

COVID-19 and Changes in the Gendered Division of Unpaid Labor, Job Productivity, and Job Satisfaction

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* Corresponding author: Yana Rodgers. We gratefully acknowledge Debra Lancaster, Gretchen Donehower, and Olivia Waaben for their helpful suggestions and assistance.

Abstract

The stay-at-home orders associated with COVID-19 left many employees teleworking and increased the amount of unpaid care work within the home. Such disruptions have the potential to upend the gendered distribution of unpaid labor and radically change how people perform their paid jobs, particularly for dual-career households. This study investigates how the lockdown affected the gendered distribution of unpaid labor, job productivity, and job satisfaction. We conducted a real-time survey in May 2020 that yielded a sample of 920 respondents in cohabiting, opposite-sex partnerships in the U.S. Results showed that both men and women experienced an increase in the amount of unpaid work within the home during the pandemic relative to before, with women performing more. However, men's increase in labor related to the care of elderly and disabled family members exceeded that of women. Regression results showed that as men took on more household labor, women reported a greater odds of being more productive in and satisfied with their paid jobs. Men's job productivity and satisfaction were unaffected by women's increased contributions to household labor during the pandemic. These results have implications for perceptions of inequalities within organizations that may shift social norms related to the ideal worker.

Keywords: COVID-19, division of labor, job satisfaction, unpaid labor, gender equity, productivity

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The COVID-19 pandemic has caused major disruptions to individuals' economic livelihoods, up-rooted workers' home lives, and extracted enormous costs to health and well-being. In many countries around the globe including the U.S., COVID-19 has had a greater impact on women in terms of employment vulnerability. Women have experienced a higher rate of unemployment compared to men because they had relatively higher employment rates in industries with business closures. At the same time, women hold a disproportionate number of essential jobs on the front lines, thus increasing their risk of exposure to the disease at work (Alon et al., 2020; Wenham et al., 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic has also increased unpaid labor at home, and women have historically been more likely to shoulder the brunt of increased caring labor responsibilities within the home during natural disasters (Enarson, 2000). However, the COVID-19 pandemic's social-distancing orders are unique from previous economic recessions and most natural disasters. Work closures forced both men and women to telecommute from home for work if feasible, particularly for those employees in white collar jobs. Both men and women were faced with supervising home schooling and providing childcare for young children. Lockdowns and business closures also contributed to more domestic chores because in-home service providers such as housecleaners, childcare workers, and home health aides were forced to stay home themselves. The pandemic also increased the need for caring labor within the home because more people were sick and needed care.

Hence, the pandemic raises the important question of how stay-at-home orders have changed the gendered distribution of who performs unpaid labor within the home and how these

changes in unpaid work in turn affected the ability of workers to engage in their paid jobs. To address this question, we conducted a real-time survey in May 2020 during the height of the pandemic's stay-at-home orders in the U.S. and before the end of the academic school year. The survey focused on self-reported and partner-perceived contributions to household labor before and during the pandemic, as well as job productivity and satisfaction. We explored the extent to which women's and men's unpaid household workloads have changed as a result of the pandemic's stay-at-home orders, and we tested the hypothesis that an increase in men's contribution to caring labor and housework at home positively influences paid job productivity and satisfaction for women.

This research represents a snapshot in time during the beginning phase of the pandemic, when families were forced to make rapid adjustments to school closures and mandatory work-from-home orders. A growing amount of evidence globally indicates that the increase in care work during the pandemic has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of women, and that the pandemic has exacerbated pre-existing inequalities, not only by gender but also by race and class (Bahn et al., 2020; Özkazanç-Pan & Pullen, 2020). However, there is less knowledge of how the pandemic has changed the dynamics within the home regarding the overlap of unpaid and paid work for men and women. This study is among the first to examine self- and partner-perceived changes in contributions to household labor during the COVID-19 pandemic and how these changes influence job productivity and satisfaction.

Not only has COVID-19 generated a major economic and health shock, it has also challenged the status quo around the gendered distribution of work at home, with the potential to shift long-standing social norms around the ideal worker. The pandemic has brought a new reality of family life and flexibility into the workplace like no other time in history. The

relationship between paid work, childcare, and housework is no longer much of a balance, but instead a direct overlap for both men and women. With more men facing the direct overlap of paid work and home life due to stay-at-home orders, the social norms around what constitutes an ideal worker may change and de-stigmatize the implicit bias that limits women's opportunities for career advancement.

Conceptual Framework

Researchers have long theorized that the imagined separation between the public and the private spheres, with home and family pitted against paid work, has disadvantaged women who cross both spheres. The family devotion schema, as characterized by Blair-Loy (2003), conceptualizes marriage and motherhood as the primary calling for women. This paradigm collides head-on with the schema of work devotion, or the all-consuming pursuit of a career that has come to be the norm for professional culture. Gender ideology is a powerful way of structuring work and home and it remains the central theory for understanding the division of labor in households (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010; Thébaud, 2010). The gender ideology framework suggests that people adopt a structured division of labor through socialization whereby men are breadwinners and women are homemakers (Cunningham, 2001). This sex-typed socialization likely arose from differences in parental investment over time, with women biologically constrained to provide more care to offspring to ensure their survival (Folbre, 1995). However, modern households are less constrained by the classic division of labor between men and women.

The U.S. is more egalitarian than some countries when it comes to gender roles, but households still adhere to traditional roles related to the gendered division of unpaid labor (Chen et al., 2009). Women have continued to do a greater share of the domestic work despite steadily

increasing their hours of paid work. The gendered division of unpaid labor does vary across social and racial groups. Highly educated professional women have the ability to outsource housework and childcare, while women in low to moderate income households struggle to maintain work-life balance while working in jobs that offer little flexibility and support (Coltrane, 2010; Bianchi et al., 2000). Identity factors also influence the way couples share unpaid work. For instance, the gendering of unpaid work within the household is less salient for women of color who have historically had higher representation in paid work than their white counterparts (Kane, 2000). For Latinx individuals, the gendered division of labor within the house falls along more stereotypical lines, with men as breadwinners and women as homemakers, than African Americans and whites (Wight et al., 2013). The uneven distribution of unpaid labor comes at the price of women's well-being, health, earnings, and career advancement (Friedemann-Sánchez & Griffin, 2011).

As much as 10 percent of the gender wage gap is the result of gender differences in work experience, with women more frequently choosing flexible scheduling and intermittent exits from the labor market (Blau and Kahn 2017). The fact that childrearing is still considered women's work also results in employers maternal-profiling all women, regardless of whether or not they have children, and assuming women have less workplace commitment than men. Workplace programs and government policies have had some influence in changing these attitudes in professional organizations and gender dynamics inside the household (Greenstein, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Programs that help women to invest in their human capital development (such as professional coaching and mentorship programs) give them more negotiating power, and paid parental leave has made it easier for women and men to maintain their attachment to the labor force while spending time at home caring for newborns. However,

occupations are often highly gendered and sex-segregated, leading to differing levels of support for care work (Cohen, 2004; Davis et al., 2007). When employers have such differing attitudes toward accommodating unpaid labor, couples may specialize by splitting paid and unpaid labor through traditional gender roles (Kamp Dush et al., 2018).

A great deal of time and effort is spent on designing workplace policies intended to support women's unpaid labor as mothers and caretakers. Developing and supporting women's unpaid care work is a major focus of diversity and inclusion efforts of Fortune 500 firms (Ely et al., 2011). However, taking advantage of these policies often signals to others that women are on the "mommy track" and not fully committed to the workplace (Fuller & Hirsh, 2019; Munsch et al., 2014). Employers are then less likely to see mothers as competent and deserving of promotions (Kahn et al., 2014). An increase in the number of men taking parental leave could potentially work against the "mommy track" stigma and reduce disparities between working mothers and fathers in terms of wages, workplace advancement, and caregiving responsibilities. However, the stigma around family-friendly workplace policies also impacts men who take advantage of them to participate in non-traditional gender activities within the home (Theunissen et al., 2011; Rudman & Mescher, 2013). Social norms around gender roles are often slow to change, but the introduction of stay-at-home orders during the COVID-19 may jump start this change as employees and employers face an unprecedented overlap between paid jobs and unpaid labor in the home.

Materials and Method

Participants

We conducted a web-based survey of over 1500 adults in May 2020. We piloted the survey to employees of three firms and utilized these first 85 surveys to test the survey questions

and usability. After the initial pilot phase, a Qualtrics panel was used to recruit participants in three waves between May 13 and May 15, 2020. This allowed the research team to review responses for quality and accuracy. Qualtrics provides a pool of panel participants that can be drawn from to create a suitable sample and matches respondent characteristics to the target population. Due to the increase in low response rates and gaps in random-digit dialing surveys, online panels are becoming a more popular means of recruiting survey participants. Recent studies have shown that web-based data collection using crowdsourced samples can be as reliable as responses collected with more traditional methods (Buhrmester et al., 2018; Gosling et al., 2004). Additionally, our research faced a major time constraint in that our team wanted to capture the experience of individuals during what appeared to be the height of the COVID-19 shutdown period.

Our sample consists of all adult respondents living with an opposite-gender spouse or partner in the U.S. Because we focus on the overlap between paid and unpaid work, we restrict our sample to individuals aged 18-65, the standard age range in U.S. labor market studies. A total of 1532 people took the survey; 612 were excluded due to sample restrictions and missing values, leaving a sample of 920 respondents. Exclusion restrictions were as follows: 102 due to missing value for age, 118 due to age outside of the 18-65 range, 12 due to inconsistent responses, 227 due to missing value for sex, and 153 due to not living with an opposite-sex partner, for a total of 612 dropped observations. Our methodology is based on bivariate tests of gender differences in paid and unpaid work as well as estimation of a logistic model of the determinants of job productivity and satisfaction.

Instruments and Data Analysis

To create the survey instrument, we used the instrument developed by Donehower (2020) as a base, and amended it with additional questions on the paid and unpaid work of the respondents' partners. We collected information on work hours, telecommuting, time spent on different types of caring labor and domestic chores, self-reported job satisfaction, self-reported job productivity, and demographic characteristics including gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, partner status, and number and age of children. Our use of a survey questionnaire to measure time use has well-established precedents. Studies published on housework typically use questionnaire-based self-reported methods or detailed time diaries (Bianchi et al., 2000; Kamo, 2000).

The methodology is based on a series of bivariate tests of gender differences in paid work characteristics and unpaid care work within the home before and during the pandemic. To test the prediction that the unpaid labor of one's partner positively affects job productivity and satisfaction, we estimated a simple logistic model of the determinants of the change in self-reported job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic relative to before the pandemic. Independent variables included dummy variables for race, ethnicity, education, and whether or not the respondent has children. We also included continuous variables for age, the change in the partner's share of unpaid work, and the change in hours per day devoted to housework.

Results

Demographics.

As shown in Table 1, which reports the sample means, the sample is quite diverse in terms of socioeconomic status as measured by education and income. One quarter of the sample is highly educated with some type of postgraduate education, and at the other extreme, 15% of respondents have a high school degree or less. Men are more likely than women to have

postgraduate education, while women have a higher representation among respondents with a college degree or some college. About one fifth of the respondents have more than \$150,000 in household income, and 42% of the respondents are in households earning \$75,000 or less.

Women are significantly more likely than men to fall into the lower household income category. In terms of race and ethnicity, 15% of respondents reported that they are non-white, and the vast majority were born in the U.S. Also of note, 79% of the sample reported that they were working in a paid job before the pandemic, with men reporting a higher employment rate than women. On average, 14% of respondents said they lost their paid jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic, with women's rate of job loss substantially higher than that of men (17% versus 9%). Finally, men in the sample were considerably more likely than women to be living in a household that also had an elderly or disabled family member present.

Insert Table 1 Here

Balance of unpaid labor across gender.

Respondents living with opposite-sex partners reported what they perceived to be the share of unpaid work in the home performed by themselves, their partners, and others in the household (Table 2). Of note, men reported an increase in their own share of unpaid work during the pandemic (from 45% to 48%) and a decrease for their female partners (from 48% to 45%). At the same time, women reported a small increase in the average share of unpaid work that they themselves perform in the home (from 65% to 66%) and also reported a decrease for their male partners' contributions (31% to 29%). Other household members also performed a small share of the household labor, which men thought had fallen somewhat during the pandemic while women reported the opposite. These patterns reflect not only the unequal gendered distribution of

household work, but also reporting differences in perceived contributions between men and women that are consistent with prior research (Kiger & Riley, 1996).

Insert Table 2 Here

Our data showed that women's hours of unpaid work at home have increased during the pandemic. However, men's workloads have also increased, and in some specific types of caring labor even exceed those of women. Table 2 reports results for the percentage of respondents who worked five or more hours per day in different types of active and supervisory caring labor (childcare, eldercare, disabled care) and housework. As explained in the survey instrument, active care includes hands-on activities such as bathing, feeding, dressing, teaching, playing, and taking to appointments when the respondent is interacting directly with the other person. Supervisory care is when the respondent is not interacting with the other person but is responsible for them and "on-call" should active care be needed. Housework includes cooking, cleaning, shopping, and laundry, and household management activities such as scheduling activities and paying bills.

As shown in the table, the percent of men who reported that they provide at least 5 daily hours of active care for children nearly doubled, rising 15% pre-pandemic to 29%, while for women this share increased from 23% to 37%. Self-reported time devoted to household chores also rose for both men and women, with 11% of men devoting at least 5 hours per day to housework before and 20% during the pandemic, compared to a jump from 15% to 28% for women. Women also did relatively more supervisory childcare than men, with the gap having grown during the pandemic. The gender gaps in active and supervisory childcare and housework during the pandemic are each statistically significant.

While men increased the amount of time they spent on childcare and housework, women were still performing more. Men reported a larger time commitment than that of women to providing care for elderly and disabled family members. During the pandemic, 10% of men were providing at least five hours per day of active eldercare, compared to 7% of women (Table 2). The results are very similar for active care for a disabled family member.

Balance of paid labor across gender.

Respondents reported fewer hours of paid work per week during the COVID-19 pandemic (from an average of 38 to 27 hours per week), and the gender difference is not statistically significant (Table 3). However, there is a considerable gender gap among respondents who reported that they earn more than their partner. Before the pandemic, two-thirds of male respondents said they earned more than their partners compared to less than a quarter of female respondents. This gap narrowed substantially during the pandemic, although men, on average, still reported more frequently than women that they earn more than their partners. As expected, both men and women showed a substantial increase in the likelihood of telecommuting. On average, before the pandemic, 21% of the sample reported working from home at least some days of the week, compared to 57% during the pandemic. The gender difference in the rate of telecommuting is not statistically significant before or during the pandemic, but it does shift in sign: before the pandemic, relatively more women than men were telecommuting while during the pandemic a higher share of men than women reported telecommuting. We also see a large drop in the percent of respondents who reported that their partners work at least 7 hours per day in a paid job. On average, this share dropped from 63% to 45%, with women reporting far more often than men that their partners worked at least 7 hours per day.

Insert Table 3 Here

Job productivity and satisfaction.

About 72% of respondents said they were as or more satisfied with their jobs during the pandemic than they were before (Table 3). However, men were more likely than women to report greater job satisfaction during the pandemic relative to before, while women were more likely than men to report a drop in their self-reported job satisfaction during the pandemic relative to before. These gender gaps are both statistically significant. Finally, as reported in Table 3, more than two-thirds of the sample said that they were equally or more productive during the pandemic than before, while close to one-third of respondents said they were not as productive. In this case, we found no statistically significant gender differences.

In tests of people with and without children, our analysis reveals that 67% of working mothers reported the same or greater productivity in their paid work after the pandemic hit (Figure 1). The findings were similar for women without children. Not only were women as or more productive during the pandemic, but 71% of mothers also reported equal or higher job satisfaction after the pandemic hit compared to 68% of women without children. In looking more closely at women with children of different ages, we found that mothers of teenagers reported higher rates of job productivity and satisfaction than mothers of very young children. While 69% of women with children aged 13-17 reported equal or more productivity, only 63% of women with very young children (ages 4 or below) reported equal or higher job productivity during the pandemic. Results for job satisfaction were similar.

Insert Figure 1 Here

These patterns differed somewhat for men. For fathers, 67% reported the same or more productivity in their paid work after the pandemic hit, whereas 73% of men without children

reported the same or more productivity. At the same time, 72% of fathers reported equal or higher job satisfaction after the pandemic hit compared to men without children (82%). Of note, mothers experienced greater satisfaction than non-mothers, but fathers showed the reverse. That said, regardless of having children, a majority of both men and women reported that they are just as productive and satisfied with their jobs, if not more so, even though they are predominantly working from home and spending more hours on unpaid labor. As with mothers, a greater proportion of fathers of teenagers reported equal or higher levels of job productivity and satisfaction compared to fathers of very young children.

Finally, we tested the prediction that changes in job productivity and job satisfaction may be impacted by changes in the contribution of one's partner to unpaid labor in the home, particularly for women. To test this assertion we used a logistic regression that controlled for other demographic and work characteristics. Results showed that an increase in men's contribution to unpaid labor within the home has a positive and statistically significant association with women's job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic (reported as odds ratios in Table 4). As men take on a greater share of the unpaid work at home, women reported a greater odds of being more productive in and satisfied with their paid work. This relationship between a partner's contributions at home and a respondent's job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic held only for women respondents, not for men. For depiction purposes, we calculated the predicted probability of women's job productivity as a function of the male partner's contribution to total household labor (Figure 2). As the male partner's contribution to household labor increased, the probability of women reporting equal or greater job productivity during the pandemic also increased.

Insert Table 4 Here

Insert Figure 2 Here

Men and women also differed in their job productivity and satisfaction by race (Table 4). White men reported substantially lower odds of being as or more productive during the pandemic compared to non-white men, and the same is true of Hispanic men compared to non-Hispanic men. However, white men had substantially greater odds of being satisfied with their jobs during the pandemic compared to non-white men. Among women, there are no statistically significant racial or ethnic differences in job productivity and satisfaction. Results also showed that both job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic increased with age for women, but not for men. In addition, results showed an inverse relationship for women between the change in their own daily housework hours and their productivity during the pandemic. That is, holding all else constant, an increase in household chores during the pandemic was associated with lower job productivity. This finding is consistent with earlier evidence of greater well-being for women when they have less pressure from the domestic workload (Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). Men, however, experienced greater job satisfaction when they were engaged in more housework. Finally, having children was associated with enhanced job satisfaction for women during the pandemic, but the opposite was true for men.

Discussion

This study examined changes in paid and unpaid labor within dual-career households as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic lockdown orders. Results showed that, although both men and women experienced an increase in the amount of childcare and housework during the COVID-19 pandemic relative to before, women's unpaid workloads increased relatively more. In contrast and somewhat surprisingly, men reported participating in more unpaid labor related to the care of elderly and disabled family members during the pandemic compared to women. Risks associated

with COVID-19 infection made it more difficult to hire home health aides or to place family members in institutionalized care, thus shifting the work into private homes, with men appearing to take on a slightly larger role than women in providing this care.

Interestingly, evidence of a misperception of a partner's contributions to unpaid household labor emerged. Both men and women reported an increase in their own share of unpaid labor during the pandemic lockdown, but a decrease in their partner's share of unpaid labor. This bias is consistent with prior research that finds individuals tend to exhibit a positive illusion in self-perception, whereby people come to view their own performance as slightly better than objective measures (Kiger & Riley, 1996; John & Robbins, 1994). However, this particular finding related to a bias in perception of a partner's household labor contributions has implications for relationship and individual well-being. It suggests that a sizable portion of an individual's contribution to household labor is going unrecognized by their partner. This bias is likely responsible for exacerbating the stress related to balancing work and family, particularly for women. One potential solution to this misperception is for households to keep track of household chores completed by all household members, leaving less room for bias to enter into perceptions.

Despite the increase in unpaid labor at home, the majority of men and women reported that their job productivity and satisfaction were at least as high during the pandemic compared to before the pandemic. Among working parents, job productivity and satisfaction were greater for parents with teenagers as compared to those with younger children, a result most likely explained by the self-sufficiency of teenagers. Although somewhat counterintuitive at first blush, the steady and slightly elevated job productivity and satisfaction reported during the pandemic may be a product of the timing of data collection. In May 2020, the lockdown was still in its infancy and

the benefits of work-from-home orders such as the elimination of commutes and preparing children to get out the door for school may have contributed to stable or increased job productivity and satisfaction. Future research to determine whether this particular result sustained across time is warranted.

Logistic regression results showed that an increase in men's contribution to unpaid labor within the home had a positive and statistically significant association with women's job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic. As men took on a greater share of the unpaid work at home, women reported a greater odds of being more productive in and satisfied with their jobs. This relationship between a partner's contributions to unpaid labor at home and a respondent's job productivity and satisfaction during the pandemic held only for women respondents, not for men. This finding is consistent with earlier evidence from the U.S. showing that a more equitable distribution of labor in the home is associated with fewer symptoms of depression among partners (Kalmijn & Monden, 2012). Previous work has also shown that men's participation in housework and childcare at home increases women's well-being and relationship health (Barnett & Hyde, 2001; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997). The increase in men's unpaid work within the home may also accelerate progress toward gender equity (Smith and Johnson 2020).

Taken together, these findings have implications for the future of work. The shifting balance of paid-to-unpaid labor within the home during the COVID-19 pandemic has the potential to alter social norms around the household division of labor and lessen the stigma surrounding beneficial workplace policies that support working parents. With more fathers engaged in caring for children due to stay-at-home orders, the social norms around who provides care within the home may change and de-stigmatize the implicit bias of motherhood that limits

women's opportunities for career advancement. As companies extend their work-from-home orders, telecommuting could become the new normal for a larger proportion of the workforce.

The changing landscape of work life now intersecting with home life is poised to shift the descriptive norm (that is, we are all in the balancing act together – men and women), and this new descriptive norm could change the injunctive norm (that is, what we value) (Cialdini et al., 1991). Workplace accommodations and occupational tracks to provide working parents with greater flexibility to meet their parenting demands have long been associated with stigma (Stone & Hernandez, 2013). By way of a virus, this stigma may dissipate as women and men feel less ashamed of creating boundaries around work and home. At the same time, senior management (still predominantly held by men) may drop their preconceptions of diversity and inclusion support programs as signals that women are more committed to their families than the workplace (Perlow & Kelly, 2014). During the pandemic, these same men have needed to deal with juggling their own paid and unpaid work, a change that may pre-empt longer-term changes in views as to what constitutes an ideal worker.

A positive shift in social norms related to gender equity and the stigma of balancing work and family is not inevitable as a result of the pandemic. In fact, it is possible that the disproportionate burden of unpaid labor during the pandemic shouldered by women could weaken the progress women have made in the workplace toward gender parity. This is because more women than men are losing their jobs as a result of the pandemic and one in four employed women are considering scaling back or dropping out of the workforce altogether due to the increased pressure of balancing paid and unpaid labor (McKinsey 2020). Explicit action at the firm and individual level could help ensure that social norms change in a positive direction.

There are a number of reforms to workplace practices and government policies that can facilitate changes in the view of an ideal worker to incorporate the domestic sphere. First, senior leadership should take the mask off work-life overlap, and adding an injunctive message (such as one that conveys social approval) can help to eliminate stigma (Schultz et al., 2007). Senior management could create messaging targeted to employees that communicates company support for leave programs, including the message that senior leadership members also have experienced the strain of the literal overlap of work and life occurring at the same time, in the same physical space. This messaging is particularly important because both men and women are stigmatized or feel shame in taking advantage of workplace programs that support leave for unpaid care work (Rudman & Mescher, 2013).

Closely related, senior leadership should be encouraged to take advantage of leave programs. Senior leadership can play an essential role in communicating what the firm values. Perhaps the most optimal way to communicate this is to role model the behavior. This can go a long way to help de-stigmatize taking advantage of family-friendly policies and increase acceptance among all employees. In addition, firms should encourage all employees, both men and women at all levels, to take advantage of employee resource groups (ERGs) and business resource groups (BRGs). Firms originally created these groups to build community and support for marginalized members of a workforce. However, membership should not be limited to those who identify with marginalized groups such as women and racial minorities. For example, firms should encourage the participation of men in women's ERGs and BRGs. Men's participation in these groups can help normalize workplace practices around flexibility because men can contribute to the conversation on the struggle for balance.

Also, working parents should continue to advocate for workplace policies that support their wellbeing. As COVID-19 has ushered in the normalization of telecommuting, working parents can push their employers to adopt other workplace policies such as job sharing and flex-time that place value on labor within the home. This can eventually normalize the role of men and women in sharing household labor, making it less associated with feminine roles. Firms should encourage their partners and suppliers to create similar practices to support their workers. To create sustainable workplaces that support working parents, these practices must be supported and reflected by key stakeholders, leadership, employees, clients, and other players.

Finally, the government should develop national legislation that values care. The 2020 CARES act does provide, for the first time, paid family and medical leave during the pandemic to care for a sick or at-risk family member or oneself, and it applies to employees who need to care for children whose schools or daycare facilities closed. However, almost half of the U.S. private sector workforce is not eligible, and the legislation is temporary. The U.S. is one of just three countries in the world without paid parental leave. Results from our survey corroborate the prediction that the COVID-19 lockdown orders have shifted the traditional division of labor. Although women are devoting more time to unpaid household labor during the pandemic, men are also contributing more time to household tasks during lockdown orders and many are witnessing the overlap of paid and unpaid labor firsthand. It is time to leverage this unique time in history to start a national conversation about how to better support working parents.

Limitations, Future Directions, and Conclusion

A positive feature of our analysis was the rapid-response nature of the survey and our ability to gauge changes in unpaid work responsibilities and job productivity during the pandemic as it was happening. This advantage of speed also came at a cost, primarily in terms of

needing to use a fairly short survey instrument and a relatively small sample. Administration of this survey took place at an early phase of the pandemic's lockdown orders and, thus, it is unknown how the reported results hold over time. Further, our sample was relatively homogenous and comprised primarily of heterosexual, married individuals. Single men and women, and non-heterosexual people, likely faced unique challenges as a result of the pandemic not captured in our study. These drawbacks point to the need for additional research using a more detailed time use survey, including longitudinal comparisons with more diverse samples, to provide a richer account of how and why unpaid work changed and how it impacted job productivity and satisfaction during throughout the pandemic.

Our survey results offer reason for optimism, particularly in terms of how men's increased contributions at home relate to women's increased job productivity and satisfaction. Although the question of how these effects hold up over time remains, many signs point to the U.S. emerging from this pandemic with less distinct gender norms that may neutralize the stigma of the mommy track, making retention and promotion in the workforce easier for women. The current challenge for working mothers in particular is to endure the disruptions caused by this global pandemic so they may benefit from a more agile work environment in the future.

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Table 1. Sample Characteristics: Individuals Living with Opposite-Gender Partners/Spouses

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Difference (M-F)</i>
Female	57.4%	49.5%	-	-	-
Age (years)	41.7	12.1	44.8	39.3	5.4*
Race is white	84.5%	36.3%	86.5%	83.0%	3.5%
Hispanic	11.6%	32.1%	9.9%	12.9%	-2.9%
Born in U.S.	93.3%	25.1%	94.4%	92.4%	2.0%
Education					
High school degree or less	15.0%	35.7%	15.8%	14.4%	1.4%
Some college/2yr degree	29.9%	45.8%	23.5%	34.7%	-11.2%*
College degree	30.5%	46.1%	25.8%	34.1%	-8.3%*
Postgraduate education	24.6%	43.1%	34.9%	16.9%	18.1%*
Household income					
<\$75,000	41.6%	49.3%	36.0%	45.8%	-9.8%*
btw \$75,000 & \$149,000	37.9%	48.5%	42.3%	34.6%	7.7%*
>\$150,000	20.5%	40.4%	21.7%	19.6%	2.1%
HH Size (# people)	3.3	1.3	3.3	3.3	0.1
Number of children (#)	1.1	1.3	1.1	1.1	0.0
Lives with elderly or disabled person	14.3%	35.1%	17.3%	12.1%	5.2%*
Had paid job before	78.7%	41.0%	83.9%	74.8%	9.1%*
Lost paid job	13.9%	34.6%	9.4%	17.2%	-7.8%*

Note: Sample size is 920. The notation * indicates statistically significant at 5% or better in a 2-tailed t test.

Table 2. Respondents and their Partners: Unpaid Care Work Before and During the Pandemic

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Difference (M-F)</i>
Share of unpaid work before					
Self	55.7%	26.5%	44.5%	64.9%	-20.4%*
Partner	38.5%	25.2%	47.8%	30.9%	16.9%*
Other hh member	5.8%	13.7%	7.7%	4.2%	3.5%*
Share of unpaid work now					
Self	57.8%	27.2%	47.9%	65.9%	-18.0%*
Partner	35.9%	25.4%	44.7%	28.7%	16.0%*
Other hh member	6.3%	14.9%	7.4%	5.4%	2.0%
% of respondents who work 5+ hours/day in the following unpaid activity					
Active childcare before	19.7%	39.8%	15.1%	23.1%	-8.1%*
Active childcare now	33.2%	47.1%	28.6%	36.7%	-8.1%*
Superv. childcare before	18.9%	39.2%	15.1%	21.8%	-6.8%*
Superv. childcare now	28.1%	45.0%	23.5%	31.5%	-8.0%*
Active eldercare before	5.5%	22.9%	6.4%	4.9%	1.4%
Active eldercare now	7.8%	26.9%	9.7%	6.5%	3.2%
Superv. eldercare before	5.1%	22.0%	7.1%	3.6%	3.5%*
Superv. eldercare now	6.3%	24.3%	7.9%	5.1%	2.8%
Active disabled care before	5.8%	23.3%	7.9%	4.2%	3.7%*
Active disabled care now	7.5%	26.4%	9.7%	5.9%	3.8%*
Superv disabled care before	6.3%	24.3%	8.7%	4.6%	4.1%*
Superv. disabled care now	7.0%	25.5%	8.4%	5.9%	2.5%
Housework before	13.4%	34.1%	11.0%	15.2%	-4.2%
Housework now	24.6%	43.1%	20.2%	27.9%	-7.8%*

Note: Sample size 920. The notation * indicates statistically significant at 5% or better in a 2-tailed t test, and “Superv.” is supervisory.

Table 3. Respondents and their Partners: Paid Jobs Before and During the Pandemic

	<i>Total</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Difference (M-F)</i>
# hours worked/week					
Before	37.8	10.8	38.6	37.2	1.4
Now	27.0	17.8	28.1	26.2	1.9
I earn more than my partner					
Before	43.4%	49.6%	67.0%	23.9%	43.1%*
Now	37.8%	48.5%	58.4%	20.8%	37.6%*
I telecommute					
Before	21.4%	41.1%	20.1%	22.6%	-2.5%
Now	57.1%	49.5%	60.2%	54.5%	5.7%
Partner works 7+ hours/day in paid job					
Before	62.8%	48.4%	51.2%	72.3%	-21.1%*
Now	45.0%	49.8%	31.1%	56.5%	-25.4%*
Partner telecommutes					
Before	17.0%	37.6%	22.5%	12.4%	10.1%*
Now	42.5%	49.5%	51.7%	34.8%	16.9%*
Satisfaction of work now					
More than before	18.7%	39.0%	24.2%	14.6%	9.7%*
Same as before	53.6%	49.9%	51.8%	54.9%	-3.1%
Less than before	27.7%	44.8%	24.0%	30.5%	-6.5%*
Productivity now					
More than before	26.1%	43.9%	29.1%	23.9%	5.2%
Same as before	42.4%	49.4%	40.6%	43.8%	-3.2%
Less than before	31.5%	46.5%	30.4%	32.4%	-2.0%

Note: Sample size 920. The notation * indicates statistically significant at 5% or better in a 2-tailed t test.

Table 4. Logistic Regression Results for Job Productivity and Satisfaction During the Pandemic Relative to Before

	<i>As or More Productive</i>		<i>As or More Satisfied</i>	
	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>	<i>Women</i>	<i>Men</i>
White	0.805 (0.221)	0.521* (0.193)	1.049 (0.284)	1.793* (0.618)
Hispanic	0.935 (0.284)	0.505* (0.187)	1.22 (0.379)	1.047 (0.424)
Age	1.024** (0.010)	1.016 (0.010)	1.031*** (0.010)	1.004 (0.011)
Some college	0.757 (0.242)	1.088 (0.408)	0.846 (0.258)	1.163 (0.459)
College degree	0.687 (0.228)	1.461 (0.569)	1.152 (0.374)	1.631 (0.673)
Post-graduate degree	0.504* (0.185)	0.751 (0.269)	1.306 (0.493)	1.191 (0.454)
Has children	1.311 (0.284)	0.985 (0.254)	1.488* (0.327)	0.502** (0.144)
Change in partner's share of unpaid work	1.019*** (0.007)	1.006 (0.007)	1.011* (0.006)	1.001 (0.008)
Change in daily housework hours	0.599** (0.148)	1.172 (0.339)	0.689 (0.172)	2.320** (0.772)

Note: Sample sizes are 478 women and 390 men. Numbers represent the odd ratios. The numbers in parentheses represent the standard error. The notation ***, **, * denotes significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels.

Figure 1. Job Productivity and Satisfaction Before and During Pandemic by Parent Status

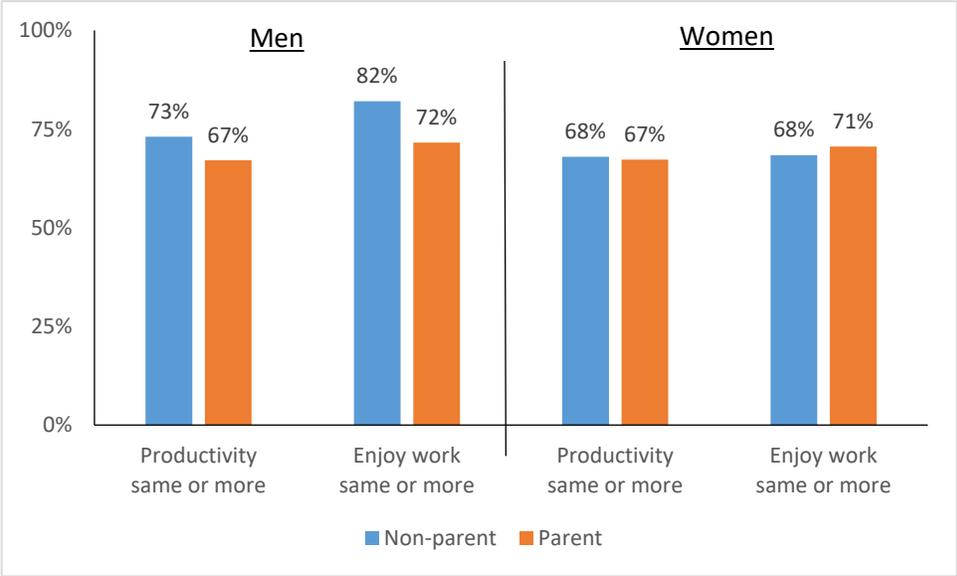


Figure 2. The Association between the Change in Male Partner’s Household Contributions and Women’s Predicted Job Productivity during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

