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Negotiating the "Labor of Love": How Resources, Time, and Gender Shape Parenting Agreements

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Negotiating the “Labor of Love”: How Resources, Time, and Gender Shape Parenting Agreements

Marlena Studer*

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Having it all” is an aspiration of many young women today. With American women’s educational attainment quickly beginning to surpass that of men, many young women desire to combine meaningful work *and* motherhood. However, a woman’s success in a professional career is fundamentally dependent upon negotiating a division of labor at home that supports her paid work. If she takes on the majority of work at home in addition to a full-time professional career, she will carry a burden known as the “second shift”¹ that may have negative implications for her professional work or home life.

Research findings from a recently published meta-analytic review verify what many couples are troubled by: that marital satisfaction declines with the introduction of children.² Women are more likely than men to express dissatisfaction with marriage after children arrive, partly due to the fact that their employment and earnings decline while their unpaid work increases because they are more likely to carry the burden of primary parenting.³ Thus, when women anticipate becoming mothers, they are more likely to have positive outcomes if they clearly identify their goals in the areas of work and family life, and negotiate agreements with their spouses that are consistent with those goals.⁴

The following questions beg to be addressed: How clearly are pregnant women able to articulate their work and family goals? And how is this related to carving out parenting responsibilities with their spouses? Because it is so critical to women’s trajectory in their work and family roles, I am interested in examining how married couples approach the decision-making process regarding the responsibilities they will take on as they anticipate becoming parents. This research seeks to illustrate how married couples “do

1. See generally ARLIE HOCHSCHILD & ANNE MACHUNG, *THE SECOND SHIFT: WORKING PARENTS AND THE REVOLUTION AT HOME* (1989).

2. Jean M. Twenge, W. Keith Campbell & Craig A. Foster, *Parenthood & Marital Satisfaction: A Meta-Analytic Review*, 65 *J.MARRIAGE & FAM.* 574, 575-76 (2003).

3. See BETTY CARTER & JOAN K. PETERS, *LOVE, HONOR & NEGOTIATE: BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS THAT LAST A LIFETIME* (1996).

4. See *id.* at 582 (stating that setting reasonable expectations will help alleviate the burden of childcare and might improve a woman’s satisfaction with her marriage).

gender"—how they negotiate the roles that fundamentally define their gender relations.

II. CHANGES IN WOMEN'S WORK AND FAMILY ROLES

Changes in middle-class women's attitudes and behaviors have defined a whole new set of "choices" for married women's private and public roles over the last century. Census data demonstrates that paid employment amongst married women with children under the age of three has risen dramatically for Whites, African-Americans, and Hispanics over the last quarter century.⁵ The most dramatic changes are amongst white women with young children, who have more than doubled their labor force participation rates from thirty percent to sixty-two percent from 1975 to 1998.⁶

Though women's involvement in the labor force and participation in work outside of the household is rapidly increasing, the responsibilities for unpaid work within the household still rest primarily on women's shoulders.⁷ Research from the National Survey of Families and Households shows some changes in housework amongst married couples from 1965 to 1995, though a gender gap still remains.⁸ The average housework hours spent by married women have declined from 30 to 17.5 hours per week, while hours spent by men have increased from 4.9 to 10.⁹ Even with these slight changes, a gender gap still remains. Women still do the majority of household work, including preparing meals, washing dishes, cleaning up after meals, cleaning the house, laundry, ironing, mending, outdoor/other household maintenance, paying bills, keeping financial records, and car maintenance and repair.¹⁰ While the Bianchi study shows that women continue to do the majority of household tasks, the most labor intensive and time consuming task of all—childcare—is not even included in the study.

When childcare is added as a factor in the division of household labor, the gender gap is further enlarged. Women report doing a much higher percentage of childcare than men, which is not only adding a great

5. U.S. DEPT. OF LAB., BUREAU OF LAB. STATISTICS, NEWS, EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS OF FAMILIES IN 2005 (April 27, 2006), <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/fameec.pdf>.

6. *Id.*

7. See generally Suzanne M. Bianchi et al., *Is Anyone Doing the Housework? Trends in the Gender Division of Household Labor*, 79 SOC. F. 191 (2000).

8. *Id.* at 207.

9. *Id.* at 206.

10. *Id.* at 209-15.

responsibility, but also adds to time spent on overall household tasks.¹¹ Data from the Australian Study “Negotiating the Life Course: Gender, Mobility and Career Trajectories” verifies that childcare is a much more labor intensive job—women report many more hours per week spent on childcare than on housework.¹² This explains why the introduction of children into a marriage tilts the marriage more strongly in the direction of a traditional gender division of labor.

III. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

There are three theories often cited in the academic literature that explain why women do most of the unpaid work in the home (childcare and household tasks).¹³ Explanation for gender differences in household work are said to be based on time availability, relative resources, and “doing gender.”¹⁴

The time availability theory states that couples rationally allocate who does what in the household according to time availability.¹⁵ Because women seem to have the most flexible schedules, and fewer constraints imposed by work roles and responsibilities, women tend to have more availability to take responsibility for the majority of the household tasks.

A second theory posits that women are the primary housekeepers due to relative resources.¹⁶ This theory states that couples allocation of who does what is a reflection of relative resources; in other words, the person with greater resources has greater influence over the distribution of household labor.¹⁷ These resources include both the tangible, such as earning potential and education, and the intangible, such as attractiveness and confidence.¹⁸ In a marriage, the couple may choose to “invest” in the building of one individual’s resources over the other.¹⁹ That is, they may choose to invest time and money in the educational or occupational advancement of one spouse with the expectation that the specialized spouse will provide financial support to the family in the future.²⁰ Although the higher-earning spouse is viewed by both as a “family asset,” their resources serve them personally in negotiations within the family.²¹

11. Janeen Baxter, *The Joys and Justice of Housework*, 34 *Soc.* 609, 618 (2000).

12. *Id.*

13. Bianchi, *supra* note 8, at 193.

14. *Id.*

15. *Id.*

16. *Id.* at 193-94.

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.* at 194.

20. *Id.*

21. *See id.*

The phrase coined by Joan Williams, "He who earns it, Owns it" expresses how the courts do not treat earning potential as an asset to be divided equally in family law cases.²² Women tend to have lower relative resources in a marriage than men, and this gender gap tends to expand when women have children because women invest more of their time in their children while men invest more of their time in building their earning potential.²³ Thus, after married women have children, their influence over decisions concerning familial responsibilities may decline as the gender gap in earnings grows.

A third theory points to the household division of labor as a result of couples "doing gender."²⁴ By "doing gender" these couples reinforce the ideas that housework defines and expresses gender relations, and that gendered activities have a cultural and social meaning in playing roles successfully.²⁵ These gendered activities have a different representation for each gender, and there are societal expectations for certain activities to be carried out by a certain gender. If this is not done properly it is usually looked down upon by societal norms.²⁶ Society expects certain activities, such as cleaning the house, managing the couple's assets, and providing cookies for a bake sale, to be carried out by a certain spouse, and certain spouses perform these activities to solidify the public representation of their gender.²⁷ Julie Brines' research finds that men's contributions to housework do not increase when he is more economically dependent on his wife—perhaps to avoid threatening his sense of masculinity.²⁸ According to this theory, in order to "do gender," women are expected to do the majority of the housework to express their feminine role in the marriage.²⁹

IV. RESEARCH QUESTION

When a couple awaits the birth of a baby, they are embarking on one of the most critical transitions of their marital partnership. They are at a formative stage in writing their own family scripts. Decisions they make at

22. JOAN WILLIAMS, UNBENDING GENDER: WHY FAMILY AND WORK CONFLICT AND WHAT TO DO ABOUT IT 120-23 (2000).

23. See Bianchi, *supra* note 8, at 194.

24. *Id.*

25. *Id.* at 194-95.

26. See *id.* at 195 (explaining that cleanliness is of a home is often considered a reflection on a woman's competence).

27. See *id.*

28. Julie Brines, *Economic Dependency, Gender, and the Division of Labor at Home*, 100 AM. J. SOC. 652, 682 (1994).

29. See *id.*

this creative moment in time will have an impact on many of their future goals and options. The purpose of this research is to focus on this point in a couple's life together to gather insights into decision-making. The question that drives this research is: How do couples *negotiate* who does the "labor of love?" And how do men and women define, construct, and play out their parenting roles? I would like to examine the extent to which the division of household labor is determined on the basis of time availability, relative resources, or just "doing gender."

A. *Methods*

This research was conducted by interviewing a non-random sample of fifty couples expecting a baby.³⁰ A face-to-face interview of the couples was conducted at their homes. The interview began with a videotaped decision-making task regarding the division of childcare responsibilities. The couple was instructed to decide on who would serve as the "primary parent" for every hour of every day for a "typical" week during the time the child is an infant, toddler, and school-age, along with scheduling who should take responsibility for typical childhood tasks. This videotaped session was followed by a two-part interview (conducted separately for husbands and wives) consisting of a face-to-face interview and a written questionnaire. Husbands and wives were asked about their educational and work histories, and their future work and family goals. In addition to reporting on current socioeconomic standing, couples were asked to project what they would ideally like to be doing (professionally and in family roles) and what they would like to be earning five and ten years in the future.

B. *Findings*

1. Traditionalism of Family Patterns

Couples were divided into four categories based on the wife's paid work responsibilities before the baby's birth and their goals for family and work roles after the baby's arrival. The four categories consisted of traditional,³¹ dual-worker,³² egalitarian,³³ and non-traditional³⁴ family patterns.

30. The research for this study is on file with the author.

31. Families were defined as traditional if the wife's short term goals included staying at home full time when the children are young and the husband's primary goals included remaining the primary breadwinner for the family. There were ten couples in the study that met these criteria (three of which were new parents-to-be and the other seven were experienced parents).

32. Families were defined as dual-worker if the wife's short and long term goals included working full or part time when the child is young and also serving as the child's primary caretaker. In other words, wives made plans to be working, but anticipated that their role as earner was secondary to that of their husbands, and that their responsibility for childcare was greater than that of their

2. Relative Resources and Traditionalism of Family Patterns

To evaluate the tenets of the theory on relative resources, I compared couples' traditionalism (family typology) with relative income (wives' income as a percent of their husbands' both current income and projected ten year income). The findings are illustrated on Table 1 showing that wives' and husbands' self-defined goals for family roles are significantly associated with relative resources. Relative resources are clearly related to family roles, which define power relations. What this data also shows is that women's choices to take primary roles in parenting are significantly related to shaping the gender gap in relative resources (by supporting the future roles each will play in their marriage).

husbands. Husbands' short and long term goals included working full time and earning the primary income for the family and being the secondary caregiver for the child. In the dual-worker category, the sample size was nineteen couples, ten of which were new parents-to-be, and the other nine were experienced parents.

33. To be defined as an egalitarian couple, both the wife's and husband's short and long term goals must include working full time, sharing the responsibility for earning the family income, and sharing the responsibility for doing the childcare with the other spouse. There were twelve couples who met these criteria, eight of which were new parents-to-be and the other four being experienced parents.

34. Non-traditional couples were defined by a reversal of roles from the traditional pattern. Wives' short and long term goals were to work full time when the children are young and earn the primary income for the family while sharing the childcare responsibilities with their husbands. In addition, the husbands' short and long term goals included reducing work load while the children are young, supporting the wife's role as the primary earner and either sharing in childcare responsibilities or acting as primary caretaker for the child. There were five couples who met these criteria, all of which were new parents-to-be.

FIGURE 1

Relative Income By Family Type

Wife's Income as % of Husbands

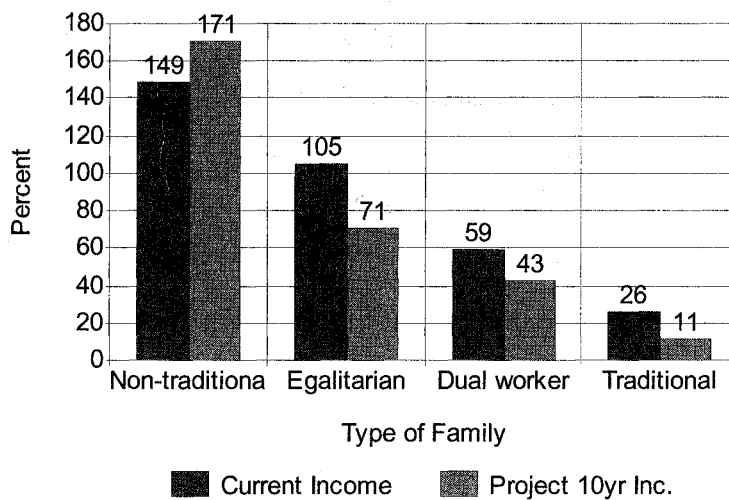


TABLE 1

Comparison of Means by category: Wives as a percent of husbands
(current income and ten year projected income)

Typology		Current Income Ratio (Wife/Husband)	Projected Income Ratio (Wife/Husband) 10 yrs ahead
Traditional	Mean	.20	.11
	(n)	(20)	(20)
	s.d.	.36	.22
Dual Worker	Mean	.55	.51
	(n)	(38)	(34)
	s.d.	.64	.43
Egalitarian	Mean	1.00	1.02
	(n)	(28)	(28)
	s.d.	.97	1.46
Non-Traditional	Mean	1.47	1.69
	(n)	(10)	(10)
	s.d.	1.10	.33
Total	Mean	.70	.70
	(n)	(96)	(92)
	s.d.	.85	.97

p-value = <.01, significant

Figure 1 (along with corresponding data shown in Table 1) illustrates that women who express a desire to be traditional "stay-at-home" moms have significantly lower current income relative to their husbands, while those who desire full-time careers have higher income relative to their husbands. Wives' projected income (what they say they ideally hope to earn in ten years) is even more likely to relate to traditionalism in family roles. Women who intend to be traditional stay-at-home moms set significantly lower goals for earning income ten years down the road from women who are anticipating equal parenting or being primary earners for the family.

3. Gender Role Attitudes and Traditionalism of Family Patterns

Because of the importance of attitudes in shaping gender identities and choices, I evaluated how husbands' and wives' reported attitudes about gender roles in the family were related to their choices of family and work roles. Gender role attitudes were measured by level of agreement or disagreement with the following statements on a self-administered questionnaire:

a. *Non-traditionalism in gender role attitudes is shown by agreement with the following items:*

- A married couple should divide evenly the household tasks of washing dishes, preparing meals, and doing the laundry.
- If both spouses work full-time, both of their career plans should be considered equally in determining where they will live.
- Spouses should share the responsibility for earning a living for the household.
- A husband should not accept a job he wants in a distant city, if it means that his wife's career prospects will be seriously diminished.

b. *Traditionalism in gender role attitudes is shown by agreement with the following items:*

- It is better if the man works to support the household and the woman takes care of the home.
- Even if a wife works, her husband should have major responsibility for the couple's financial support.
- When there are small children in the home, it is better for the mother not to work.

When I compared the level of agreement with non-traditional gender roles for both men and women with couples' traditionalism (family typology), the results show that there is a strong correlation between attitudes and decision-making about family roles and responsibilities (See Table 2). Also, within families on the ends of the continuum (Non-traditional and Traditional), women's attitudes are more strongly correlated with the type of gender relations they express a preference for while men's attitudes are not significantly predictive of the traditionalism of family structure. Clearly, women's gender identities and attitudes play a defining role in how couples construct their family responsibilities.

FIGURE 2

GENDER ROLE ATTITUDES AND TRADITIONALISM OF FAMILY STRUCTURE

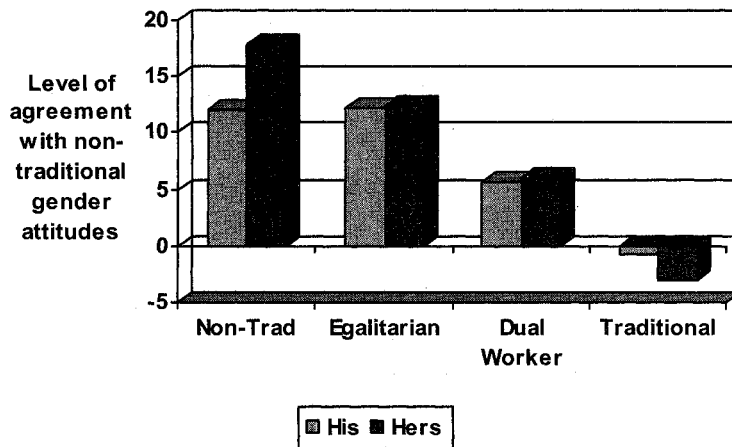


TABLE 2

CHI-SQUARE TESTS

Respondent's gender		Value	df	Significance (1-sided test)
Male	Pearson Chi-Square (n)	26.65 (50)	24	<.16
Female	Pearson Chi-Square (n)	40.90 (50)	24	<.01

p-value (male) = < .16, not significant

p-value (female) = < .01, significant

C. *Conversational Analysis of Partnering Negotiations*

One of the unique aspects of this study was the opportunity to hear couples engage in a negotiation about childcare responsibility. Couples were given an empty spreadsheet with a time schedule for a generic week. They were asked to fill in every hour of every day in that week of 24/7 hourly time-slots with an "M" (for Mom) or "D" (for Dad) to represent their agreement about which of them would take responsibility for being the primary parent (either "on-call" or "in-person") during each hour. Interviews were videotaped so that the verbal and non-verbal behavior of couples could be evaluated as it reflected levels of deference, compromise, and other negotiating behaviors.³⁵ The roles of the couples were further illustrated in their language and verbal cues.

1. A Traditional Couple Expecting Their First Child

An excerpt from a discussion by a traditional couple without children follows below. As soon as she found out she was pregnant, she made plans to reduce her hours of involvement in her graduate education program. Simultaneously, he gladly accepted the responsibility for being the primary breadwinner. In this example, she defines the household roles and he agrees:

She: *Since I'll be home with the baby basically I'd say all the mornings and afternoons will be me, 'cuz you'll be at work.*

35. The videotapes are on file with the author.

He: Mm-hmm.

She: . . . and maybe starting around 7 you could *help out* with the diapering and things like that.

He: Mm-hmm.

She: OK, basically until 11 . . . and then it would *primarily be me* again. . . because that's only fair since I'll be home all day the next day.

In this excerpt, the wife frames her availability to take responsibility for childcare as part of her identity as a full-time mom. Her comments suggest that she is already engaging in "gatekeeping" behavior by defining herself as the one who has primary responsibility and expertise at parenting, while he is expected to "help out."³⁶ In addition, gender differences in relative resources are shaped by the role the husband takes as sole income earner, while his wife anticipates being economically dependent.³⁷ This couple is "doing gender"³⁸ by constructing and playing roles that are consistent with their traditional gender identities.

2. A Traditional Couple With Children

The following excerpt is from a traditional couple who already has children. She was caring for the children full time while he worked full time. The language and verbal cues in the following conversation suggest that he defines expectations and she defers on the construction of family roles.

He: (advising her to write "M" in time schedule) That's going to be primarily you . . . Put it ["M"] down 'til at least 5:00 because I'll be gone until then . . .

She: Until 5? Or through 5?

36. R. WILLIAM BETCHER AND WILLIAM S. POLLACK, IN A TIME OF FALLEN HEROES: THE RECREATION OF MASCULINITY 236-38 (1993).

37. *Id.* at 237.

38. See Bianchi, *supra* note 8, at 194; see also *supra* notes 24-29 and accompanying text.

He: . . . because I'll be home by 5, but . . .

She: That covers this whole area (referring to all daytime hours).

He: That should, I hope.

She: After that, it's kind of mixed, isn't it?

He: It is, and I was going to say, though, in the evening and at night, *if the baby wakes up, it's probably going to need to be fed, so you'll be taking care of it then.*

She: Yup.

He: So, I don't know . . . from about 11 'til 6 it's going to be you.

She: Yup. 11-6. Yeah. All the way across.

In this conversation, time is mentioned as defining availability to shape responsibilities and division of tasks. Relative resources are mentioned and articulated in that she defers to his availability and supports his primary earner role. Finally, "doing gender" is shown through the nature of their language; he defines time, availability, and expectations. She agrees, defers, and asks for approval.

3. A Dual-Working Couple With Children: She Accepts the Second Shift

In this next conversational excerpt from a dual-working couple, the wife volunteers (perhaps begrudgingly) for the "second shift"³⁹ of being a primary parent in addition to an income earner. This couple is composed of two "working parents," both of whom have full-time jobs and similar levels of educational and professional experience. However, his income is higher than hers (and the expectations he has for future income are dramatically higher than her expectations for future earnings). Whether it is due to his greater current earnings or his desire to invest in his future earnings, he is a much stronger negotiator in delegating the responsibility for childcare to her, and she supports his earning potential by accepting the childcare responsibilities:

39. See generally HOCHSCHILD & MACHUNG, *supra* note 1.

She: All right, well I think I'm going to be doing all the feedings.

He: Right, for the first year . . . I mean, I'll be helping out when I can, but you're going to be primary, right?

She: Right.

He: (writing "M" throughout the schedule, chuckling) I like how it's shaping up so far.

She: (sighs) Ahh.

The husband mentioned earlier in this couple's conversation (not shown in this excerpt) that time conflicts made him unavailable for other childcare and household work. Ultimately, this couple "does gender" by articulating their expectations and agreement with gender roles that give her more responsibility for care-taking roles and him more opportunity to invest time in his earning potential.

In another conversational excerpt from the same dual-worker couple shown above, the husband claims ignorance of parenting and the couple uses humor to mask the negotiation that leaves him with reduced childcare responsibilities:

She: Even these days, when you'd be watching [current child], there were times when you'd be calling me at work screaming (both laugh).

He: (mock screams) Help me, come home! . . . I'm not good with the baby stage.

This couple's excerpt shows that he defers to her "expertise" at mothering. In turn, she enables him to maintain a distant role in parenting and continues to carry the primary burden. In this conversation, "doing gender" is represented through his dependency on her to play the role of caretaker and her willingness to invest in his role as greater income producer.

4. A Dual-Working Couple Without Children

The following conversation is another excerpt from a dual-worker couple, in which the wife currently works as a full-time nurse while the husband completes a medical residency. Like the dual-working couple shown above, both husband and wife participate in defining her role as primary parent and invest in his role as future primary earner. Although she works full-time, she demonstrates through her language and positioning that she considers her work and time less important than his. Thus, she volunteers for the second shift and supports his career trajectory.

He: On these three days, it's basically going to have to be you.

She: Yeah, but don't you have class then, too?

He: Oh yeah.

She: So we should say 'til 8, do ya think?

He: Yeah, probably . . . And here I'm on call so this has to be all the way through (referring to "M" as primary parent)

She: Right . . . (laughs) and then all day here.

He: It's all you.

In this excerpt, time availability is accepted by both spouses as a defining factor for the division of household labor. Both spouses are focused on his future earning potential, and they articulate how they will construct their lives around these expectations. When he says "It's all you," essentially he is defining his expectations of her role as primary parent by referring to the fact that she should fill in "M" throughout the time schedule. This couple also shows the ways that they "do gender" by him defining his expectations while she supports and asks for approval. Even her language patterns show her deference to him, with statements that end in questions and request approval or agreement.

5. An Egalitarian Couple

An egalitarian couple is unique in their strong articulation of equal sharing in their attitudes and values. In this conversation from an egalitarian couple, their negotiations begin with their first child:

She: We'll just do 50-50

He: I didn't know you were going to make me clean up the room.

She: (laughing) I'm not *making* you do anything, but I think equal chore sharing is only fair.

He: This is like our wedding day.

It can be inferred that the time factor is equal in this relationship through the couple's language concerning their similar work schedules. The relative resources for both spouses are closer to equal and appear to be the context of expecting more equal gender relations. In terms of "doing gender," her challenge to ask for equal sharing creates some tension because it challenges traditional gender expectations, and he uses humor to soften the negotiations.

6. An Egalitarian Couple: Clearly Stating Expectations

In the following conversation from an egalitarian couple, expectations of sharing responsibilities equally are clearly verbalized:

She: Clean up, we'll do 50-50.

He: It's gonna have to be.

She: We do housework 50-50, too.

He: Yeah, that's fine.

She: Bathe . . .

He: 50-50.

In an unusually direct articulation of expectations, this couple defines and agrees upon their ideals. Their attitudinal agreement is so strong and clearly articulated that they do not allow time availability or relative resources to tilt the balance. This is a case which illustrates how a shared set

of goals might help to overturn other dynamics in the typical patterns of “doing gender.” This conversation also shows that an egalitarian couple may be able to negotiate the division of household labor in an equal manner.

7. A Non-traditional Couple: He Volunteers to Reverse Roles

Non-traditional couples follow a reversal from the traditional pattern of roles in the division of household labor. In the following conversation excerpt, the husband volunteers to take on the role as primary caretaker for the child:

She: You’re gonna do all night again? Both nights?

He: Sure . . .

She: That’s a lot of nights for you.

He: You wanna take some nights?

She: . . . do you think that’s fair?

He: (laughs) Sure.

She: I could take at least one.

Through this excerpt, it is shown that the husband in this relationship wants to do the majority of the housework and childcare knowing that his wife is the primary earner. Later in this conversation, the husband also articulates his support for his wife’s career and his plans to help her with her work in the future. Their expectations of relative resources being tilted in a non-traditional manner are also a defining characteristic in their negotiations. This couple “does gender” differently in that he expresses comfort with non-traditional roles and offers to take more than half of the responsibility with infant care.

D. Family Traditionalism and Negotiation of Infant Care

The outcomes of parenting negotiations are shown in Figure 3, where the ratios of wives’ to husbands’ agreed-upon hours of infant care are compared by family type. Interestingly, even non-traditional couples do not reverse the sex ratio in their expectations of sharing infant care; they merely approach equality with an average one-to-one ratio of primary parenting

responsibilities. In other words, wives plan to serve as primary parent in caring for their infant equally with their husbands.

FIGURE 3

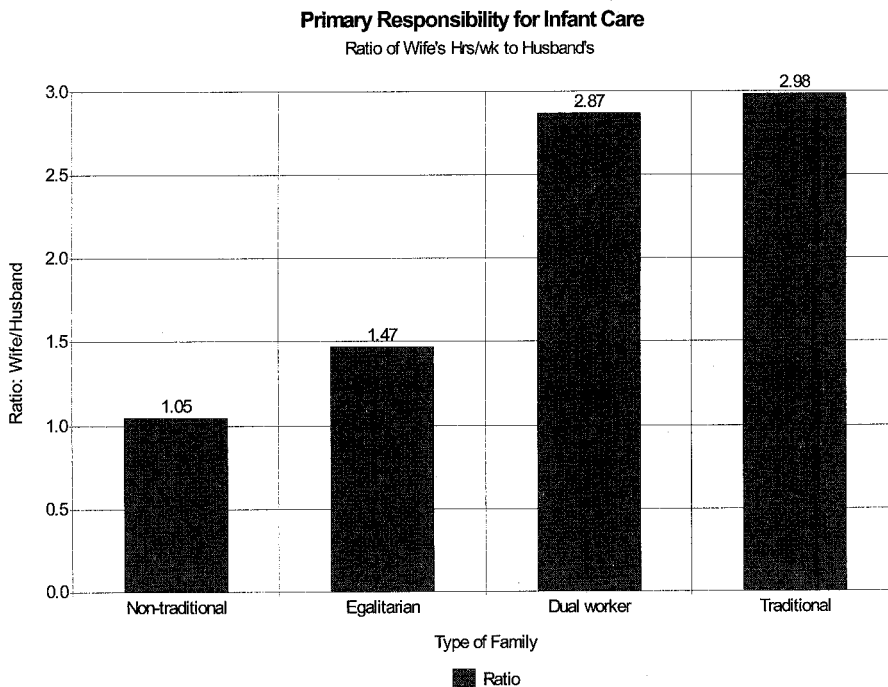


TABLE 3

CHI-SQUARE TESTS

p-value <.001, significant

	Value	df	Significance (1-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	241.51(a)	117	.00
N of Valid Cases	98		

Amongst egalitarian couples, the ratio jumps to 1.47—a wife agrees to spend at least an hour and a half for every hour her husband spends as the

primary parent. However, that ratio doubles again amongst dual-working and traditional couples. Most surprisingly, women who earn an income outside the home and express an expectation of being the primary parent are negotiating an outcome in infant care responsibilities with their husbands that is not very different from women who are not planning to earn an income outside the home. Both groups agree to spend nearly three hours with their infants for every hour their husband spends as primary parent.

V. CONCLUSION

Negotiating parenting responsibilities is a critical process for couples. It affects the trajectory of their work and family roles in a way that may support couples' goals and expectations, or it can introduce frustration and stress to work or family life. If couples are able to clearly articulate and shape family roles that are in agreement with their work goals, they are more likely to be satisfied with marriage, work, and family life.

My findings suggest that traditional and dual-working couples actively construct and maintain more traditional gender differences in work and parenting roles. Simultaneously, egalitarian and non-traditional couples are more likely to articulate their commitment to values emphasizing "equal sharing" in their discussions about parenting.

Women who plan to take on the "second shift" of being an income earner as well as primary parent (dual-working spouses) actually play a role in shaping their double burden in the way they negotiate with their spouse.⁴⁰ They appear to be least able to articulate goals for sharing parenting responsibilities, and are frequently found using a language of deference and conciliation during negotiation and decision-making.⁴¹ Surprisingly, the outcomes of their negotiations over sharing parenting responsibilities are quite similar to outcomes of traditional couples. Women planning to engage in paid work while simultaneously serving as primary parent agree to take a similar number of hours of primary parenting responsibility in relation to their spouses as women planning to be at home full time.

Cahn suggests that women may hold on to responsibility for caretaking because it is a source of family and social power for women who do not perceive other sources of power being available to them.⁴² In addition, some women may fear that their children will not be well cared for if they do not take primary responsibility for parenting.⁴³ My findings suggest that women who take on the "second shift" have significantly less resources than their

40. See *supra* text accompanying note 39.

41. See *id.*

42. Naomi Cahn, *The Power of Caretaking*, 12 YALE J. LAW & FEMINISM, 177, 222 (2000).

43. *Id.* at 205.

spouses, do not perceive having an earning potential equal to their spouses, and do not make plans to invest in their earning potential.

In comparison, non-traditional couples actively negotiate agreements to share parenting equally during their expected child's infancy. An important distinction between the non-traditional couples and more traditional ones is that non-traditional wives are currently earning more than their spouses and have goals of earning significantly more in the future. Thus, my findings support the theoretical view that a woman's higher earnings and resources relative to her spouse give her an alternative source of power in negotiations. Outcomes of negotiations are strongly correlated with a woman's current access to resources and how she envisions investing in her earning potential. My research suggests that relative resources not only define family roles, but may also play an increasingly larger role as the gap between men and women's earning potential widens. I found that women who had lower current earnings than their spouses were generally less likely to negotiate equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. However, regardless of their current earnings, women who had expectations of higher future earning potential than their spouses were much more likely to negotiate equal sharing of parenting responsibilities. Aspirations of future earnings appear to be very important in how women negotiate sharing the "labor of love" with their spouses.

In addition to resources, time availability has reciprocal influences on work and family. In other words, it *influences* and *is influenced by* work roles and the strength of commitment to goals. Men and women shape their work to fit their expectations for family roles and vice versa.

Finally, couples shape their family lives by unwittingly "doing gender"—acting in ways that reinforce their expectations about masculinity, femininity, and family responsibilities. "Doing gender" often defines the process, tools, language, and outcome of the negotiation process regarding the division of household labor and parenting responsibilities. Thus, even in non-traditional families, women do not appear to relinquish their responsibilities as mothers, but merely expect to share the responsibilities equally with their spouses.

My research confirms that all three major theoretical perspectives contribute toward explaining why women retain the majority of responsibility for household work. In other words, time availability, relative resources, and "doing gender" each play a role in the process and outcome of negotiations over the division of childcare responsibility. Women who have traditionally been burdened by the stress of the "second shift" will benefit from an awareness of the role of resources in shaping the division of household responsibilities. Men and women will both benefit from clearly

articulating their expectations for work and family roles and negotiating win-win outcomes that strengthen marital satisfaction, and ultimately, family relationships.