

Why Emotion Work Matters: Sex, Gender, and the Division of Household Labor

Attempting to explain why biological sex remains the primary predictor of household labor allocation, gender theorists have suggested that husbands and wives perform family work in ways that facilitate culturally appropriate constructions of gender. To date, however, researchers have yet to consider the theoretical and empirical significance of emotion work in their studies of the gendered division of household labor. Using survey data from 335 employed, married parents, I examine the relative influence of economic resources, time constraints, gender ideology, sex, and gender on the performance of housework, child care, and emotion work. Results indicate that gender construction, not sex, predicts the performance of emotion work and that this performance reflects a key difference in men's and women's gendered constructions of self.

Socioemotional behavior, or activity that maintains the relations among family members, has been considered an essential component of marriage and family life since at least the mid-20th century (Levenger, 1964). Although the functionalist role theory that produced the gendered symbolism of "instrumental" and "expressive" tasks has been broadly criticized (Osmond & Thorne, 1993), family scholars continue to confront the legacy of inequality signified by this initial characterization. This legacy remains evi-

dent in the well-established finding that women, even when they are employed full time, perform the bulk of routine housework and child care (Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996).

Researchers attempting to explain this persistent gendered effect have generated promising new insights into the relationship between household labor allocation and the construction of culturally appropriate gender identities (Berk, 1985; Ferree, 1990). This gender constructionist approach has drawn attention to the symbolic importance of family work for how people do gender and to the potential for variation in the gendered meanings associated with doing each type of household task (Twiggs, McQuillan, & Ferree, 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). To date, however, this line of research has yet to fully examine how the *emotional* components of family work may advance social scientific understanding of the relationship between gender and the division of household labor.

This study extends the ongoing theoretical and empirical analysis of gender and household labor by examining the performance of emotion work. Building on Erickson (1993), I show that expanding the traditional operationalization of family work (i.e., housework and child care) to include emotion work provides a unique avenue of support for the view that the division of household labor varies according to culturally based constructions of gender rather than on the basis of biological sex. In so doing, this study reinforces Coltrane's (2000, p. 1210) observation that investigators' continued failure to include emotion work in their studies of household labor constitutes a "major shortcoming" in family research.

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THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The Case for "Emotion Work"

Levenger's (1964) initial argument for including socioemotional behavior in studies of marriage was grounded in the social psychology of groups (Parsons & Bales, 1955; Thibaut & Kelley, 1959). From the standpoint of marital partners, socioemotional behaviors were differentiated from other, more instrumental, family tasks in that they could not be delegated to persons outside the group (Levenger). Levenger's research provided evidence for the importance of emotional expressivity by showing that it was more strongly related to marital satisfaction than was instrumental task completion.

Perhaps because Parsonian functionalism dominated family scholarship during the mid-20th century, few other researchers examined socioemotional behavior as a requisite task performed by marital partners. Instead, its performance, along with that of housework and child care, came to be seen as a "natural" expression of women's love for their husbands and children. As the women's movement gained momentum in the late 1960s and early 1970s, however, assumptions about women's roles began to break down and their marital and familial behaviors began to be reconceptualized as work.

In her classic essay on "invisible work," Daniels (1987) explained that applying the concept of work only to those activities for which people are paid renders much of women's activities invisible. Although Oakley (1974) and others had made this case for housework and child care over a decade earlier, Daniels was among the first to make such a claim for the performance of emotion work. Daniels argued that because the work people perform provides a clue to their status in society, it constitutes a central pathway to identity. She further illustrated how the recognition of an activity as work tends to infuse it with a certain level of "moral force and dignity" (Daniels, 1987, p. 404). In that women perform more family work than men, failing to characterize these activities as work serves to invalidate women's essential contributions to social and community life and, in this way, contributes to the reproduction of gender inequality.

The preceding argument has largely been accepted when applied to housework and child-care activities. It has been more difficult, however, to see comforting, encouraging, and

facilitating interaction as characterizing a work role. Such difficulty may be because these activities are closely associated with women's "natural" or "feminine" tendencies and with culturally based assumptions about love and intimate family relations (DeVault, 1991; Erickson, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989). Women themselves often discount the time and effort involved in caring work not only because it is expected to be a spontaneous expression of love but also because the illusion of effortlessness is part of doing the work well (Hochschild, 1983).

Researchers have applied many different terms to the behaviors associated with the provision of emotional support (e.g., emotional sustenance, socioemotional role, expressive role, therapeutic role). As these terms suggest, behavior that makes others feel cared for and loved has been characterized as an aspect of marital intimacy and support rather than as a specific form of family work. In this paper, however, I follow my earlier work in using the concept of *emotion work* to refer to activities that are concerned with the enhancement of others' emotional well-being and with the provision of emotional support (Erickson, 1993). This conceptualization of emotion work captures people's attempts to effectively manage the emotional climate within a relationship. It is therefore consistent with Levenger's use of the term *socioemotional behavior* and, more recently, Thoits's (1996) concept of *interpersonal emotion-management*. These activities require time, effort, and skill. They reflect "the warm and caring aspects of the construction and maintenance of interpersonal relations...what Hochschild (1979) calls *the positive aspects of 'emotion work'* [emphasis added]..." (Daniels, 1987, p. 409).

In the sociology of emotions literature, emotion work has traditionally been defined as the "management of feeling to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 7). Although this description references the self-management of emotion, Hochschild (1979, p. 562) also stated that emotion work can be done "by the self upon others" (also see Thoits, 1996). The idea that husbands and wives may have to work at caring and intimacy contradicts what many may wish to believe about love and marriage. The deeper the bond between people, however, the more the emotion work is likely to take place (Hochschild,

1983, p. 68). Offering encouragement, showing your appreciation, listening closely to what someone has to say, and expressing empathy with another person's feelings (even when they are not shared)—day after day, year after year—represent emotion work of the highest order.

Given Western assumptions about the close relationship between gender and emotion (Lutz, 1988), examining the performance of emotion work as a distinct type of family work task may yield new insights into how the construction of masculine and feminine conceptions of self is connected to the reproduction of a gendered division of household labor (Twiggs et al., 1999). Because women are held accountable for the performance of emotion work in ways that men are not (Daniels, 1987), explicit recognition of this work also may prove helpful for developing a more complete understanding of gender construction.

Predicting the Allocation of Family Work

Over the years, family scholars have adopted different theoretical approaches to predicting the allocation of family work (i.e., the routine activities that feed, clothe, shelter, and care for both children and adults; Coltrane, 2000, p. 1209). One approach has been to suggest that a combination of relative individual resources, time constraints, and gender ideology could account for much of the variation in who performs domestic labor. Although each of these factors has been shown to account for some of this variation, being female has remained the primary predictor of family work performance (Coltrane; Shelton & John, 1996). Another, more recent, approach has sought to understand the gendered meanings associated with performing particular family work tasks. Referred to here as *gender construction theory*, this second perspective suggests that spouses actively construct the allocation of family work tasks in ways that affirm and reproduce their gendered conceptions of self (Ferree, 1991; Twiggs et al., 1999). In what follows, I outline each theory's basic ideas and the hypotheses emerging from them.

Relative resources. Drawing on human capital theory (Becker, 1981) and the resource-bargaining theories of family power (Blood & Wolfe, 1960), the relative resource model proposes that marital partners negotiate the allocation of

household labor using the basic principles of economic exchange. In that resource theorists do not ground their view of economic dependency in culturally based assumptions about gender-appropriate behavior, some have described the theory as "gender neutral" (Brines, 1994; Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). According to this perspective, the spouse who brings more resources to the marital relationship will be able to use these resources to "buy out" of the performance of household labor. When resources are operationalized in terms of relative income, the expected relationship can be cast in terms of the economic dependency of one spouse on another, regardless of the spouse's biological sex (Brines). Based on relative resource theory,

Hypotheses 1a–c: The greater one's economic dependence, the more (1a) housework, (1b) child care, and (1c) emotion work one will perform.

Time constraints. The time constraints approach theorizes that people who spend more time in paid work have less time to spend performing household labor (Artis & Pavalko, 2003; Coverman, 1985). Both husbands and wives are therefore expected to perform family work to the extent that other demands on their time allow them to do so. When operationalized in terms of the number of hours spent in paid employment, studies consistently show that men's and women's paid work hours are negatively related to their performance of housework time. These studies also indicate that women continue to perform the majority of family work regardless of the number of hours they worked outside the home (Kamo, 1991; Shelton & John, 1996). Drawing on the time constraints approach,

Hypotheses 2a–c: The more hours one spends in paid employment, the less (2a) housework, (2b) child care, and (2c) emotion work one will perform.

Gender ideology. Emerging out of socialization theories, the model of gender ideology posits an inverse relationship between traditional attitudes and an egalitarian division of family work (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Kamo, 1988). The perspective assumes that a more traditional ideology reinforces a division of labor in the home in which women perform more of the work traditionally associated with being female (i.e., housework, child care, and emotion work).

Although this relationship has tended to hold more strongly for men than for women (Presser, 1994; Shelton & John, 1996), studies have generally provided support for the expectation that holding a traditional ideology will be associated with wives performing more family work.

Hypotheses 3a–b: The more traditional one's gender ideology, the more (3a) housework and (3b) child care wives will perform.

Hypothesis 3c: The more traditional men's gender ideology, the less emotion work they will perform.

Hypothesis 3d: The more traditional women's gender ideology, the more emotion work they will perform.

Gender construction theory. Women continue to perform the bulk of routine housework and child care and to feel more responsible than men for this work regardless of income, time constraints, or ideology (Shelton & John, 1996; Spain & Bianchi, 1996). Attempting to account for this empirical fact, feminist scholars have suggested that the rise in women's paid employment has not led to a similar increase in men's domestic labor because the nature and meaning of women's involvement in family work is different from men's (DeVault, 1991; Thompson & Walker, 1989). This theory suggests that the models described above do not adequately account for variations in the division of household labor because they fail to consider the gendered meanings husbands and wives derive from the performance of family work. Gender construction theorists also differentiate their approach from those focusing on gender ideology by rejecting the assumption that people are socialized into fixed "gender roles." Instead, gender theorists emphasize that the ideologies surrounding family work are themselves a contested terrain that reflects the ongoing display and reproduction of gender (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000).

Researchers using gender construction theory propose that the gendered allocation of household labor persists because it signals the extent to which husbands and wives have constructed gender "appropriately." Differences in the performance of household labor are thus reflective of gendered norms of accountability (Twiggs et al., 1999; West & Zimmerman, 1987). As long as women are held (and hold themselves) accountable for family work in ways that men

are (and do) not, the performance of this work will remain more central to how women construct a gendered sense of self and, in so doing, their behavior will continue to reflect such (self-) expectations (Sanchez & Thomson, 1997). In applying this approach, researchers have established a theoretically consistent rationale for observed variations in the division of household labor (Maret & Finlay, 1984; Twiggs et al., 1999) and have demonstrated how the performance of gender-appropriate family work helps individuals construct what it means to be a "real" mother or father (Berk, 1985; DeVault, 1991; Hochschild, 1989).

Gender construction theory also provides an explanation for why most women do not perceive the unequal distribution of family work to be unfair (Mederer, 1993). As feminist scholars have noted, many women view the performance of domestic labor as both a demonstration of their love and concern for family members and as a crucial means of identity construction (Ferree, 1991; Shelton & John, 1996). The emotional symbolism underlying family work is thus intricately related to how we conceive of ourselves as men and women. Because femininity continues to be conceptualized in ways that emphasize care, concern, and connection to others (Spence, 1984), one would expect that women would be more likely than men to define family work as reflecting such expressivity and to behave in ways that are consistent with such meanings (DeVault, 1991; Mederer, 1993). In this case, performing family work is less likely to be experienced as an alienating burden than as an expression of authentic self-hood.

The importance people place on behaving consistently with identity meanings suggests another compelling theoretical reason why the gendered division of household labor remains intact. Although gender theorists have not traditionally framed it in this way, further theoretical justification for their approach can be found within identity theory (Burke, 1991; Stryker, 2003). Identity theorists posit that individuals seek to construct and maintain interactional settings that lead to the confirmation of their identities or self-meanings (Burke & Cast, 1997). Thus, women may perform more family work because such performance enables them to behave consistently with their generally more feminine and expressive gender identities. As Kroska (1997) points out, however, although the basic premises of identity theory are

consistent with those of the gender constructionist approach, researchers have yet to specify and empirically examine the conditions under which characteristics traditionally associated with femininity and masculinity might influence the performance of family work over and above those of biological sex.

In their examinations of the gendered meanings of household tasks, Twiggs et al. (1999) and Kroska (2003) illustrate how such meanings can influence the allocation of household labor. Combining gender construction theory with an analysis of task differentiation, Twiggs et al. use a series of quantitative techniques to identify the household tasks that carry particularly strong gendered meanings. Their findings affirm the importance of differentiating among family work tasks and suggest that certain forms of domestic labor have particularly meaningful implications for gendered selves. Kroska's (2003) analysis of the affective meanings attached to child care, baby care, and household chores further demonstrates that men and women apply different meanings to these tasks and that such differences may be linked to differences in work patterns and gendered norms of accountability.

The study reported below contributes to this emerging body of research on *meanings* by shifting attention from gendered tasks to gendered selves. To what extent might one's construction of self in "masculine" or "feminine" terms be associated with the performance of particular types of family work? The formulation of this question builds on the work of symbolic interactionists and gender constructionists, who suggest that the same behavior (or task performance) should take on different meanings depending on the implications it holds for a person's self-conception. For example, individuals who construct their gendered selves in more "feminine" terms would be more likely to attribute positive meanings (e.g., loving care, concern, nurturance) to family work tasks that traditionally have been performed by women. As a result, these individuals would be expected to perform such tasks more frequently. To find support for the theoretical assumptions underlying this approach, the positive relationship between characteristics associated with femininity and the performance of traditionally female tasks should hold even when controlling for the effect of biological sex. One final question of interest concerns whether men's and

women's construction of gender will affect their performance of housework, child care, and emotion work in similar ways. Kroska (2003) and Twiggs et al. (1999) suggest that various family work tasks tend to carry different meanings for women and men. These previous studies, however, did not include emotion work in their conceptualization of domestic labor. In their study of marital satisfaction, Stevens, Kiger, and Riley (2001) included emotion work and found that such work was more equally distributed between husbands and wives than types of family work tasks. What has yet to be examined, however, is the extent to which husbands' and wives' construction of gender affects their family work performance and the variance in effects by the type of family work performed.

To summarize, gender construction theory provides a theoretical basis for examining the extent to which gender is associated with the performance of family work. For example, the more feminine characteristics men and women apply to themselves, the more household labor they are expected to perform. Support for gender construction theory requires that the performance of family work be related to these gendered constructions more strongly than to relative resources, time constraints, gender ideology, and biological sex. Each of the following hypotheses is tested using the total sample and controlling for biological sex. On the basis of the findings reported by Twiggs et al. (1999) and Kroska (2003), I further explore each of these relationships separately for men and women.

Hypotheses 4a–c: Constructing gender in masculine terms will be negatively related to the performance of (4a) housework, (4b) child care, and (4c) emotion work.

Hypotheses 5a–c: Constructing gender in feminine terms will be positively related to the performance of (5a) housework, (5b) child care, and (5c) emotion work.

Other potential influences. In addition to the theoretically motivated relationships noted above, several other sociodemographic variables are typically entered into statistical models as controls. These variables include *age*, *education*, *number of children*, and *presence of preschool children*. Previous research suggests that age tends to be negatively related to men's performance of family work, whereas the effect for women is often curvilinear (Brines, 1994).

Brines found, however, that when economic dependency was included in the model, the effect for women became linear. In some studies, *education* has been considered an indicator of power or resources. More frequently, however, researchers have used absolute measures of men's and women's educational attainment to capture a cultural or attitudinal effect (Shelton & John, 1996). This approach has been supported by results indicating that wives with more education tend to hold more egalitarian ideologies and to perform less housework, whereas highly educated men tend to do more (Brines). The *number of children* in a family and the *presence of preschool children* may also influence the allocation of family work. Considered an indicator of time constraints, having more children tends to increase the amount of household labor performed. This tends to be particularly true for families with preschool children (Berk, 1985; Shelton & John).

METHOD

Data and Sample

The data presented here are part of a larger study designed to investigate the relationships among work, family, and health among a community-based sample of dual-earner, married parents. Two waves of data were collected between the summer of 1995 and the spring of 1996. Potential respondents were initially contacted through the random sampling of residential phone numbers within one county of northeastern Ohio. Respondents were screened to ensure that they fit the demographic profile of dual-earner parents with at least one child under the age of 18 living at home. During the first wave of data collection, questionnaires were mailed to the 780 respondents who fit this profile. Five hundred and twenty-two respondents returned the questionnaire for a response rate of 67%. This response rate is comparable to other mailed surveys, which tend to have a completion rate between 60% and 75% (Dillman, 1991). Ninety-two percent of the first-wave respondents indicated that they would be willing to participate in the second phase of the research. Consistent with the goals of the larger study, a second questionnaire was mailed to 480 respondents approximately 6–9 months later. Three hundred and fifty-four surveys were returned, representing a 74% response rate.

Because questions regarding gender construction were asked only in the follow-up questionnaire, the data used in this study are limited to the second wave of responses. It should also be noted that the responses were obtained from men and women who were not married to one another. Thus, the data presented do *not* represent couple data.

The final sample consisted of the 335 married parents who were employed full time and for whom complete data were available. Women comprised 67% ($n = 225$) of the final sample. Ninety-three percent of the sample was White. The age of the respondents ranged from 23 to 68 years, with a mean of 39 years. The respondents' educational levels ranged from having some high school experience to having a graduate degree, with the average having had some college. The average respondent had been married 14.23 years and reported having approximately two children. Thirty-five percent of the respondents indicated that they had at least one preschool child living in the home. Compared to the county from which it was drawn, this sample tends to underrepresent Black men and overrepresent those with more education. As a result, caution should be used in generalizing the results to the population of employed, married parents as a whole.

Measures

Dependent variables. Housework and child care were measured using a modified version of a five-point scale created by Blumstein and Schwartz (1983). These measures assessed the relative amount that each task was performed by respondents and their spouses. Each item in the housework and child-care measures was scaled so that the higher (or more positive) the score, the more housework wives were perceived as performing ($-2 = \text{husband does more}$, $0 = \text{spouses perform equally}$, $2 = \text{wife does more}$). For men, more positive scores indicate a perception that their wives were doing more family work relative to their own contribution. For women, higher or more positive scores indicate a view that they themselves were performing more family work relative to their husbands.

Wives' housework assessed the relative amount that husbands and wives performed five routine household tasks: grocery shopping, cooking meals, doing dishes, doing the laundry,

and cleaning the bathroom (Cronbach's $\alpha = .66$). This list is consistent with what others have identified as the most nondiscretionary, routine, and time-consuming household tasks; these tasks also tend to be the most highly gendered (Barnett & Rivers, 1996; Coltrane, 2000). *Child care* referred to activities specifically involving children. This scale included the following nine items: keeping track of children's activities, taking children to appointments, attending children's performances or games, driving children to activities, chaperoning children's activities, playing with the children, disciplining children, supervising the children's homework, and reading to or with the children ($\alpha = .83$).

Emotion work was the final measure of family work used in this study. Consistent with Erickson (1993), *respondent's emotion work* was measured using a summated scale of eight items measuring the amount of emotion work performed by the respondent ($\alpha = .85$). Respondents were asked to indicate on a five-point scale how often in the past 6 months they engaged in each of the following behaviors: initiated talking things over, listened closely to their spouse's innermost thoughts and feelings, recognized the importance of their spouse's feelings even if they did not share them, offered encouragement, respected the spouse's point of view, did favors for the spouse without being asked, let the spouse know they were appreciated, and listened closely to what the spouse wanted to say about his or her day (1 = *never*, 3 = *sometimes*, 5 = *very often*).

Independent variables. Relative resource theory proposes that the spouse who brings relatively more resources (e.g., income) to the relationship will perform less family work. Following Brines (1994), *economic dependency* was used to measure husbands' and wives' relative economic resources. It was operationalized using a version of Brines's formula (p. 668):

$$\frac{(\text{Spouse's Income} - \text{Respondent's Income})}{(\text{Spouse's Income} + \text{Respondent's Income})}$$

The values produced by this formula ranged from $-.73$ to $.76$. A score of 0 indicates that the spouses contributed equally to the family's income. Negative scores indicate the economic dependence of the spouse on the respondent. By contrast, the more positive a score, the more

economically dependent the respondent is on the spouse.

The time constraints model suggests that the allocation of family work depends on the amount of time each spouse is available to do the work. Among dual-earner couples, availability depends on the amount of time husbands and wives spend in paid employment. *Respondent's labor force hours* and *spouse's labor force hours* measured the number of hours per week each spent in the paid labor force. Respondent's hours ranged from 10 to 70 hours per week, whereas spouse's hours were reported by respondents to range from 10 to 80 hours per week.

The gender ideology explanation assumes that spouses will view the performance of family work differently depending upon their attitudes about gendered family roles. Those holding a more traditional gender ideology are more likely to view family work as being "appropriately" performed by women. *Traditional gender ideology* was measured by asking respondents to indicate the extent of their agreement with five statements reflecting traditional attitudes toward gendered roles (1 = *strongly disagree* to 4 = *strongly agree*). The statements were as follows: A wife's wages should only be supplementary to the main wages earned by the husband; spouses should share the responsibility of earning a living for the household (reverse coded); when there are small children in the home, it is better that the mother not work outside the home; ideally, it is better if the man works to support the household and for the woman to take care of the home; and, even though a wife may work outside the home, the husband should still focus most of his attention on earning a living ($\alpha = .67$).

The construction of gender was measured using the instrumental-masculine and expressive-feminine subscales of the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). These scales assess gender construction in terms of the respondent's self-perceived possession of personality traits, traits that are stereotypically believed to differentiate between women and men but that are considered socially desirable in both (Spence, 1984). Assessing the construction of gender in this way is consistent with the study's goals and with gender construction theory more generally (e.g., Ferree, 1990; Fox & Murry, 2000). For example, Fox and Murry (2000, p. 1164) stated that when

gender is understood as “the product of social processes and *as embodying the cultural meanings of masculinity and femininity* [emphasis added], then it becomes possible to distinguish a person’s gender from his or her sex.” Spence also noted that the items on the instrumental and expressive subscales reflect two constellations of personality characteristics that can be linked empirically to the terms *masculine* and *feminine*. Consistent with constructionist arguments against the tendency to operationalize gender as opposite ends of a singular continuum (Ferree), the use of two separate subscales allows individuals to identify the extent to which they themselves are instrumental and expressive, thus enabling the identification of empirical variation both within and between women and men.

The *instrumental-masculine* and *expressive-feminine* items used to operationalize the construction of gender were measured using a five-point semantic differential (Spence & Helmreich, 1978). The eight items used to construct the *masculine-instrumental* scale were as follows: not at all independent–very independent, very passive–very active, not at all competitive–very competitive, have difficulty making decisions–can make decisions easily, give up very easily–never give up easily, not at all self-confident–very self-confident, feel very inferior–feel very superior, and go to pieces under pressure–stand up well under pressure ($\alpha = .77$). The eight anchoring items for the *feminine-expressive* scale were as follows: not at all emotional–very emotional, not at all able to devote self completely to others–able to devote self completely to others, very rough–very gentle, not at all helpful to others–very helpful to others, not at all kind–very kind, not aware of others’ feelings–very aware of others’ feelings, not at all understanding of others–very understanding of others, and very cold in relations with others–very warm in relations with others ($\alpha = .79$). In each case, items were coded so that higher scores reflected greater instrumentality or expressivity, respectively.

Control variables. Five other variables were included in the analyses: respondent’s age, education, biological sex, the number of children present in the home, and the presence of preschool children. *Respondent’s age* was measured in years and ranged from 23 to 68. *Respondent’s education* was measured using a seven-point scale ranging from eighth grade

or less to holding a graduate degree, with the average respondent having had some college. Biological sex was coded as 1 for *female* and 0 for *male*. *Number of children* was measured by asking respondents to indicate the number of children under 18 who lived in their home for at least 6 months during the preceding year. Finally, the presence of *preschool children* was measured dichotomously with a question that identified whether there were any children living in the home who had yet to begin kindergarten (1 = *yes*). Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations, and correlations for all variables.

RESULTS

In addition to the descriptive information presented in Table 1, *t* tests were run to examine differences in women’s and men’s responses (results not shown). As would be expected, women saw themselves in significantly more feminine-expressive terms than men, and men applied more masculine-instrumental characteristics to themselves than did women. Men were older than women, held more traditional gender ideologies, and spent more hours in the paid labor force. Women were significantly more economically dependent on their husbands than vice versa. Women also reported performing more emotion work than did the men.

The *t*-test results for housework and child-care activities are more complicated to interpret in that they reflect men’s and women’s perceptions of their *relative* contributions to these forms of family work. In that the mean responses for both men and women were positive, the analyses indicate that both men and women perceived that wives performed relatively more housework and child care than husbands. Thus, the reports of both men and women indicated that the allocation of family work had been constructed in ways that were consistent with traditional expectations regarding women’s work. Despite this commonality, male and female respondents differed in their estimations regarding the extent of this inequality. Women’s average responses were significantly more positive than men’s. This suggests that women perceived the distribution of housework and child-care activities to be significantly more unequal than men perceived it. Based on these descriptive results, correlational and regression coefficients with a negative sign should be interpreted as

TABLE 1. MEANS, STANDARD DEVIATIONS, AND CORRELATION COEFFICIENTS FOR ALL VARIABLES (N = 335)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 Wives' housework		.40**	-.19	-.34**	.30**	-.31**	.15	.06	-.15	-.18	-.12	-.02	.08
2 Wives' child care	.39**		-.32**	-.19*	.23*	-.26**	.20*	.03	-.16	-.07	-.21*	-.10	.01
3 Respondent's emotion work	-.03	.06		.23*	-.01	.14	-.24*	.04	.41**	-.01	.05	.13	.08
4 Economic dependency	.13	.14*	.06		-.20*	.67**	-.35**	-.05	.32**	.02	.02	-.10	.01
5 Respondent's labor force hours	-.20**	-.19**	-.08	-.59**		.02	.07	-.02	.01	-.02	.02	-.01	-.06
6 Spouse's labor force hours	.11	.16*	.13*	.24**	-.07		-.33**	-.01	.13	.11	-.04	-.16	-.05
7 Traditional gender ideology	.11	-.01	-.05	-.20**	-.27**	-.08		.01	-.11	.16	-.13	.08	-.12
8 Masculine-instrumental	.01	.04	.34**	-.11	.05	.01	-.16*		.24*	-.09	-.02	.17	.10
9 Feminine-expressive	.07	.03	.37**	.11	-.09	.15*	.05	.33**		-.10	.14	.19*	.01
10 Respondent's age	-.01	-.12	-.03	-.04	.08	-.16*	.04	-.01	-.10		.12	-.21*	-.47**
11 Respondent's education	-.02	.01	-.09	-.10	.03	.04	-.25**	.21**	-.14*	.15*		.02	.15
12 Number of children	.10	.05	-.02	.11	-.21**	.01	.20**	.04	.14*	-.14*	-.03		.33**
13 Preschool children	-.04	.04	-.01	-.09	-.03	.06	-.07	-.02	-.01	-.59**	.05	.13	
M	6.57	7.00	28.83	.08	37.32	41.85	11.94	20.17	22.56	39.24	5.10	1.90	.35
SD	3.58	5.28	4.55	.36	11.50	12.77	2.93	4.68	4.35	6.23	1.37	.92	.48

Note: Descriptive statistics are reported for the total sample. For the correlations, men's results are above the diagonal and women's results are below the diagonal.

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

indicating a relatively more *egalitarian* division of labor rather than that husbands are performing more of these tasks relative to their wives.

The bivariate results shown in Table 1 reveal interesting differences between men's and women's family work experiences. In the full sample, for example, being female was positively correlated with the performance of each type of family work.

Women's economic dependency was positively associated only with the performance of child-care activities. Men's economic dependency, however, was associated with a more egalitarian division of housework and child care, and with the men themselves engaging in more emotion work. For both men and women, the more hours spent in paid employment, the less housework and child care they performed. Again, the positive coefficients for men indicate that their wives performed relatively more housework as the men spent more hours in paid employment.

Spouse's reported labor force hours operated somewhat differently. Women reported that the more hours their husbands spent in paid employment, the more child care and emotion

work the women performed. In contrast, men reported that the more hours their wives spent in paid employment, the less housework and child care their wives performed. This result coincides with those of other studies on the often self-serving bias of household labor reporting (Kamo, 2000). Also consistent with the findings reported by others, gender ideology was significantly correlated with family work only for the male respondents. For men, holding a more traditional gender ideology was positively related to their wives performing relatively more child care and to the men themselves performing less emotion work.

As expected, applying more feminine-expressive traits to oneself was associated with the performance of more emotion work among women. Somewhat surprisingly, however, women who saw themselves in *masculine* terms were also more likely to perform emotion work. Among men, applying feminine-expressive traits to oneself also was associated with performing more emotion work. These initial results suggest that emotion work may indeed provide unique insights into the complex relationship between gender and family work performance.

Predicting the Performance of Family Work

Table 2 presents the results of regression equations predicting the performance of housework, child care, and emotion work for the total sample. Each of these equations accounted for the effects of both biological sex and the construction of gender in masculine and feminine terms. Consistent with prior research on the division of household labor, the findings presented in Table 2 indicate that being female was the primary correlate of performing housework and child care even when the effects of relative resources, time constraints, and gender ideology were controlled. Of the other variables, only age ($\beta = -.108, p < .10$) and holding a traditional gender ideology even approached significance in regard to housework ($\beta = .102, p < .10$). Age ($\beta = -.120, p < .10$) also approached significance in terms of child care. These results corroborate the view that biological sex is the most important determinant of family work (Shelton & John, 1996) when that work is operationalized as housework and child care.

The findings for emotion work are quite different. In contrast to the preceding results, the final column of results in Table 2 illustrates that the performance of emotion work was significantly influenced by respondents' construction of gender rather than by their biological sex. Those who

constructed gender in feminine terms were significantly more likely to perform emotion work. Somewhat surprisingly, seeing oneself in masculine terms was also positively related to emotion work performance. In addition, respondents who espoused a more traditional gender ideology were less likely to perform emotion work.

The results in Table 2 indicate that neither the relative resources model (Hypotheses 1a-c) nor the time constraints model (Hypotheses 2a-c) received empirical support. Moreover, no significant support was found for gender ideology (H3a, 3b). In that the hypotheses predicting the effects of gender ideology on emotion work (Hypotheses 3c-d) depend on the biological sex of the respondent, the negative relationship between ideology and emotion work should not be interpreted as a test of these hypotheses (see below).

Gender construction theory was not supported in regard to housework or child care (H4a, 4b; H5a, 5b), although the theory did receive support in the equation for emotion work. Hypothesis 5c received strong support in that being female had no statistically significant effect on emotion work. Further, the positive relationship between defining oneself in feminine-expressive terms and the performance of emotion work was more than 2½ times stronger than any other relationship in the model. The

TABLE 2. REGRESSION OF FAMILY WORK TASKS ON ALL INDEPENDENT VARIABLES ($N = 335$)

Independent Variables	Wives' Housework			Wives' Child Emotion Work			Respondent's Emotion Work		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Female	3.126	.550	.411***	3.848	.805	.343***	.128	.673	.013
Respondent's age	-.062	.037	-.108	-.102	.054	-.120	.055	.046	.075
Respondent's education	-.055	.143	-.021	-.110	.209	-.028	-.257	.175	-.077
Number of children	.084	.210	.022	-.107	.307	-.019	-.137	.257	-.028
Presence of preschool children	-.410	.470	-.055	-.323	.688	-.029	.589	.575	.062
Economic dependency	-.925	.864	-.092	-.063	1.263	-.004	.422	1.057	.033
Respondent's labor force hours	-.024	.022	-.076	-.045	.032	-.099	-.022	.027	-.055
Spouse's labor force hours	-.008	.019	-.028	.011	.027	.027	.024	.023	.068
Traditional gender ideology	.124	.068	.102	.089	.099	.050	-.166	.083	-.107*
Masculine-instrumental	.036	.043	.048	.071	.062	.063	.128	.052	.132*
Feminine-expressive	-.034	.049	-.041	-.085	.072	-.070	.372	.060	.356***
Constant		7.00			9.93			18.72	
Adjusted R^2		.14			.15			.20	
<i>F</i>		5.77***			6.30***			8.53***	

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

result for Hypothesis 4c, however, was opposite to that expected in that masculinity-instrumentality was also positively related to the performance of emotion work.

To explore these relationships further and to test Hypotheses 3c and 3d, the regression analyses were repeated for men and women separately. The results shown in Tables 3 and 4 provide further evidence that there are meaningful distinctions between the different forms of domestic labor and that these differences are gendered.

In Table 3, men reported that the allocation of housework and child care was influenced by the time both they and their spouses spent in paid labor. As men’s time in the labor force increased, their wives tended to perform relatively more housework. As these men’s wives spent more time in paid employment, however, this division of labor became more egalitarian. In addition, men who reported having higher levels of education tended to have a more egalitarian division of child-care tasks. Constructing gender in more feminine terms was positively related to men’s performance of emotion work. In contrast, men who espoused a more traditional gender ideology tended to perform less emotion work. This last result supports Hypothesis 3c.

Among women, the only significant model was that for the performance of emotion work (see Table 4). Here, education was negatively related, and masculinity and femininity were both positively related, to emotion work perfor-

mance. The hypothesized relationship between women’s gender ideology and emotion work (Hypothesis 3d) did not receive support. These results indicate that women who saw themselves in more feminine-expressive terms tended to perform more emotional labor. Interestingly, women who applied masculine-instrumental traits to themselves also performed more emotional labor. This latter finding suggests that the meaning of emotion work performance may indeed be different for men and women.

DISCUSSION

Family scholars have made a number of advancements in the understanding of the gendered division of household labor over the past three decades. Despite these inroads, examinations of how emotion work may contribute to this literature remain scarce. This relative lack of attention is somewhat surprising given the historically central place that emotion has held in conceptualizing women’s family roles (e.g., Parsons & Bales, 1955) and in feminist scholars’ attempts to debunk the myth that women’s family work emanates “naturally” from within (Daniels, 1987; Hochschild, 1989; Oakley, 1974). This study has sought to bring emotion work back to the center of family work scholarship.

The results suggest that including emotion work in studies of household labor provides new

TABLE 3. REGRESSION OF FAMILY WORK TASKS ON INDEPENDENT VARIABLES FOR MEN (*n* = 110)

Independent Variables	Wives’ Housework			Wives’ Child-Care Activities			Respondent’s Emotion Work		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Respondent’s age	-.080	.067	-.127	-.012	.077	-.017	.107	.083	.136
Respondent’s education	-.331	.292	-.105	-.756	.336	-.213*	-.248	.366	-.064
Number of children	-.562	.482	-.113	-.973	.553	-.173	.480	.603	.078
Presence of preschool children	.611	.896	.073	.973	1.029	.103	1.134	1.121	.110
Economic dependency	-1.069	1.914	-.074	2.758	2.197	.169	.676	2.394	.038
Respondent’s labor force hours	.164	.052	.289**	.174	.060	.270**	.016	.065	.022
Spouse’s labor force hours	-.081	.040	-.251*	-.131	.046	-.358**	-.003	.050	-.008
Traditional gender ideology	.043	.142	.030	.184	.162	.112	-.366	.177	-.205*
Masculine-instrumental	.064	.073	.081	.071	.084	.079	-.057	.091	-.059
Feminine-expressive	-.083	.093	-.090	-.118	.107	-.113	.454	.116	.399***
Constant		5.24			5.60			19.31	
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²		.18			.15			.16	
<i>F</i>		3.37***			2.99**			3.00**	

p* ≤ .05. *p* ≤ .01. ****p* ≤ .001.

TABLE 4. REGRESSION OF FAMILY WORK TASKS ON INDEPENDENT VARIABLES FOR WOMEN ($n = 225$)

Independent Variables	Wives' Housework			Wives' Child Care			Respondent's Emotion Work		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	β
Respondent's age	-.006	.043	-.012	-.098	.072	-.116	.039	.055	.055
Respondent's education	-.005	.156	-.002	.031	.262	.009	-.418	.200	-.139*
Number of children	.152	.214	.050	.049	.359	.009	-.361	.275	-.083
Presence of preschool children	-.400	.524	-.064	-.444	.879	-.042	.324	.673	.037
Economic dependency	-.304	.946	-.028	.253	1.588	.014	-.097	1.21	-.006
Respondent's labor force hours	-.050	.023	-.184*	-.079	.039	-.173*	-.036	.030	-.093
Spouse's labor force hours	.031	.020	.108	.063	.034	.130	.040	.026	.098
Traditional gender ideology	.065	.073	.065	-.048	.123	-.028	-.068	.094	-.048
Masculine-instrumental	.013	.050	.019	.062	.085	.054	.273	.065	.285***
Feminine-expressive	.014	.056	.019	-.047	.095	-.036	.274	.072	.254***
Constant		6.52			12.18			19.01	
Adjusted R^2		.02			.03			.19	
<i>F</i>		1.42			1.59			6.24***	

* $p \leq .05$. ** $p \leq .01$. *** $p \leq .001$.

insights into the gendered meaning and allocation of family work tasks. In so doing, this study lends support to the view that husbands and wives perform family work in ways that facilitate culturally appropriate constructions of gender. The finding that emotion work was more closely linked to the construction of gender than were housework and child care provides evidence that emotion work matters, especially to our efforts to discern how *gender* influences the meaning and allocation of family work.

To be sure, this study represents merely an initial step in developing a more complete understanding of the relationship between gender and emotion work. This is especially true in that gender was operationalized only in terms of identity construction, and not as a complex, multilevel system (Ridgeway & Correll, 2000). As a result, this study may underestimate the potential power of gender theory. Nonetheless, consider the finding that constructing gender in feminine terms led to more emotion work among men, whereas *both* feminine and masculine gender constructions led to more emotion work among women. In that the masculinity scale reflects agentive, self-assertive, and instrumental traits (Spence, 1984), the results for women demonstrate that the performance of emotion work represented a form of instrumental action, not merely an expression of their "kindness toward others." For a woman who constructed her sense of self in these masculine or instrumental terms, providing emotional

support to her husband was an integral part of her family *work* role. In contrast, men construed their performance of emotion work as merely part of their *interpersonal* relationship with their wives, not as part of how they constructed themselves in agentive terms.

The tendency to conceptualize emotion work as *work* suggests that women recognized that they are held accountable for the performance of this work in ways that men are not. This is consistent with Shaw's (1988) observation that men are more likely than women to characterize household labor as leisure rather than work. In sum, these results provide a new avenue of support for gender construction theory and illustrate how reconceptualizing family work to include emotion work can inform our understanding of the complex relationship between "doing gender" and "doing family" (Thompson & Walker, 1989). In contrast, the results for the total sample provide no support for the relative resources and time constraints models and quite marginal support for the gender ideology approach. Consistent with most research in this area, biological sex had the strongest effect on the allocation of housework and child care.

On the basis of the sex-specific findings reported in Tables 3 and 4, more research is needed to understand how time constraints influence men's approach to the division of household labor. These results also raise questions about the gender neutrality of the time constraints model (also see Hook, 2004).

Further theoretical and empirical work should specify the gendered meanings of time in relation to particular forms of domestic labor.

Limitations

The current study has several limitations. First, previous research suggests that spouses tend to overestimate their contributions to family work and that wives' contributions are particularly likely to be overestimated (Kamo, 2000; Press & Townsley, 1998). Such findings represent a clear limitation to using survey methods to collect information about family work. These biases may be somewhat less problematic in the current study given its use of task inventories rather than estimations of hours spent (Marini & Shelton, 1993). In that the male and female respondents in this study were not married to each other, it is impossible to determine the extent to which errors in the relative estimations occurred or the extent to which these errors were gendered. Further methodological research exploring the biases involved with using task inventories to measure family work performance would help clarify these issues and would contribute to a more thorough understanding of how emotion work may operate differently than other types of family work tasks.

A second limitation concerns the generalizability of the results. The racial and educational characteristics of the sample limit the ability to generalize these results to the general population of employed, married parents. The fact that the sample was predominantly White may be particularly problematic. Black couples tend to espouse more egalitarian attitudes about gender and to allocate family work more equally than White couples (Kamo & Cohen, 1998; Orbach & Eyster, 1997). Given that the measures of housework and child care focused on the relative contributions of husbands and wives, it remains unclear whether the results reported would be similar within a more racially diverse sample.

A third limitation emerges from the study's reliance on the subjective perceptions of only a single family member. When data are obtained from a single respondent using self-reports, the respondent's dispositional characteristics may be part of what is being measured. As a result, the relationships between variables may be inflated because of common-method variance (Lorenz, Conger, Simons, Whitbeck,

& Elder, 1991). For example, asking a husband to report on his construction of gender and on the extent to which he and his wife perform family work tasks may inflate the relationship between the variables because dispositional traits constitute part of the shared variance. This limitation suggests the need for research based on information obtained from multiple family members and that combines self-report methods with observational techniques.

CONCLUSION

The time and energy required to provide emotional support to others must be reconceptualized as an important aspect of the *work* that takes place in families. These efforts have commonly been overlooked because they have tended to be characterized as reflections of interpersonal intimacy or love. Such a conceptualization parallels the once conventional view of housework and child care that existed prior to those tasks being reconceptualized as part of a work role rather than as components of a female role (e.g., Oakley, 1974). Continued neglect of emotion work within the family work literature risks perpetuating the view that being an emotional caretaker is something women are rather than something women do. Caregiving, in whatever form, does not just emanate from within, but must be managed, focused, and directed so as to have the intended effect on the care recipient. By continuing to overlook the part that emotion work plays in the creation and maintenance of marriages and families, researchers are unlikely to achieve full appreciation of the subtle ways in which cultural conceptions of "woman," "wife," and "mother," along with "man," "husband," and "father," are reproduced.

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