

By default: How mothers in different-sex dual-earner couples account for inequalities in pandemic parenting ^[1]

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AVAILABILITY

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Excerpted from introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted normal routines for many U.S. families. Parents of young children faced school and child care closures (Garbe et al. 2020; Landivar et al. 2020), and some lost jobs (Moen, Pedtke, and Flood 2020) or shifted to remote work (Lyttelton, Zang, and Musick 2020). These disruptions left mothers disproportionately responsible for additional child care (Carlson, Petts, and Pepin 2020; Dunatchik et al. 2021; Hertz, Mattes, and Shook 2020; Lyttelton et al. 2020; Sevilla and Smith 2020; Zamorro and Prados 2021), which negatively impacted mothers' careers, relationships, and well-being (Collins, Landivar, et al. 2020; Collins, Ruppner, et al. 2021; Landivar et al. 2020; Lyttelton et al. 2020; Petts, Carlson, and Pepin 2021; Zamorro and Prados 2021).

Building on these findings, we ask how mothers in different-sex, prepandemic dual-earner couples accounted for their pandemic parenting arrangements. Accounts allow people to “negotiate between actions taken and prevailing cultural schemas” (Damaske 2013:438; see also Damaske 2011). Thus, mothers who took on disproportionate shares of pandemic parenting may offer accounts that justify such arrangements even if such arrangements had a high personal cost. Justifying such arrangements may also have discouraged mothers and others around them from adopting more egalitarian divisions of pandemic parenting. By examining mothers' accounts of pandemic parenting, we can thereby help explain: (1) why so few women reentered the workforce even as schools and child care centers reopened (Bureau of Labor Statistics [BLS] 2021), (2) why initial increases in father involvement waned as the pandemic progressed (Carlson and Petts 2021), and (3) why the pandemic led to increased public preferences for “traditional” divisions of domestic and paid labor in the United States (Mize, Kaufman, and Petts 2021).

We investigate mothers' accounts using data from a longitudinal qualitative study of families with young children. We focus on mothers in different-sex couples in which both partners were employed prepandemic and who also completed at least one wave of surveys and interviews (N = 55). We also incorporate data from surveys and interviews with fathers in some of these couples (N = 14) to triangulate mothers' accounts and offer tentative insights into fathers' accounts as well.

Region: Australia and New Zealand ^[4]

Tags: gender ^[5]

mother's labour force participation ^[6]

care work ^[7]

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