.
I argued that there were three ways that men how much time they spend in the household division of labor. First, they distinguished between “equity” and “fairness.” While “equity” referred to relative distinctions between what they and their wife do in regards to housework and childcare, “fairness” referred to the conditions under which people perform tasks related to the household division of labor. I argued this is an important distinction men make because it allowed them to make the case that even though people may spend “unequal” amounts of time people in housework and childcare tasks, this is still a “fair” division of labor.

Second, men used mathematical representations to bolster their assertions that arrangements of household labor can be “unequal” and “fair.” They did this by utilizing proportional representations (e.g., a 60-40 share) or percentages (e.g., I do yardwork 70 percent of the time) to illustrate how one spouse does more than the other in certain tasks, or overall. However, in the majority of cases men often described themselves as the beneficiary of these mathematical representations in that they are the ones who do the least.

Finally, men invoked comparison cases to contextualize the amount of time they spend in the division of labor. While they reference a number of comparisons, men most commonly, and extensively, discussed their spouse, father, and mother. Regardless of who men compare themselves, the use of a comparison case highlights from their perspective how their contributions are “fair.” By comparing and contrasting their involvement to a comparison case these men contextualize both their involvement and justification for how much time they spend in the household division of labor.
While similar to the rhetorical strategies I identified in Chapter 4, these justifications obscure the fact that the majority of men in my study spend less time per week in housework and childcare than their wives. By arguing that seemingly “unequal” arrangements of household labor are still “fair,” these men ignore how spending less time per week compounds into huge time differentials in the household division of labor. Moreover, when coupled with men not engaging in mental labor (as I discussed in Chapter 3), this has far reaching implications for the reproduction of gender inequality within the home. This is what I now turn to my attention to in the concluding chapter.
CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

This project was about how men understand and justify their involvement in the household division of labor. Throughout this project I argued it is important to analyze how men experience and justify their level of involvement for at least four reasons. First, the unpaid, invisible work which needs to be performed in the home affects everyone in a household. If women are the ones performing the majority of these tasks this reproduces a number of inequalities. Second, families suffer economically from men’s lack of involvement in the household division of labor. Working mothers often are the ones who adjust their work schedules to meet family demands (Deutsch 1999; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Sherman 2009). Doing so diminishes their earning potential because they may adjust their work schedules (e.g., working less hours) to compensate for men’s lack of involvement in household work (Deutsch 1999; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Sherman 2009). Third, understanding men’s perspectives on the household division of labor can deepen our understanding of how gendered practices and ideologies are reproduced within the home. Finally, the narratives of household work among men provide a needed contribution to research on the household division of labor. Even though there is a rich body of literature on this topic, there is limited understanding of what men think, say, and do in regards to household work (Atkinson and Boles 1984; Banerjee 2015; Demantas and Myers 2015; Deutsch 1999; Doucet 2006; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Legerski and Cornwall 2010; Pesquera 1997; Sherman 2009; Tichenor 2005).

Additionally, a close reading of the literature on the household division of labor reveals two key themes. One, despite men doing more housework than ever before women
continue to do the majority of household work. An interesting, and unreconciled, contradiction emerges from men’s involvement in the household division of labor. Men are increasingly embracing childrearing tasks but avoid household work unrelated to childcare. Two, there is limited understanding about men’s perspectives on the household division of labor. What little we know suggests that some men engage in household work if they are willing to confront hegemonic ideals of masculinity and negotiate with their partners over the allocation of tasks. Other studies suggest when some men are unable to enact the hegemonic masculine ideal of “breadwinner,” they, and their wives, develop rhetorical strategies to emphasize their ability to “provide” for their families in non-monetary ways. To this end, three research questions guided my study:

1. What does the division of household labor mean to a group of men from diverse economic and racial backgrounds?

2. How do these men experience and do household labor within their marriage?

3. What does being a family provider mean to these men?

To answer these questions I conducted 37 in-depth, semi-structured interviews with married men from diverse economic, age, regional, and parental backgrounds. I conducted these interviews from March 2017 – August 2017, which totaled over 66 hours of interviewing, 1,000 pages of interview transcripts, and 300 pages of fieldnotes.
WHAT DOES THE DIVISION OF HOUSEHOLD LABOR MEAN TO A GROUP OF MEN FROM DIVERSE ECONOMIC AND RACIAL BACKGROUNDS?

For the men in my study, the division of household labor means a plethora of physical and emotional work needs to be accomplished on a daily basis. They overtly reject that completing these tasks are the sole and primary duty of women. In fact, many embraced both the physical and emotional work required to being a supportive, loving, and attentive father and husband. This is quite a departure from the not-so-distant past when men were tenuously involved in any type of physical or emotional work in the home.

They overlook, however, what I call *mental labor* – the cognitive work required to plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated with household labor. Similar to “emotion work,” mental labor is invisible, necessary for managing household functions and activities, and largely performed by women. There were four prominent ways mental labor appeared in men’s narratives on the household division of labor – *meal planning, planning vacations and social functions, arranging the logistics of childcare, and managing household finances*. In each of these tasks, most men were unaware of how they were completed until prompted during their interview. Moreover, once they were called to account for how these, and other tasks, are accomplished many overtly rejected wanting to be the one to complete the mental labor associated with household and childcare tasks.

This is the biggest takeaway from this project for two important reasons. First, mental labor is an essential feature towards understanding the household division of labor. This is an innovative way that scholars, and the lay public alike, can understand the complexities and challenges of running and maintaining a family. Indeed, the key towards understanding how,
and why, the men I interviewed characterized their involvement in some tasks and
noninvolvement in others was their relationship towards mental labor. We have a limited
understanding, however, of how mental labor appears within the household division of labor
and how an uneven division of mental labor within the family can contribute towards
reproducing inequality within the family. This study is an important first step in
demonstrating both the importance and implications of mental labor in understanding family
life.

Second, men’s perspective on the household division of labor provides an important
theoretical contribution towards understanding how gender inequality is reproduced within
the home. These findings demonstrate that while men see themselves as *undoing gender* –
acting in gender atypical ways, subverting gendered expectations, and working towards
reducing gender inequality – they are actually *redoing gender* in order to maintain a gender
status quo within their family. When men were not engaged in mental labor related to the
household division of labor they did not disrupt their underlying assumptions that housework
and childcare are primarily women’s responsibility. Moreover, describing their involvement
in mental labor as “doing what I am told” enables these men to tell outsiders, and themselves,
that they are committed to feminist practices within the home. While these men physically
and emotionally subverted, and challenged, traditional conceptions of masculinity, they do
not appear to do the same when it comes to mental labor.
HOW DO THESE MEN EXPERIENCE AND DO HOUSEHOLD LABOR WITHIN THEIR MARRIAGE?

Another important contribution this study makes to research on the household division of labor is providing an analysis of men’s perspectives on housework and childcare. Findings from this study complement previous research by demonstrating that the men in my study are not experiencing what counts as “work” in the same way as women. We know from previous research on women’s experiences in housework and childcare that they are the ones who do the majority of household work (DeVault 1991; Hays 1996; Hochschild and Machung 2012; Pasquera 1997; Walzer 1996), wish their husbands would spend more time completing housework (Pesquera 1997) and childcare tasks (Walzer 1996), and feel that if they do not perform mental labor in the household division of labor nothing will be completed (Daly 2002; Hessing 1994; Walzer 1996; Zimmerman et al. 2002). We also know that women who report spending more time engaged in housework and childcare tasks report lower levels of marital satisfaction (Dush and Taylor 2012; Oshio, Nozaki, and Kobayashi 2013; Suitor 1991), higher levels of stress (Claffey and Mickelson 2009; Bird 1999), and higher levels of marital conflict (Dush and Taylor 2012; Kluwer, Heesink, and de Vliert 1996; Newkirk, Perry-Jenkins, and Sayer 2017).

The men in my study are not oblivious to the unpaid work which goes into the household division of labor. They too reported being stressed, overburdened, and strapped for time to meet the demands of living in a home. Especially for the young fathers in my study, many are in the process of figuring out a division of labor which, from their
perspective, is equitable. What is interesting, however, is how these men justified what they do, and do not do, in the household division of labor.

As I discussed in Chapter 4, there were four major rhetorical strategies men utilized in their interviews to justify their involvement in the household division of labor. Time availability was the most commonly cited way men described their involvement in household work. Second, men cited having a different skillset as a way to justify how they and their wife divide housework and childcare tasks. Third, they and their wife complete unpaid work in the home according to preferences for tasks. Finally, men argued that because they have a different approach towards completing housework and childcare tasks from their wife, this creates a difference in the quality and quantity of work which needs to be done in the home.

These four rhetorical strategies shed light on how men do household labor within their marriage. This is an important contribution to research on the household division of labor because we know little concerning how men view and describe their involvement. All of the men I interviewed outwardly rebuked cultural prescriptions that unpaid work is women’s work. They pointed to their purported involvement in household and childcare tasks as evidence of their commitment to feminist beliefs within the family. When describing how they came to be involved in these specific tasks, however, they relied upon central features of “patriarchal ideology” (Connell 2005) – rationality, logic, and essential differences between women and men – to account for their arrangement of household labor. While seemingly gender-neutral, the logic underlying these justifications is rooted in traditional thinking about the household division of labor. Consequently, this lays the
groundwork for these men to justify resulting time differences in the household division of labor and perpetuating gender stereotypes within the home.

WHAT DOES BEING A FAMILY PROVIDER MEAN TO THESE MEN?

In Chapter 5, I explored what equality means to men when dividing up household labor. To hear the men tell it, what happens in their homes is fair with regard to the number of hours they and their spouse spend in the household division of labor. They say this despite the fact that men in sample spend an average of 10 hours per week in housework and 13 hours per week in childcare, while their wife spends 13 and 15 hours per week, respectively, in these tasks.

While similar to the rhetorical strategies I identified in Chapter 4, there were three ways men justified how much time they spend in the household division of labor. First, they distinguished between “equity” and “fairness,” where “equity” referred to relative distinctions between what they and their wife do in regards to housework and childcare and “fairness” referred to the conditions under which people perform household labor. Second, men used mathematical representations to bolster their assertions that arrangements of household labor can be “unequal” but “fair.” Finally, men invoked comparison cases to contextualize the amount of time they spend in the division of labor.

Taken together, men in my sample come to see “provider” as both an economic and social component. Undoubtedly, the majority of men I interviewed saw being an economic provider as an important component to their identity as a husband and father. However, many cited their involvement in household work and childcare tasks as a way to support their
assertions that “provider” is more than just contributing material goods and services to their families.

The stories that these men tell, however, are not without limits. Arguing that seemingly “unequal” arrangements of household labor are still “fair” ignores the implications of these weekly time disparities. Specifically, women end up spending far more time completing housework and childcare tasks than men. This has far reaching implications for the reproduction of gender inequality within the home, especially when considering that most of the men in this study did not attend to mental labor within the home.

This could partially explain why the gender revolution stalled within the home (England 2010). Specifically, the reason women and men are not spending equal amounts of time in the household division of labor is because men perceive their current arrangements of household labor to be fair. Certainly, the structure of the workplace, family leave policies, occupational status, and sociodemographic background (e.g., social class) are important factors shaping men’s weekly involvement in housework and childcare. However, the findings from this study suggest that, in addition to the structural conditions in which men find themselves, we cannot discount how men determine how much time they should spend in the household division of labor.

LIMITATIONS

No study is perfect. My study is no exception. This is not to say that what I argued in this study is invalid. Rather, it should be a starting place for those wishing to extend or replicate this study.
First, women’s voices are not in this study. In the context of this research, this means that I do not have the perspective of spouses. As such, I do not have any way to corroborate what the men in my study claimed happens in their home. I also do not have women’s perspectives on specific issues which arose in men’s narratives. More broadly, I do not know how women experience and view mental labor within their family.

Having women’s perspectives on mental labor is an important next step towards understanding this phenomenon. I argued in this study that most men outsourced mental to their wife which creates an additional burden upon their spouse to complete housework and childcare tasks. Especially for employed mothers, this means that women are unable to escape from household labor because they have to constantly plan, evaluate, and execute tasks associated with housework and childcare – even when they are at work.

It could be the case, however, that women do like to engage in, and be primarily responsible for, mental labor. I am reminded of the African-American women interviewed by Mignon Moore (2011) who found caretaking and homemaking as a sign of power and respect for their lesbian partners. Rather than avoiding household labor, the women in Moore’s study engaged in this type of work as a sign of respect and admiration for their partners and their children. Thus, it could be the wives of the men I interviewed look at mental labor in a similar way. Or, they could see being the one to primarily engage in mental labor as a form of power and control. Future studies should consider how women view and experience mental labor within their families. This can provide deeper insight into how women experience the household division of labor and negotiate the challenges of striking a work-family balance.
Second, I only interviewed heterosexual men. This is an important limitation because there is a dearth in sociological literature on male, same-sex families. It is not clear how gay men view and experience the household division of labor within their marriages and families. My analysis is based upon how men who identify as heterosexual enact their masculine self through their purported involvement in housework and childcare. However, I cannot say if men who identify as homosexual would respond to similar questions as posed to the men in this study.

Having gay men’s perspectives, therefore, is an equally important next step towards understanding mental labor. I argued in this study that one reason men did not engage in mental labor is because they viewed it as “women’s work.” Do gay men characterize mental labor in a similar vein? Answering this question can provide a rich, theoretical understanding in the intersection of family, sexuality, and gender.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

I have three suggestions future studies should pursue in research on mental labor. First, future studies need to explore to what extent mental labor factors into how families negotiate the household division of labor. What I mean by that is that we need to see to what extent other family structures experience this phenomenon, how people in these families complete this type of labor, what effects completing this type of work has upon those who are primarily tasked with completing it, and how this is linked towards reproducing inequality.
As I discussed in Chapter 1, previous research on the household division of labor primarily focuses on physical and emotional labor completed with families. However, my findings suggest that mental labor is just as important and, arguably, more difficult to complete. Understanding how people manage this type of labor within the home can deepen our understanding of family dynamics and breathe fresh insight into one of the most common social phenomena in social life – dividing domestic duties. Moreover, because of the close connection between the workplace and family, and because “good” jobs are increasingly requiring people to perform mental labor for their jobs, we need to understand the challenges and barriers people face in completing mental labor for their family.

Second, future studies should replicate or extend my study. The point of my study was to gain a deeper understanding into how men view and experience the household division of labor. While this study provided some novel insights into men’s perspectives on housework and childcare, a sample of 37 men can only tell us so much about such a complex social phenomenon. Consequently, the resulting analysis could be due to the idiosyncratic composition of my sample. That is, mental labor was such an important part to these men’s stories because they work in occupations which require them to think abstractly. Thus, they might be primed to talk about this type of labor because it is so familiar to them.

Future studies should, therefore, replicate my study with a different sample of men or extend it to different populations of men. As I mentioned above, one possible avenue is interviewing gay, married men. Another could be interviewing men with different educational and occupational backgrounds. This may elicit different views and experiences related to the household division of labor. Regardless, any study would be an important
contribution to research on the household division of labor because we would have more qualitative data from men.

Finally, future studies should explore under what other conditions people experience mental labor. Specifically, I am thinking of how people complete mental labor relating to the workplace. The modern economy is characterized by people’s ability to think critically and conceptually. Workers are constantly under pressure to innovate, and use, new technologies and services in order to turn a profit, be efficient at their jobs, and ensure they stay “competitive” within their fields. As Margolis (1974) discovered over 40 years ago, however, the workplace also requires people to complete a great amount of mental labor in order for organizations to function.

While I conceptualized mental labor as a way to analyze gender dynamics within the household division of labor, this concept can be applied in numerous ways to help understand familiar parts of a society in a different way. For example, exploring how mental labor manifests in the workplace could help to explore how people reproduced gender inequality on an interactional-level within the workplace. To what extent are workers expected to complete mental labor unrelated to their job description? How do they and their co-workers determine who will complete this work? What can we learn about the reproduction of inequality from how people manage, negotiate, and accomplish mental labor within the workplace? These are just but a few of the questions which future research could explore.
REFERENCES


APPENDIX A – INTERVIEW GUIDE

Part I. Dating/Engagement
1. Tell me about the dating period.
   a. Probe: How did you meet your partner? What did you think about ____? How did you feel about ____?
2. What were some activities you would do with ____?
   a. Probe: How often would you do ____? What did you like about ____? What didn’t you like?
3. Walk me through a typical date with ____.
   a. Probe: What would you do? What did you think about the dates with ____? Can you describe to me how you would feel during these dates? Tell me about a memorable date you had with ____.
4. Walk me through how marriage became something you thought about with ____.
   a. Probe: When did you start thinking about marriage? What were you thinking about at that time? What was going on in your life during that time?

Part II. Marriage
1. Think back to the first few months after you were married. What was a typical day like then?
   a. Probe: What would you do together? Could you tell me about a time you and ____ did ____ together? What would you think about during ____? How did it feel?
   b. Probe: What would you do separately? Did you like doing ____ separately? Walk me through what you thought and felt about during ____.
2. What do you like about your marriage?
   a. Probe: Could you provide an example? Tell me a little bit how ____ mattered to you.
3. What are some difficulties you’ve experienced with being married?
   a. Probe: Tell me about an instance that stands out to you. What do remember most about this experience?
   b. Probe: What do you do to manage these difficulties? Do you rely upon another person to talk with? Are there any resources you utilize to manage these difficulties?
4. What are some benefits you’ve experienced with being married?
   a. Probe: Tell me about an instance that stands out to you. What do remember most about this experience?
   b. Probe: What do you attribute ____ to?

(Part II-a. Children – If applicable)
5. Walk me through a typical day with (name of child(ren)).
a. Probe: Describe a day which stands out to you most. What do you remember about this day?

6. Tell me a little bit how you and ____ divide parenting responsibilities.
   a. Probe: Walk me through some examples of how you and ____ divide the responsibilities. What did you think about this arrangement? How does it make you feel?

7. I noticed on question 19 of the questionnaire you said (read question and answer). Could you tell me a little more about that?
   a. Probe: What were you thinking about while answering this question? Were you thinking of anything in particular when answering this question?

8. You indicated that ____ should do ____ childcare tasks than they currently do. Could you tell me a little more about that?
   a. Probe: Tell me about an instance that stands out to you. What do remember most about this experience?

9. What does being a “father” mean to you?
   a. Probe: How would you describe how you viewed fathering before the birth of ____? How, if at all, has your view of fathering changed?

Part III. Housework
1. Did you and your spouse ever discuss how household chores would be completed when you were first married?
   a. Probe: If Yes → Can you describe a time when you and your spouse discussed who would do what chores?
   b. Probe: If No → How then did you and your spouse decide who does what?
   c. Probe: Who does what? How are these decisions made? Walk me through some examples of how you and ____ divide these tasks.
   d. Probe: What are the biggest barriers you and ____ face in accomplishing household work?

2. What does doing housework mean to you? What do you think shapes your opinions about housework?

3. Describe the typical chores you do around the house.
   a. Probe: How do you feel about doing housework? What do you like to do? What don’t you like to do?

4. I noticed on question 14 of the questionnaire you said (read question and answer). Could you tell me a little more about that?
   a. Probe: What were you thinking about while answering this question?

5. What does a fair arrangement of housework look like to you?
   a. Probe: Could you describe an example from your marriage? What stands out to you from this experience?

6. What does an unfair arrangement of housework look like to you?
   a. Probe: Have you ever experience an arrangement like the one you’ve described? Tell me a little about that.
7. You also indicated that (read answer to question 15). Could you tell me why you feel this way?
   a. Probe: Is there a specific example you were thinking of which informed your response?
8. Whose responsibility is it to do housework?
   a. Probe: Did you talk with your spouse about these views while you were dating?
   b. Probe: During the engagement?
9. Can you describe a time when you and your spouse fought over chores?
   a. Probe: How did it start? What was your position? What was your spouse’s position?
   b. Probe: How was the conflict resolved? Do you think this was fair? What would you have done differently?
10. What do you think about the current way housework gets done in your family?
    a. Probe: How do you feel about these arrangements?
    b. Probe: Do you rely upon anything other than family members to get these chores accomplished? What role, if any, might this play?
11. If you were to get a job where you worked ____ as your wife, would this change the amount of housework you would do?
    a. Probe: In what way? Tell me why you think so.
12. What would your housework expectations be of your wife if she worked ____ hours per week than you?
    a. Probe: In what way? Tell me why you think so.

(Part III-a. Children – If applicable)

13. How do you and ____ teach (name of child(ren)) about household work?
    a. Probe: Describe a day which stands out to you most where you talked with them about housework. What do you remember about this day?
14. What do you hope for (name of child(ren)) to learn about household work?
15. In question 16 on the questionnaire you said (repeat answer). Could you tell me a little more about that?
    a. Probe: What informs your perspective on this issue?

Part IV: Providing

1. You indicated that you (are/are not) the primary breadwinner in your marriage. In your own words, tell me what breadwinner means to you.
   a. Probe: What informs your perspective on this word? Who, if anyone, was involved in shaping your opinion? When was that? How were they involved?
2. What does being a “provider” mean to you?
   a. Probe: Tell me how you came to this understanding. Who, if anyone, influenced your understanding of what providing means to you?
   b. Probe: Tell me about how you go about providing for your family. What do you do? Walk me through some specific examples.
3. How does it make you feel to be able to provide for your family in this way?
4. What are some barriers you face which might prevent you from providing?
   a. Probe: Tell me about the source of these problems. How do they arise? What strategies or techniques do you use to work past them?
   b. Probe: Is there a time in your life where these barriers were more prevalent than others?
5. Have you encountered a time during your marriage where you were unable to provide for your family the way you wanted to?
   a. Probe: What did you do? How did this make you feel?

Part V. Ending Questions
1. Is there anything that you might have not thought about marriage, housework, or childcare before that occurred to you during this interview?
2. What advice would you give to other men about housework and childcare?
3. Is there anything else you think I should know to understand housework and/or childcare better?
4. Is there anything you would like to ask me?
APPENDIX B – BACKGROUND INFORMATION FORM

The following questions ask for some personal information. Your responses will remain confidential and will only be used for statistical purposes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>You</th>
<th>Spouse</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How do you identify in terms of your gender?</td>
<td>1. How do they identify in terms of gender?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Man</td>
<td>□ Man</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Woman</td>
<td>□ Woman</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I use a different term:</td>
<td>□ They use a different term:</td>
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<td>_______________</td>
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<td>□ I don’t know</td>
<td>□ I don’t know</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ I prefer not to answer</td>
<td>□ I prefer not to answer</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. What racial background(s) do you identify with?</td>
<td>2. What racial background(s) does your spouse identify with?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>□ Black</td>
<td>□ Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>□ Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td>□ Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
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<td>□ Hispanic or Latino</td>
<td>□ Hispanic or Latino</td>
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<td>□ Native American or American Indian</td>
<td>□ Native American or American Indian</td>
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<td>□ I don’t know</td>
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<td>□ I prefer not to answer</td>
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<td>□ Yes</td>
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<td>□ I prefer not to answer</td>
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</table>

If No, where? _______________

If No, where? _______________

□ I don’t know
□ I prefer not to answer
4. What is your highest level of education?
   - Some high school
   - GED
   - High school Diploma
   - Some college
   - Associate’s Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Graduate Degree
   - If Graduate Degree, what kind (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD)?
     - __________
   - I don’t know
   - I prefer not to answer

5. What is your political affiliation?
   - Republican
   - Democrat
   - Libertarian
   - Independent
   - I use a different term: __________
   - I prefer not to answer

6. How do you identify religiously?
   - I identify as: ____________
   - I don’t know
   - I prefer not to answer

7. How often do you attend religious services?
   - Weekly
   - Every other week
   - Monthly
   - Once every few months
   - Twice a year
   - Once a year
   - Never

4. What is their highest level of education?
   - Some high school
   - GED
   - High school Diploma
   - Some college
   - Associate’s Degree
   - Bachelor’s Degree
   - Graduate Degree
   - If Graduate Degree, what kind (e.g., MA, MS, PhD, MD, JD)?
     - __________
   - I don’t know
   - I prefer not to answer

5. What is their political affiliation?
   - Republican
   - Democrat
   - Libertarian
   - Independent
   - They use a different term: ____________
   - I don’t know.
   - I prefer not to answer.

6. How does your spouse identify religiously?
   - They identify as: ____________
   - I don’t know
   - I prefer not to answer

7. How often do they attend religious services?
   - Weekly
   - Every other week
   - Monthly
   - Once every few months
   - Twice a year
   - Once a year
   - Never
8. What is your employment status?
   - Employed, full time  
     If so, what was your occupation? __________
   - Employed, part time  
     If so, what was your occupation? __________
   - Unemployed  
   - Do not work outside the home  
   - I don’t know  
   - I prefer not to answer

8. What is your spouse’s employment status?
   - Employed, full time  
     If so, what was their occupation? __________
   - Employed, part time  
     If so, what was their occupation? __________
   - Unemployed  
   - Do not work outside the home  
   - I don’t know  
   - I prefer not to answer

9. What is your income level?
   - Below $10,000  
   - $10,000 - $19,000  
   - $20,000 - $29,000  
   - $30,000 - $39,000  
   - $40,000 - $49,000  
   - $50,000 - $59,000  
   - $60,000 - $69,000  
   - $70,000 - $79,000  
   - $80,000 - $89,000  
   - $90,000 - $100,000  
   - Above $100,000  
   - I don’t know  
   - I prefer not to answer

9. What is their income level?
   - Below $10,000  
   - $10,000 - $19,000  
   - $20,000 - $29,000  
   - $30,000 - $39,000  
   - $40,000 - $49,000  
   - $50,000 - $59,000  
   - $60,000 - $69,000  
   - $70,000 - $79,000  
   - $80,000 - $89,000  
   - $90,000 - $100,000  
   - Above $100,000  
   - I don’t know  
   - I prefer not to answer

10. What was your age when you married your spouse? 
    Age: ____________  
    - I don’t know.  
    - I prefer not to answer

10. What was their age when they married you? 
    Age: ____________  
    - I don’t know.  
    - I prefer not to answer

11. Do you consider yourself to be the primary breadwinner in your marriage?  
    - Yes  
    - No  
    - N/A – We earn an equal amount of money

12. How many hours per week do you estimate you spend on housework? This can include, but is not limited to, cooking, grocery shopping, washing dishes, taking out the trash, sweeping and/or mopping the floors, vacuuming, laundry, yardwork, planning
family dinners, paying bills, and managing household finances.

13. How many hours per week do you estimate your spouse spends on *housework*? This can include, but is not limited to, cooking, grocery shopping, washing dishes, taking out the trash, sweeping and/or mopping the floors, vacuuming, laundry, yardwork, planning family dinners, paying bills, and managing household finances.

14. If applicable, how many hours per week do you estimate your children spend on *housework*? This can include, but is not limited to, cooking, grocery shopping, washing dishes, taking out the trash, sweeping and/or mopping the floors, vacuuming, laundry, yardwork, planning family dinners, paying bills, and managing household finances.

15. I should do _____ housework than I currently do.
   - the same amount of
   - less
   - more

16. I think my spouse should do _____ housework than they currently do.
   - the same amount of
   - less
   - more

17. If applicable, I think my child(ren) should do _____ housework than they currently do.
   - the same amount of
18. If applicable, how many hours per week do you estimate you spend on *childcare*? This can include, but is not limited to, meal preparation, feeding, dressing, attending school functions, helping with homework, bathing, driving to extracurricular activities, attending extracurricular activities, playing, babysitting, picking them up from school, putting them on the school bus, talking about their concerns, arranging play dates, and supervising sleepovers.

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</table>

19. If applicable, how many hours per week do you estimate your spouse spends on *childcare*? This can include, but is not limited to, meal preparation, feeding, dressing, attending school functions, helping with homework, bathing, driving to extracurricular activities, attending extracurricular activities, playing, babysitting, picking them up from school, putting them on the school bus, talking about their concerns, arranging play dates, and supervising sleepovers.

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20. I think I should do _____ childcare than I currently do.
   - the same amount of
   - less
   - more

21. I think my spouse should do _____ childcare than they currently do.
   - the same amount of
   - less
   - more