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A Case of Sticky Gender? Persistence and Change in the Division of Household Labor during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract: Contemporary research finds that gender continues to provide an organizing framework for couples' allocation of household labor. To explain this outcome, scholars focus on how structural arrangements and cultural beliefs contribute to the persistence of gender inequality in domestic labor. Yet scholarship has yet to fully clarify what combination of cultural and structural factors create persistent gender inequality in household labor. We use the COVID-19 pandemic as a naturally occurring event in which arrangements for childcare and work were upended, making it possible for many to rethink their household arrangements. Drawing on in-depth interviews with 81 respondents in heterosexual dual-earner couples, we examine how change in structural arrangements allowed some couples to develop a more egalitarian division of domestic labor. We also examine why an unequal division of labor persisted for most couples even amid the dramatic changes in their work and childcare arrangements and, for some, a strong desire to do so. We theorize that, taken alone, neither cultural attitudes nor shifts in the organization of work are sufficient to remove the stickiness of gender inequality in household work. Instead, structural change offers the possibility to change behavior, but only if cultural beliefs exist that make such change desirable.

Keywords: gender and work; COVID-19; caregiving



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1. Introduction

The pandemic upended the lives of Americans in many ways. Schools and offices closed; childcare centers shut down; many workers suddenly found themselves working at home while others had to decrease their hours or lost their jobs entirely; and many families were unable to leave their homes for months, producing isolation from friends and other relatives. Exposure to one or more of these sudden and unexpected changes represented an inescapable shock to American families' household dynamics. While devastating in many ways, the upending of taken-for-granted institutional arrangements also provided an opportunity for partners with children in the home to rethink their household dynamics and rearrange their daily patterns.

Given these institutional shifts, it is possible that new demands on parents made the achievement of gender inequality in the home more difficult, reinforcing or intensifying traditional divisions of labor (see [Del Boca et al. 2020](#); [Farré et al. 2020](#); [Obioma et al. 2023](#)). It is also possible that when parents, and especially fathers, found themselves spending more time at home, couples were able to more equally restructure the division of childcare, cooking, cleaning, and other domestic tasks. In our interviews with 81 individual parents in dual-earner, different-sex couples with children at home, little change took place for most of them. Instead, as couples navigated the challenges posed by shifts in their job requirements and childcare supports, almost ninety percent sustained the allocation of caregiving tasks that existed prior to the pandemic. This finding aligns with the work of other scholars, who have noted that mothers took on added domestic labor during the

pandemic (Calarco et al. 2020, 2021; Dunatchik et al. 2021) and that women's employment was significantly altered (Collins et al. 2021). Most mothers in our sample continued to do the vast majority of domestic labor even when fathers who had previously worked on-site were now at home.

Yet not all of our interviewees reported this outcome. A notable minority instead described household dynamics that shifted toward men's greater involvement in caregiving and couples' increased sharing of domestic work—a result that Petts et al. (2023) also find. To unravel the reasons for these divergent patterns, we use the destabilizing conditions brought on by the pandemic to uncover both the mechanisms that maintain and deepen domestic inequality and the conditions that can undermine it and encourage more equal sharing. We thus address the following questions: why and how did gender remain so sticky for most couples? And under what conditions did a small minority become more egalitarian?

2. Literature on Division of Domestic Labor and the Pandemic

Since the home is an important site for the reproduction and maintenance of gender inequality, scholars have long focused on the division of labor in the domestic sphere. During the COVID-19 pandemic, when much of social life became confined to the home, a unique opportunity arose for scholars to evaluate the domestic conditions and work arrangements that either reinforce or undermine the dynamics of gender inequality.

Gender scholars have extensively examined the influence of institutional factors on gender inequality in the domestic sphere. This research has emphasized the role of economic and political institutions in shaping gendered divisions of domestic labor. Folbre (2001, 2008, 2009) has argued that social institutions systematically undervalue care work (including household chores, emotional support, and childcare) and also that analytic frameworks fail to adequately acknowledge the economic worth of this labor. The fact that women tend to take on a disproportionate share of care work in both paid and unpaid domains both reflects and serves to reproduce gendered power dynamics. Connell (2014), among many others, has shown how occupational segregation and gender pay differences contribute to unequal divisions of labor in the home, including unequal decision-making power in the domestic sphere. Hochschild's (1989) influential work on the "second shift" also pointed to institutional factors such as inflexible jobs, men's long work hours, and women's lower earnings, although it emphasized the ways that beliefs—or "family myths"—contribute to the expectation that employed mothers will shoulder the heaviest burden of unpaid domestic labor. The previous literature has made clear that the organization of paid work, with its presumption that "ideal workers" (Acker 1990) have partners to care for their domestic lives, has shaped women's responsibility for caretaking and household labor in modern societies. As "gender structure" theory suggests, the material reality of paid jobs leaves women disadvantaged in both the labor force and the home. The organization of paid work encourages the presumption that men can expect partners to support their work participation by performing the domestic labor.

Scholars have also emphasized the importance of cultural factors in shaping the contours of gender inequality. Social norms, cultural expectations, and gendered ideologies contribute to gender inequality in domestic labor. In an early examination of the social position of the housewife, Oakley (1974) demonstrated how cultural expectations and stereotypes, such as the idea that domestic work is feminine, contribute to the unequal burden women assume at home. Half a century later, these beliefs persist. Butler (1990) has thus challenged essentialist views by arguing that ideologies, expectations, and norms actively shape the construction of gender, thereby perpetuating inequality across many domains, including the domestic sphere. And Schor (2010), among others, has pointed out how prevailing cultural ideologies surrounding productivity and economic growth ultimately undervalue non-market activities such as caregiving, suggesting that shifts in work-related norms could contribute to greater equity in the home.

Risman's multi-level theory of gender as a social structure (Risman 2018) helps to synthesize these classic views and, in doing so, also helps explain our findings. Risman argues that a gender structure can be found on the individual, interactional, and macro levels. At each level of analysis, moreover, both materialist and cultural factors are at play. At the individual level, for example, we all inhabit bodies that we use to present and claim a gender identity. We also hold internalized beliefs about ourselves as gendered actors that we use to guide our choices. At the interactional level, it is unclear if pandemic-related changes had notable consequences. While much of the research focusing on the interactional level focuses on "gender frames" (Ridgeway 2011) and "doing gender" (West and Zimmerman 1987), there is no *a priori* reason to presume that the pandemic would change gendered expectations about domestic labor or caretaking. Indeed, there is no evidence that the pandemic prompted any societal shift that would undermine people's gendered sense of self or how they experienced their interactions with others.

At the macro level, however, the pandemic prompted dramatic changes in the organization of institutions across many domains. In a remarkably short period of time, employers distinguished between essential and non-essential workers as well as whose work could (and could not) be done on-screen at home during the workday. Similarly, in many states, day care centers and public schools were closed. Remote workers suddenly had the flexibility to participate in family labor, while at the same moment the rise of at-home schooling and loss of daycare substantially increased the amount of domestic labor and caretaking tasks left to parents. There is no reason to expect that the closed schools, day care centers, and workplaces would upend the cultural presumption that mothers are more skilled at nurturing and wives should be responsible for domestic labor. But there is reason to ask if and how the sudden and widespread changes at the macro level affected couple's gender division of labor.

Using this framework, we analyze what happens when dramatic shifts take place in the organization of paid work and domestic life. When, if at all, does such change induce husbands and fathers to increase their share of domestic labor and childcare when they found themselves at home with their families during the day? To do this, we divide our sample into three groups: parents who desired to move toward egalitarianism prior to the pandemic and did so, parents who desired to move towards egalitarianism and were unable to do so, and parents who did not desire a change and therefore made none. Our designations of egalitarian and unequal divisions at the baseline and during the pandemic are based on self-reports from one parent about how couples divided domestic tasks such as childcare, cooking, cleaning, and mental labor. If the interviewee reported that tasks were roughly divided equally, we characterized them as having an egalitarian division of labor. In cases where one partner described doing the majority of tasks, we characterized them as unequal. If interviewees described dissatisfaction with their division of labor or a desire to change their household arrangements, we categorized them as desiring change. In doing so, we ascertained whether or not parents desired a change as well as whether or not they were able to move toward it. In this way, we were able to examine how parents' aspirations interacted with their actual circumstances and locate the combination of factors that maintained inequality for most and allowed some parents to diminish it. While we recognize that self-reports represent perceptions rather than objective measures, they reflect the beliefs of those with whom we spoke and thus have real consequences in the lives of these participants.

We define changes in workplace arrangements (such as the rise of remote work and increased flexibility), time confined to home, and changes in childcare supports (such as daycare and school closures) as structural factors. For many interviewees, these changes were experienced as shifts in how and where they spent their time. In contrast, we define participants' expressed views, beliefs, values, and norms as cultural factors. With these distinctions in mind, we find that changes in institutional arrangements alone were not sufficient to explain why some were able to move toward more equality and others were not. Instead, prior beliefs and attitudes about gender and household labor set the stage

for whether or not a couple aspired to become more egalitarian. While many interviewees reported changes in their and their partner's work situations that could have facilitated more equal household dynamics, most continued to fall back on beliefs that mothers were better suited to doing most aspects of domestic labor and thus were not motivated to substantially change their division of tasks. In contrast, those participants who expressed dissatisfaction with their pre-pandemic division of labor were more inclined to hold egalitarian beliefs. The ability to achieve their aspirations, however, depended on how the pandemic rearranged their options at work and in the home.

We thus find that meaningful change toward more equal sharing occurred only when cultural beliefs aligned with institutional conditions. In most cases, changes in employment and childcare arrangements alone were not sufficient to spark change in the allocation of domestic labor. Structural shifts such as working from home, shifts in work hours, workplace flexibility, and daycare shutdowns did not, by themselves, produce more egalitarian patterns. Such a shift only happened when structural changes at the macro level allowed individual parents to enact egalitarian beliefs and aspirations they held prior to the pandemic.

Risman's conception of gender as a multi-dimensional structure provides an organizing framework for examining how the various levels of social life interact to produce specific forms of gender inequality. In the case of the pandemic, however, institutional shifts in the organization of work and family life have ambiguous implications for domestic inequality. The rise of remote work, on the one hand, led many fathers to spend more time at home, which in turn made it possible for them to increase their participation in caregiving and housework, thus reducing the gender gap. Yet the collapse of childcare supports and the rise of remote schooling increased the caregiving load for parents, which was more likely to leave mothers with more domestic responsibility and thus sustain or increase the gender gap. The question then arises: how did these cross-cutting institutional changes actually affect the division of domestic labor?

Given the significant changes that occurred in the organization of daily life during the COVID-19 pandemic, several scholars have examined how families navigated fluctuating work and household responsibilities. [Dunatchik et al. \(2021\)](#) found that, even as work, childcare, and schooling moved into the home in the early period of the pandemic, a gender gap remained as mothers continued to perform more domestic labor than their male partners. A number of studies have also reported that as the pandemic proceeded, much of the additional labor for schooling and childcare fell on women ([Calarco et al. 2020](#); [Carlson et al. 2020](#)). In data collected in April of 2020, [Carlson et al. \(2020\)](#) found that while some families did develop more egalitarian arrangements, this group accounts for only about 10–15% of couples. On the whole, research indicates that although all parents were doing more domestic work, the gender gap remained as women continued to perform more domestic tasks and spend more time caring for children than their partners ([Carlson et al. 2020](#); [Ruppanner et al. 2021](#)). Like [Carlson et al. \(2020\)](#), we find that a minority of couples did become more egalitarian and analyze what factors are correlated with such change.

Additionally, scholars have found gender differences in how changes in work conditions and the labor market affected couples' division of household labor. More women than men experienced a loss of employment, in part because women are over-represented in the kinds of jobs, such as service work, that disappeared during the pandemic ([Yavorsky et al. 2021](#)). Previous scholarship has found that when not employed, women and men both tend to take on more household labor, but non-employed women take on more domestic labor than non-employed men ([Yavorsky et al. 2021](#)). In interviews with mothers during the pandemic, [Calarco et al. \(2020\)](#) found that in families where men lost their jobs, mothers reported that their male partners still looked to them to manage most childcare tasks. Given women's added responsibilities for childcare and schooling, women were also more likely to work fewer hours and exit the workforce altogether ([Landivar et al. 2020](#)).

Yet despite the forces that sustained inequality for most different-sex couples, we know little about the combination of forces that facilitated change for some. Amid the significant changes that occurred in work and family life during the pandemic, our analysis thus seeks to unravel the factors that made it possible for a small group to close the gender gap and alleviate domestic inequality even as inequality persisted for others. Taking off from the framework of “gender as a social structure”, we analyze the role of both structural and cultural factors and how they interacted to shape whether and, if so, how such factors affected the division of labor as reported by the parents we interviewed. We also analyze the ways that the pandemic held ambiguous implications for the gender gap in domestic labor. For most, the large and sudden increase in parenting responsibilities reinforced gendered inequalities. For a small but intrepid group, however, it provided an opportunity to enact pre-existing egalitarian aspirations that had been stymied by the demands of on-site work.

3. Methods

To understand how parents viewed their family’s domestic arrangements prior to the pandemic and then trace how these arrangements and views unfolded as the pandemic proceeded, we conducted in-depth interviews with 81 dual-earner heterosexual parents with caretaking responsibilities. Since we only interviewed one member of each couple, the reported data represent that person’s narrative. We thus analyze the interview material as an individual’s rather than a couple’s views. While we cannot—and do not—presume that partners would always agree, we were able to gather in-depth portraits of the experiences of both mothers and fathers prior to the pandemic and as they encountered and responded to changes in their work circumstances, division of labor at home, and views on their relationship with their partner and dependents.

Given the variability in working hours for many Americans throughout the pandemic, and the effects on work life for both full-time and part-time workers, our sample includes data on couples where both partners worked full time throughout the pandemic and those where one partner worked part time at some point.¹ Our sample was drawn from a larger interview study of 127 Americans regarding their experiences during the pandemic. Respondents were part of a nationally representative National Opinion Research Center (NORC) panel. Over 550 caregivers were contacted and those who agreed to participate were interviewed. Our subsample consists of 49 women and 32 men, with ages ranging from 23 to 59 years at the time of the interview. We excluded respondents in single-earner couples, where one partner was a “stay-at-home” parent (all of whom were mothers), since there was no reason to expect the pandemic would alter their domestic division of labor. We also excluded respondents who had caregiving responsibilities but did not report having children at home. Participants resided in a range of locations across the country (from rural areas to large cities), occupied a variety of socioeconomic statuses, claimed diverse racial backgrounds, possessed varying political views, and were rearing children ranging in age from infancy to adolescence. Additional information on our sample can be found in Appendix A.

Interviews were conducted between July of 2021 and January of 2022. They took place over Zoom and lasted between forty minutes and two and a half hours. We asked questions about participants’ work and home lives from prior to the outset of the pandemic through the beginning and ensuing months up to and including the state of their work and home lives at the time of the interview. We elicited detailed responses that inquired not only about how, when, and who did such tasks as cooking, cleaning, and childcare but also how they viewed these patterns and how they developed as the pandemic proceeded. We also elicited detailed information about the work arrangements of the interviewees and their partners as well as their views on these arrangements.

Our data capture a limited timeline as well as a snapshot of participants’ lives at any given point. Given the quickly evolving nature of work and family life during this time, we were unable to interview participants at the same moment in the pandemic’s evolution.

We thus rely on retrospective accounts of their experiences from the moment the pandemic began up to the time of our interview. Yet despite this limitation, these retrospective reports trace the interaction of unfolding events and responses from the outset of the pandemic to the time of the interview. They provide a view of the process that evolved as once taken-for-granted institutional arrangements underwent unanticipated change.

We were also unable to analyze changes to different types of domestic labor, such as housework vs. childcare-related tasks, separately since the interviewees generally discussed their domestic tasks as an intertwined whole. While childcare and household chores are conceptually distinct, our interviewees did not typically make such distinctions. To the extent that participants perceived childcare and household chores as intertwined in practice, it was thus not useful—and would have been misleading—to artificially disentangle the two in our analysis.

Since these data consist of self-reports, we rely on the participants' descriptions of their own and their partner's contributions to household and caregiving labor as well as how they feel about their arrangements. Consistent with [Gerson and Damaske's \(2021\)](#) discussion of the nature of interview data, rather than assuming participants offer objective facts, their narratives gave us an opportunity to analyze the gendered and socially constructed meanings they shared and then place them in their appropriate social context. It is no surprise, for example, that women were more likely to report dissatisfaction or that most interviewees reported that mothers were responsible for a greater share of the household labor than fathers. It is also noteworthy that more men than women reported having an egalitarian division of labor and that men were also more likely to report both they and their partner were satisfied with this arrangement.

Given the gendered understandings and behavior regarding household labor ([Cooper 2000, 2014](#)), there is good reason to suspect that interviews with their partners might tell a different story, including one more likely to resemble the higher levels of dissatisfaction and desire for change expressed by the women we interviewed. In this sense, the narratives are clearly gendered. Yet our interviews with fathers (as well as mothers) involved considerable probing that delved beneath superficial or socially desirable responses to reveal far more granular details and nuanced information about how and why these differences exist.

It is also noteworthy that although our sample is drawn from a nationally representative and randomly sampled survey, the 81 respondents included in our analysis do not represent a random sample of this larger group. While our sample contains racial, ethnic, geographic, and educational diversity, it over-represents white college graduates compared to the broader U.S. population. As a result, it is not sufficiently diverse to explore differences among different racial, ethnic, regional, or educational groups. By interviewing a national sample of adults in depth, our data nevertheless provide insights about how and why the COVID-19 pandemic shaped the caregiving experiences and pathways of American parents in different ways.

4. Findings

What were parents' preferences for how to organize their domestic division of labor, and to what extent did the pandemic change that division? Like other studies, we found a stark gender difference in people's perceptions of their domestic arrangements at the outset of the pandemic, with 50 percent of men but only 12 percent of women describing an egalitarian division—a finding that replicates other findings that consistently show a large gender gap in women's and men's perceptions of domestic work ([Cerrato and Cifre 2018](#); [Kiger and Riley 1996](#); [Young et al. 2015](#)). We categorized couples as egalitarian if they explicitly noted that they and their partner split household labor evenly or described similar workloads when explaining which tasks they typically completed. We defined household labor as a combination of household and childcare-related tasks. Additionally, women and men who described their baseline arrangement as egalitarian were overwhelmingly likely to express satisfaction, with 94% of men and 100% of women in agreement. For this reason, the participants categorized as egalitarian fell overwhelmingly in the "did not desire

change” category. Although there were four cases in which an egalitarian interviewee nevertheless experienced change toward more equality, we included these cases in the “did not desire change” category since the change that occurred was neither expressly desired nor did it represent a substantial change in an already egalitarian set of ideals and domestic arrangements. As Figure 1 shows, we found a high level of dissatisfaction among those who entered the pandemic with unequal practices at home. Among the 59 participants who described an unequal division of domestic work, however, not only was the level of satisfaction much lower, but a large gender gap emerged. While 56 percent of men expressed satisfaction with an unequal division of labor, only 35 percent of women did so.

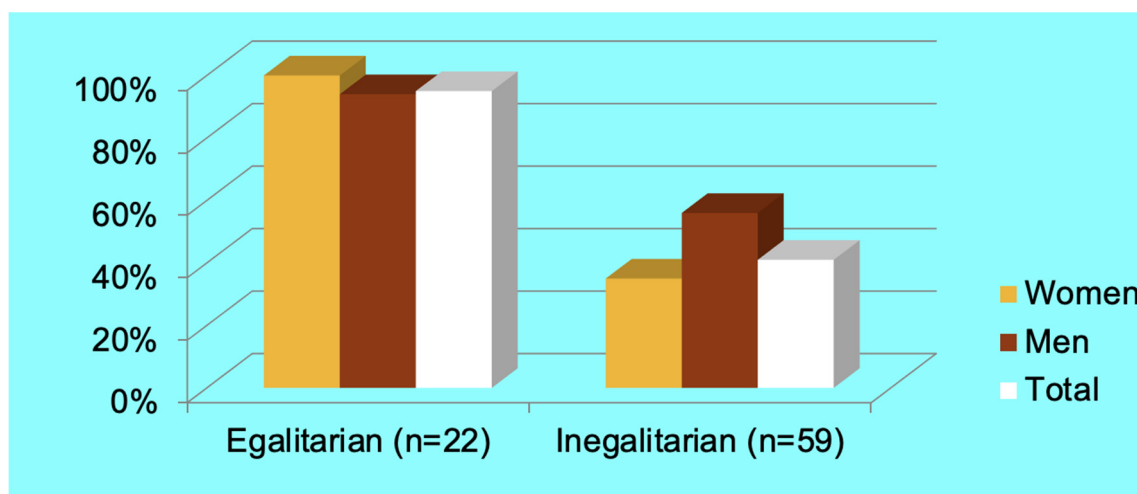


Figure 1. Percent Satisfied with Division of Domestic Labor among Dual-Earner Parents, by Gender & Perceived Division of Labor.

What happened to these arrangements as the pandemic proceeded? Did the loss of childcare support, coupled with changes in the location and demands of work, prompt changes in parents’ domestic division of labor? In particular, did it allow parents with an unequal arrangement to reduce the gap between their desires and their pre-pandemic arrangements? And how did those parents who were able to move toward more equality compare with those who were unable to do so?

To answer these questions, we compare the parents who desired change toward more equality and achieved it with the parents who desired change but were unable to do so. Figure 2 shows the large gender differences in perception of change among parents with an unequal division at the pandemic’s outset. Among men, 75 percent did not express a desire for change, while the remaining 25 percent who wished for change had contrasting pandemic experiences, with 12.5 percent moving toward equality and 12.5 percent unable to do so. Among mothers, while 43 percent did not express a desire for more equality, the remaining 57 percent were split between 10 percent who were able to achieve more equality and 47 percent who were not. We focus on those participants who expressed a desire for change and why this group experienced divergent pandemic outcomes, including the circumstances that kept most from achieving their desired change. We focus on desire for change because we want to unpack the ways that personal preferences interact with structural constraints and opportunities to either enable or prevent movement toward more egalitarian arrangements.

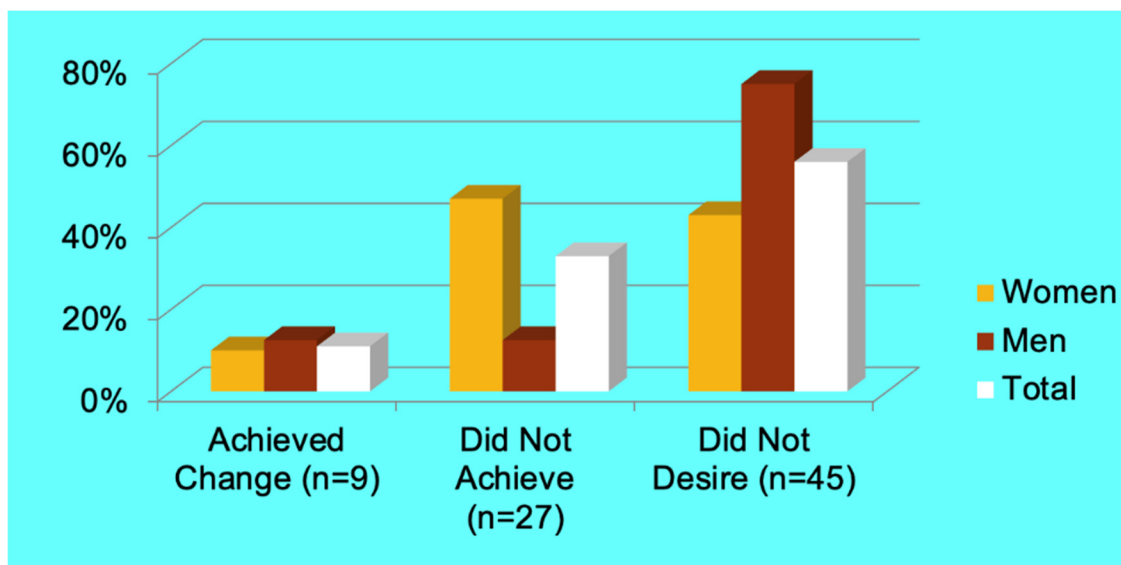


Figure 2. Percent Reporting Change in Division of Labor Among Dual-Earner Parents, by Gender and Pre-Pandemic Desire for Change.

Our sample of parents reported varying responses to the pandemic. A minority of interviewees experienced the crisis as an opportunity to revisit their domestic responsibilities and make substantial changes to achieve more equality. Others expressed the desire for change but were unable to achieve it. And some—including parents who described both equal and unequal arrangements—did not express a desire for change and therefore did not seek it.

Given the disruptions they faced, it is worth noting that many parents maintained an arrangement they found satisfying. Among those with unequal arrangements who reported a desire for change, only a minority were able to move toward equality. Amid the loss of childcare supports and the shifts in work locations and schedules, we examine the institutional and cultural factors that prevented so many parents from closing the gap between their preferences and their domestic division and compare their experiences with those of parents who were able to close that gap and move toward more equal sharing.

4.1. Parents Who Desired Change and Achieved It

Although only 11 percent ($N = 9$) of parents reported movement toward more domestic equality, their experiences reveal the ways that institutional supports can combine with cultural beliefs to make this possible. Among the five women and four men who were able to enact a preference for more equal sharing, structural changes such as a shift to working at home or on a different work schedule, combined with cultural factors such as beliefs in the value of equality, prompted more domestic sharing.

First, the pandemic brought about various changes in the organization of paid labor. Many parents began to work from home; some reduced their work hours or lost their jobs entirely; some took time off work; and some experienced changes to workplace flexibility. Christine, a thirty-year-old woman with three young children, described how her husband's shift from on-site to remote work sparked changes to his participation at home. Pete had previously worked in-person and full time at a real estate company, but according to Christine, the pandemic led him to be at home 90% of the time. Christine lamented that before the pandemic began, Pete enjoyed career advancement while she sacrificed both career opportunities and the respect of her peers in order to take care of their home and children:

As soon as I saw that it became a little bit more of Pete really going off and satisfying a lot of things professionally, that was really hard for me. I was like 'Oh, my goodness, I don't have my masters, I'm now viewed as a stay-at-home mom, my opinion doesn't matter,

nobody wants to listen to me, I have no letters after the end of my name'. I didn't like it, so that was a huge conversation with Pete, and I said, 'I don't want this life, I don't want to be putting dinner on the table at four, I'm going to need so much more than this'.

Christine felt stuck at home, frustrated by her domestic load, and unable to pursue professional growth. Prior to the pandemic, she had agreed to take a part-time job in human resources to accommodate her children's caregiving needs. The pandemic prompted a re-evaluation of her commitments to both work and caregiving: "I feel like our perspective did change for the positive in some way [during the pandemic]. I think that a lot of our relationships were strengthened because we could take different opportunities in the household". The pandemic allowed her to reevaluate the family's allocation of both domestic and paid work and strengthened her desire for change.

In addition to the change in Christine's outlook, her husband's shift to remote work made it possible for him to take on additional domestic tasks. Working from home afforded him the chance to assume responsibility for tasks that had been assigned to Christine, which sparked her appreciation but also reinforced her sense that more equal sharing was better for everyone: "I like it. I like seeing how much I don't have to do things. I like being able to look at a pile of dishes and know that, no, those aren't mine. Somebody else is gonna get those today". This combination of Pete's shift to remote work and Christine's views about who should do what at home converged to create a reinforcing process that allowed her to seek and achieve a more satisfying division of domestic labor. The structural changes enabled the couple to change their division of labor to more fully embody their egalitarian beliefs, or at least Christine's egalitarian beliefs.

In other cases, a woman's shift to remote work set the stage for change. Iris, a forty-year-old woman who lives with her husband and one young child in urban Missouri, was working in-person before the pandemic began at a management job at a local hospital that took up about 60 h of her week. In March 2020, her job became entirely remote and required fewer hours. Her husband was already working mostly at home as a freelancer who would occasionally work part-time selling baseball cards. Despite the fact that Iris held a demanding on-site job and her husband worked at home part time, Iris did the vast majority of childcare, cooking, and cleaning prior to the pandemic. It is not surprising that this arrangement created tension and began to impact her mental health: "It was overwhelming at times. . . There was definitely some resentment that built up. . . And we went to counseling, actually, because of that. Because it was very much a situation where I sort of felt like I was doing everything."

Iris's dissatisfaction led her to push for more equal sharing well before the pandemic began. Yet her efforts were met with little success until the pandemic required her to work at home and for fewer hours. Iris explained that being home made it possible to make specific requests that shifted tasks that had been invisible to her husband:

What has changed is that now that I'm here, I can actually say, 'Hey, honey, can you unload the dishwasher?' Or 'Honey, can you load the dishwasher?' Or, you know, 'Can you go do this?' Or, 'Hey, we need stuff from the store? Here's the list, can you go take care of this?' As opposed to me going to the grocery store, like on my way home from work. Because there is no 'on my way home from work' anymore. . . And so in that way, he is probably doing, we're probably more equitable in terms of the division of labor.

Iris's presence at home allowed her to initiate more meaningful conversations about their division of labor that prompted her husband to do tasks she would otherwise have done. Although a desire for more equality preceded the pandemic, the change in her work arrangements made it possible to enforce them. It may seem counterintuitive that a mother's shift to working at home would spark more domestic equality, but Iris's experience demonstrates the power of unexpected changes in the organization of work to spark a re-evaluation of ongoing practices and make it possible to enact new ones. Their division of labor moved toward a more egalitarian one, but Iris clearly continued to shoulder more of the overall load, especially the cognitive work of keeping track of all of the tasks that need to be done.

Sean and his wife Morgan were also able to move toward a more egalitarian division of labor during the pandemic. As of November of 2021, Sean was working on his PhD and was a student housing director at a public university in the South. He told us Morgan was working as the Dean of Undergraduates at a liberal arts college close by. Although Sean and Morgan had to work from home for a few months at the beginning of the pandemic, both went back to in-person work by September of 2020. Interestingly, Morgan's work hours *increased* during the pandemic, as she was promoted in August of 2021. She would often be in her office late into the evening, leaving Sean to take care of their thirteen-month-old daughter.

Prior to the pandemic, Morgan had done much of their household tasks. Sean described their division of labor pre-pandemic: "My wife did all of the cooking. It's not because we believe in gender, like stereotypical gender roles or gender norms. It's a skill-based decision. I admit that I could cook, but she is good. . .but so she used to do cleaning". He then described how Morgan would do most of their laundry pre-pandemic because she wanted it done in a particular way. Sean understood their division to be based on preferences and skills.

However, when the pandemic hit and Morgan began to work longer hours and be away from their home more frequently, Sean took on what he described as the majority of childcare and household tasks. He mentioned: "I do 97 percent of the cooking now. . .so I took over all the cooking and then I took over a lot of dishes because if she is feeding the child and providing for the child, then the least I can do is clean up the mess. . .I had to start stepping up a little bit more". Sean's reaction underscores how institutional and ideological factors work in concert to create change. His reported egalitarian beliefs are put into action following significant changes to Morgan's work arrangements and time availability. Parents' time availability may only become a factor in their division of labor if their gender ideology is egalitarian.

In some cases, changes in work-family organization sparked changes in beliefs and preferences. In other cases, pandemic changes made it easier to enact pre-existing preferences. Whatever the time order, a shift in the practical organization of work allowed these parents to enact a set of practices that more closely resembled their desires. As the following cases demonstrate, these moves toward more egalitarian practices may not have occurred without this convergence of organizational and ideological factors.

4.2. Parents Who Desired Change but Were "Stuck" in Pre-Existing Arrangements

In contrast to the couples who were able to shrink—if not close—their gender gap, most of those who desired change (33 percent of our sample) did not report a shift to more egalitarian practices. These parents, which include 23 mothers and 4 fathers, also experienced noteworthy changes in their daily routines, including shifting to remote work, losing access to childcare, and shifting from time with friends and co-workers to time with family members. Yet, even when dramatic changes in the organization of their daily lives provided a major stimulus toward reconsidering taken-for-granted patterns and practices, in many families these changes did not prompt shifts in the allocation of domestic responsibilities. Despite an expressed desire, the persistence of beliefs that women should be primarily responsible for caregiving and housework prevented them from taking advantage of the opportunities that being home together created.

As Figure 2 shows, there are large gender differences in the interviewees who desired but did not achieve change. Many more women expressed dissatisfaction with their division of household labor prior to the pandemic, routinely describing their domestic responsibilities as overwhelming and exhausting. While 57 percent of the women in our sample claimed some dissatisfaction, only 25 percent of the men expressed a desire for change. In addition, women and men tended to desire different types of change. Women largely wished for more help from their partners with cooking, cleaning, childcare, and/or mental labor. Some explicitly expressed their frustration that being a woman left

them disproportionately responsible. Shirley, a 52-year-old mother of two, described her frustration that her husband did not know how to complete basic household chores:

I hate it. I tell my daughter, 'Just do me a favor. When you find somebody that you're going to get married, make sure you pick somebody who's lived on their own for a while'. Because my husband did not. Went right from his parents' house to us being together, and so his mom did all the laundry, his mom did all the cooking. His mom would do the clothes, as soon as it came out.

Men, in contrast, were more likely to cite the wish to change their work schedules and responsibilities so that they could spend more time with their children. Mark, a 43-year-old father of one, focused on the limitations imposed by his employer, emphasizing that more time off from work would allow him additional time with his child. "I don't mind doing those things [household chores], but it wouldn't hurt to spend some more time with my son. I usually get home so late I'm pretty much too tired to do anything. . . I would like to have little more time off. But that's not practical".

Kevin described a similar desire. Kevin continued to work as an administrator at a small college, while his wife, Melanie, took a year off from work to supervise their children's remote schooling. While Kevin did not view this arrangement as ideal, he concluded that his need to work and the on-site requirements of his job put more equal sharing at home out of reach: "With three of them learning, we had one who was hybrid, two that were remote all the time. So it was a lot to figure out. And then I had to go to the office. It could have been different if I was working from home, she could have worked. But, yeah, didn't make sense". He focused on the constraints of his job rather than his own or his wife's frustration with how they decided to divide paid and domestic work. The structure of Kevin's job meant no other arrangements "made sense" even if he and Melanie preferred more egalitarian caregiving.

Dissatisfied women, in contrast, were more likely to view their partner's lack of initiative as the major barrier to enacting change. Many described partners who were willing to complete tasks, but only if asked—a dynamic that left them feeling wholly responsible for ensuring that domestic tasks were completed even if someone else was doing it. Although they wished for more domestic equality, they concluded that the mental labor required to delegate tasks would only add to their responsibilities while remaining largely invisible and unappreciated. Given this expectation, they were reluctant to ask for a more equal division even when the demands of childcare rose and both parents were spending more time at home.

Janelle and Tony exemplify the challenge of achieving more domestic sharing even when changes in work locations and schedules made that a more viable option. With six children, ranging in age from 11 to 25, Janelle and Tony grappled with caring for a large family while they both worked at schools in the same district. When their jobs became remote, their daily practices and schedules changed dramatically. Yet Janelle continued to do considerably more of the domestic tasks even though they were both at home with their younger children. Especially when it came to childcare, Tony resisted taking the initiative. As she put it: "If I say just make some eggs for the kids, he'll do it. He's willing to, but he doesn't do it voluntarily". Describing an organized meal planning system in which she lists recipes and ingredients on a dry erase board on her refrigerator, she explained how this effort illustrated Tony's resistance to performing any of the mental labor: "If I'm ever going to be gone, I can tell my husband just look on the fridge and if there's something easy that you want to make, or otherwise he'll make pancakes". Despite identical shifts in their work arrangements, neither Janelle nor Tony considered new ways of organizing their domestic lives. They continued to view Janelle as primarily responsible for running their household and Tony as the fallback when she was not available. While structural conditions changed, their pre-existing views and interpersonal dynamics inhibited change.

Connie, a 33-year-old mother of a six-year-old, also expressed a desire for her husband to take more initiative at home. As she declared: "I always wanted him to take more initiative. Instead of me having to tell him what to do, I felt like he should be able to see

what he needed to do". If Connie felt this way prior to the pandemic, when she was not employed, it intensified when she began a job as a classroom aide in November of 2020. From the beginning of the pandemic, her husband, Kenny, worked long hours as a hospital lab scientist, but he had recently shifted to a new job with a less grueling schedule at another hospital. While these changes left Connie with less time at home, she nevertheless retained the lion's share of the domestic burden and remained responsible for delegating any tasks she was unable to perform. Connie thus explained that "I just tell him what to do, and he doesn't always love having that 'to do' list", and then described her response to this as "Well, then do something so I wouldn't have to give it to you!" Contextual conditions may have made it both fairer and more feasible to move toward the more equal arrangement Connie preferred, but her husband, Kenny, drew on persisting beliefs about gender differences to resist changes at home even amid major changes in their obligations outside the home.

It is worth noting that Connie and Kenny share similarities with Sean and Morgan, a couple who experienced a shift to more egalitarian arrangements. In both cases, the wives experienced an increase in their working hours. The difference is that Sean had never been invested in continuing a gendered division of labor and was prepared to step up when Morgan's work hours increased, while Connie believed Kenny had never been bothered by his lack of initiative and was thus not prepared to change. Already existing egalitarian views left Sean and Morgan ready for change, while Kenny's disinterest left Connie stuck in an arrangement she found frustrating and unfair.

Renee also pointed to the difficulty of changing assumptions about who should be responsible, especially for the mental labor. Having grown up with a mother who did not work at a paid job and a father who rarely participated in household labor, she had made clear throughout her marriage that she did not wish to recreate this dynamic. Yet despite this desire, her husband left her responsible for doing the mental planning—a responsibility that Renee believed had prevented her from fully realizing her ideals:

He operates on the philosophy of "you just have to ask". Yeah, but I've been thinking about all the stuff that I have to ask. Like, you're not even using mental capacity to think about it. So I think the mental load is never going to be equal.

Faced with her husband's intransigence, Renee wondered whether to attribute her situation to his personality or to men in general. In either case, her partner's beliefs and assumptions created an insurmountable barrier to achieving more equality: "I don't even want to say men and generalize it, but that's just not how he is. Just as a woman and a man, the mental load will never, never [be] quite equal". In cases like these, women who expressed distaste for traditional gender norms and the pressures they felt to uphold them were nevertheless unable to overcome their partners' ideological assumptions. The mismatch between their own and their partner's views created a dynamic that prevented them from enacting the changes they desired. Even though they valued equality, they made little progress if their partners did not agree.

Ally, a 34-year-old mother of three, expressed frustration that gender provided the framework for dividing unpaid labor with her partner, Ruben: "I despise gender roles, but that's all I know, honestly. It's how I was brought up and I just think somebody has to do it. I maintain the house". When, in March of 2020, Ruben took a leave from his job at a warehouse to avoid contracting COVID-19 and passing it on to their asthmatic daughter, her view did not change. While he did not work for six months, Ally transitioned from a temporary job while finishing her master's degree to a full-time remote position that required additional hours and provided increased income. Despite this reversal in their work commitments, Ally recounted that Ruben did a bit more household labor, such as supervising remote schooling, the overall division of labor remained largely unequal. She attributed the lack of change to beliefs they have both held since childhood. She explained, "It's a cultural thing, too—women cook, clean, take care of the kids, and the man works. I don't like it, but I don't know how to change it, when culturally that's how both of our families are". Amid structural changes in their work responsibilities that increased Ally's

professional responsibilities and prestige, gender still operates at the interactional level here. Ally acknowledges that she and her husband hold cultural beliefs regarding gender that prevent further change regardless of these changes to their structural conditions.

While daily routines of work and childcare may have shifted during the COVID-19 pandemic, most of those who preferred a more equitable division of domestic labor encountered ideological barriers to initiating their desired changes. Unsurprisingly, women were far more likely than men to want to reduce their responsibility for managing and completing domestic tasks. Yet those women whose relationships relied on a traditional view about who should do what in the household were unlikely to reallocate responsibilities for domestic tasks despite any changes that took place in their work and caregiving locations and demands. Even when a woman held an egalitarian view, moreover, her partner's reluctance to endorse this outlook typically prevented a move toward equality. In contrast, among couples who shared a belief in the value of equality, contextual changes that supported a realignment were likely to prompt realignments that would shrink the gender gap.

4.3. Parents Who Did Not Desire Change

Over half (55 percent) of our sample expressed no desire to change the division of domestic labor prior to the outset of the pandemic. And despite the new demands brought on by taking care of children while also working at home, their division remained largely unchanged. Many reported they had not considered the possibility of change, often repeating phrases such as “this is how it has always been done”, “it has always worked for us”, and “that’s just how we are”. While close to half of this group (47 percent) reported they already enjoyed a generally equal arrangement, slightly more than half expressed satisfaction with a clearly unequal division. These parents divided tasks such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning unequally before the pandemic began and continued to do so during it. Although they did not share a similar level of frustration with their peers who wished to close the gender gap, this group reveals how and why gender, rather than the social contexts and demands of work and caregiving, continues to provide the organizing framework that most couples use to allocate domestic labor.

Just as the convergence of cultural *and* institutional factors allowed some parents to move toward a more equal arrangement, this convergence also supported the maintenance of an unequal division for those who preferred to do so. Noah, a thirty-seven-year old man who lives with his partner and three young daughters in suburban Ohio, spoke at length about his belief that a gender-traditional division of working and caregiving is always superior. Although his wife works part time, he was convinced their work schedules and natural inclinations were best suited for an unequal division. Pointing to his work schedule and belief that she was better suited to be the designated caregiver, he described their set-up prior to the pandemic with pride: “My wife is the primary caregiver for my kids. I went to work every day, and she’s at home with them”. When the pandemic upended others’ lives, Noah and his family did not experience similar changes. Even though he began working from home and his wife continued to work part time, she also continued to do the bulk of the childcare and housework. When asked how he felt about the lack of change at home, Noah responded: “I think our house works great the way it is. . . I think everything unfolded the best it could. There’s nothing we could have done differently”.

Noah and his family exemplify the experiences of the many parents who continued to use gender as their organizing framework even when their work and family contexts changed dramatically. He never questioned whether he should be the family breadwinner who needed to give full attention to work and whose career overshadowed his wife’s part-time work. As a result, he saw no need to stray from the path they had created. He adopted an “it is what it is” outlook that encouraged inertia and reinforced his previously held ideas. Like other couples who kept moving along an already established path, the rise of remote work and the loss of childcare support did not overcome deeply entrenched beliefs that a woman should be a household’s primary caregiver and a man its primary

breadwinner. And although we cannot know what his wife would have said, his preference for a traditional gender division of labor echoes reports of men's resistance to change among the women who wished for more equality but were unable to achieve it. In the absence of change in such beliefs, the pandemic did not undermine already established unequal patterns.

Some couples experienced work changes so significant that they could have easily prompted changes at home. Robert, who lived in the suburbs of North Carolina with his wife and children who were three and five years old, mentioned that his wife "has always been the heavy lifter when it comes to those types of responsibilities". When the pandemic hit, both Robert's job in finance and his wife's work as a marketing manager became completely remote. With no timeline for returning to his office, Robert's newfound time at home could have prompted a rearrangement of their household responsibilities, but he was adamant that nothing needed to change. He explained: "The cooking, cleaning, things of that nature, I would say volume increased, but no changes to responsibilities. Overall, you could picture us as not being impacted by COVID in that sense".

Robert acknowledged that the work necessary to maintain the household had increased and his wife's contributions became visible and tangible. And he also recognized that this development might have set the stage for some degree of change. When asked why their household dynamics did not change, Robert replied: "I would say the pandemic was nothing more than us just being in the house together more, a lot more time spent. But in terms of responsibilities, since we're kind of more traditional in those aspects, there was really not much change to how we take care of our household". Although we cannot know how his wife would have replied, more time at home did not change Robert's strongly held (and self-interested) expectations, which relieved him of domestic responsibilities even though they were both now working at home. The resistance to re-examining these beliefs not only prevented behavioral change, but also stifled the emergence of a *desire* to change. His conviction that he was not responsible for the household's domestic tasks overrode the obvious changes in the organization of his family's daily life.

Robert's and Noah's experiences contrast with those couples who were dissatisfied and thus viewed changes in their work and childcare arrangements as an opportunity to make changes to their division of household tasks. Christine, for instance, described how her husband, Pete, took on additional tasks once he began working remotely and she expressed dissatisfaction with their division of labor. For Robert, a similar shift to remote work did not prompt a change to his household participation because his traditional views rendered such structural changes irrelevant. As a group, the parents who did not desire change and therefore did not seek it exemplify the power of *inertia*. When traditional beliefs about women's responsibility for domestic labor were deeply entrenched, past domestic patterns shaped future arrangements. As Diego, a forty-six-year-old man with two young children, declared: "It's worked for me. I've dealt with [this situation] for a good part of ten years now".

It would be misleading, however, to presume that only men held tightly to such traditional views. Although close to 30 percent of fathers saw no reason to change their household's clear gender division, a similar percentage of mothers agreed. Talulah, a 29-year-old woman with a one-year-old baby, stated: "We just kind of have kept on that trajectory". And Anna, a 38-year-old woman with two teenage children, echoed the same sentiment: "That's kind of just always how we've done it". Similarly, Caroline, a 31-year-old woman with two young children, declared: "Yeah, we've never had an active conversation. It just fell into place". These comments reflect the degree to which an unequal division of domestic work remains the path of least resistance for different-sex couples. Having chosen (whether consciously or unconsciously) to hold one person—in our sample, invariably a woman—responsible for most of the domestic work, it is difficult to veer from this path. For some, this happened without discussion.

5. Discussion

Scholars have debated whether institutional conditions or cultural attitudes are primarily responsible for the persistence of gender inequality in unpaid domestic labor. The significant changes to work arrangements and the routines of daily life that occurred during the COVID-19 pandemic provided an opportunity to examine this question. Drawing on [Risman's \(2018\)](#) framework and interviews with 81 employed parents in heterosexual partnerships, we find that pandemic-driven disruptions in work and childcare routines were not sufficient to prompt movement toward more equality. Yet when these parents held egalitarian aspirations prior to the outset of the pandemic and could count on a partner who supported this view, they were able to take advantage of changes in workplace and childcare arrangements to create a more egalitarian division, at least in the short run.

Participants who reported no desire for change and then proceeded to maintain their established patterns included those who described a generally equal division of caregiving and breadwinning prior to the pandemic as well as those who described a more traditional one. Parents in both groups pointed to a general acceptance of their pre-pandemic arrangements to explain a process of inertia. Although a notable minority of this group reported maintaining an egalitarian routine (which pandemic-related shifts such as remote work supported), the majority reaffirmed a pre-existing traditional one. Despite any pandemic-induced contextual changes in their work locations and childcare demands, these parents faced few incentives to re-examine or change daily domestic patterns they deemed satisfactory.

Among the group who expressed a desire for change but were unable to achieve it, when deeply entrenched beliefs that women should be responsible for domestic labor were held by at least one partner—most often men—the ability of the other partner to achieve desired change remained limited. Confronted with their partner's entrenched gendered expectations, women in these relationships noted that their partners lacked the "initiative" to take on additional tasks and expressed frustration that their continuing responsibility for mental labor (such as delegating tasks) remained invisible even when their partners were spending more time at home. Despite pandemic-related shifts in the organization of paid work and childcare, these parents were unable to veer away from arrangements that took root long before the pandemic began. These thwarted desires underscore the ways entrenched beliefs and expectations, whether shared by both members of a partnership or only one, contribute to the stickiness of gender inequality. Movement toward more egalitarian sharing thus depended on the alignment between partners' agreement that equality is a personal as well as a social good and social contexts that could facilitate an enactment of this shared outlook.

It is important, nevertheless, to recognize the couples who valued equal sharing at the outset of the pandemic and were able to take advantage of their new conditions to achieve it. Changes in their work locations and pressures allowed those who already held egalitarian outlooks to move toward more egalitarian practices. Using the language provided by a "gender structure" framework, macro-level changes in social institutions did not by themselves push couples toward more egalitarian domestic arrangements, but they did allow couples who wished to do so to put those beliefs into practice. Institutional change alone cannot guarantee interactional change, but it facilitates change for those who desire it. Although most couples did not report large changes in their domestic lives, a minority did shift toward more equality in response to the institutional rearrangements wrought by the pandemic. While we differentiate institutional and cultural factors in our analysis, these factors interact. Over the long run, cultural beliefs can prompt shifts in institutions, which in turn may gradually exert their influence on cultural norms.

In addition to demonstrating the important role institutional change can play for those who hope to enact a more egalitarian partnership, it is also worth noting that over a third of our interviewees either reported an egalitarian division at the outset or reported achieving a more equitable one as the pandemic proceeded. Among this group, less than a quarter were women. While a minority, this group is not inconsequential. Its existence points to

the ways that the gender revolution that began in the later decades of the 20th century may have stalled, but it has not reversed. The post-pandemic rebound in women's labor force participation to pre-pandemic levels testifies to the continuing power of this still developing and undeniably consequential social shift.

The diverse pathways traversed by our interviewees reveal a set of factors that prompted some couples to move toward more equality even as most did not. Since professionals and salaried workers were more likely to work remotely for prolonged periods, they are also more likely to exemplify the ways that more flexible work arrangements influence domestic practices. Service, manual, and manufacturing workers were far less likely to possess options, such as working from home or controlling their work schedules, that facilitated change for those who wished it, but they still experienced changes to their working lives. However, the changes they reported—including lay-offs, changes to on-site work hours, and changes in employee benefits—were more likely to be unwelcome.

In any case, almost everyone reported a reduction in responsibilities outside the home, whether that included less time at work or in social activities. The rise of remote work was thus only one aspect of the changes to daily life that occurred during the pandemic. Given the cessation of leisure activities outside one's household, time at home with family members increased for almost everyone. It would thus be reasonable to expect that spending more time together would encourage couples to seek more equal sharing. Yet this did not occur for most interviewees, regardless of their occupation or socioeconomic status. And while some participants attributed their views on gender to their local cultural milieu, including living or being raised in a particular region of the country, we did not find regional differences.

6. Conclusions

We have shown that conceptualizing gender as a social structure that incorporates both institutional and cultural factors helps explain how gender inequality is perpetuated and potentially changed. If the societal goal is to decrease gender inequality, it is critical to understand the conditions under which it is likely to change or be reproduced. We found that major shifts in the organization of work and caregiving institutions—in this case including the rise of remote work and the move of schooling and caregiving into the home—did not by themselves reduce inequality in domestic labor for most parents. Only among those heterosexual couples where our interviewee reported that both members of the partnership held egalitarian aspirations before the pandemic did institutional changes lead to more egalitarian relationships. Put differently, institutional change matters because it allows those who desire more egalitarian partnerships to create them.

The COVID-19 pandemic has offered a unique opportunity to examine the impact of large-scale changes to the organization of everyday life, in this case consisting of stay-at-home mandates and the reconfigurations in childcare, jobs, and social lives. While some scholars have found gender inequality in domestic labor increased during the pandemic due to increased demands on parents, our inquiry has sought to understand the implications of institutional shifts for families by examining what conditions enabled more egalitarian arrangements for some couples (if not for most). Insights from this analysis provide greater clarity about the combination of factors that allow for the emergence of more equitable arrangements in intimate relationships. Further research needs to investigate the shape of these patterns for diverse populations and especially for diverse racial, ethnic, class, and non-heteronormative groups.

In addition to underscoring much that others have reported about the persistence of gender inequality during the pandemic (Calarco et al. 2020, 2021; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Yavorsky et al. 2021), our analysis contributes to the robust literature that seeks to explain why gender inequality in the cognitive and behavioral aspects of unpaid labor (Daminger 2020; Lachance-Grzela and Bouchard 2010) persists even as women continue to build strong ties to paid work. Like others, we find that only a minority report shifts toward a more egalitarian division (Carlson et al. 2020). Yet we also offer an analysis of how movement

toward more domestic equality can take place under the right conditions. Our findings suggest that reducing gender inequality within families depends on transforming the organization of work and caregiving, but parents' shared commitment to egalitarian views is equally important. Social change toward gender equality thus depends on the convergence of institutional forms and ideological commitments that reinforce egalitarian principles.

Our findings provide some direction about where to focus both research and policy efforts designed to facilitate more egalitarian arrangements. Despite the prevalence of unequal divisions of labor, we found notable diversity among today's heterosexual parents, with approximately a third upholding egalitarian views. This diversity points to the need for change on two fronts. In addition to pinpointing the institutional changes that will allow couples with egalitarian views to enact their preferences, we also need to better understand how cultural beliefs about the sources of gender inequality are constructed and maintained. In the absence of ideological support for equality, the effectiveness of institutional changes will be limited. Many of our participants, including many who found their domestic arrangement dissatisfying, reported feeling stuck in a pattern they had never questioned, or if they did, felt unable to change. In contrast, among the minority whose egalitarian preferences had been thwarted by institutional obstacles, pandemic-induced changes, especially in their work circumstances, allowed them to move closer to their preferred practices. The experiences of those who created more egalitarian partnerships point to the combination of institutional and cultural shifts that could enlarge the options for everyone. In a post-pandemic world, expanding the option to create an egalitarian partnership will depend on increasing institutional flexibility and encouraging cultural shifts that the pandemic brought to the fore.

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Appendix A

Gender	N	%
Men	32	40%
Women	49	60%
Race		
White	55	68%
Black	8	10%
Latinx	11	14%
Asian	1	1%
Other	5	6%
No answer	1	1%

Education			
	Less than HS	0	0%
	HS degree	6	7%
	Some College	25	31%
	College Grad	24	30%
	Graduate Degree	25	31%
	No answer	1	1%
Pop. Density			
	Urban	12	15%
	Suburban	31	38%
	Town	5	6%
	Small City	21	26%
	Rural	12	15%
Income			
	Under \$20,000	1	1%
	\$20–50,000	10	12%
	\$50–75,000	17	21%
	\$75–100,000	13	16%
	\$100–150,000	21	26%
	More than \$150,000	19	23%
	No answer	1	1%

Note

- ¹ We include part-time as well as full-time workers in our analysis for several reasons. First, the degree of work participation changed for many interviewees throughout the pandemic, including many who experienced moments when they worked part time and moments when they worked full time. Second, since we focus on participants' desire for change, such desires occurred among people who were committed to varying amounts of working time. Accordingly, we did not limit our analysis to only those who were employed full time. Instead, it is important to understand whether and why workers with varying degrees of labor force attachment desire a more egalitarian division of labor. By including participants with the full range of employment arrangements, we more accurately capture the sheer variability among couples in their desire and ability to accomplish change during the pandemic.

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