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THE ROLES OF WOMEN DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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The Roles of Women During the Covid-19 Pandemic

The modern-day woman has made significant progress in defining her place in the workplace despite the various challenges concerning workplace discrimination based on gender and race. Working mothers had gotten accustomed to the typical eight-hour work day, making their days similar to those of their working husbands. During the Covid-19 pandemic, working mothers were forced to work from home. This work setup was worsened by the lack of access to typically mothering aids, such as access to childcare and readily available babysitters. In particular, this research proposal aims to investigate whether the extended work from home setup reversed the progress made in balancing gender roles and the willingness of women to re-establish the status quo.

Literature Review

Although the modern woman has made various attempts to redefine gender roles, hegemonic ideologies of womanhood overstate the importance and ‘unnegotiability’ of the duty of childrearing in defining the woman’s position in the household. Hegemonic ideologies, which emerged from the lifestyle of white middle-class families in the course of the industrial revolution, emphasize that “a mother’s primary responsibility is childrearing and a father’s is breadwinning,” resulting in a situation where “employment conflicts with motherhood” (Dow 2015, p. 180). Fathers, who are ‘excused’ from the time-consuming roles of homemaking and childrearing, have adequate time and supporting social structures that allow them to have a standard workday. Conversely, women that choose to work outside the home are left with the task of balancing their childrearing duties with workplace responsibilities, which is problematic because employers expect employees with the same compensation to put in equal work hours. Moreover, the women’s navigation of the workplace established on male-favoring principles still

have to find a way to manage the social pressure that comes with the perceived 'absconding' of childrearing responsibilities.

After the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, working mothers' already impossible balancing act has been reframed in the context of virtual workplaces. Despite the use of technology to find some balance between paid and unpaid work, females in senior management positions find themselves multitasking, including combining work, child care, and household chores, in a state of elevated hurriedness, with limited personal autonomy in defining work time and family time (Rafnsdottir & Juliusdottir 2018, p. 88). Even though this study was conducted before working from home became the norm, it shows particular problems with this working arrangement for women. Women's attempts to use technology to find additional time to complete work-related tasks did not yield meaningful results. Instead, it resulted in a complicated home schedule. Given the experiences of mothers trying to bring work home, it is possible that the full-time working from home setup resulted in blurred lines between work, caring, and housework time allocations that extended throughout the traditional eight to five workday and the 'extra' hours beyond standard work hours.

A plausible explanation for the inability of working women to maintain clear time boundaries is the influence of their expected social roles, which has a significant effect on the decisions that they make concerning the work-family balance. Borelli et al. (2016) found that fathers experienced significantly lower guilt compared to mothers arising from concerns that employment had adverse impacts on their offspring and the perception that employment created conflict with their family duties (p. 363). A working woman's perception of the proper usage of her time is primarily constrained by her socially triggered guilt of not prioritizing childrearing and worries that her decisions may have negative consequences with unreversible effects on the

child's future. In response to this difficult situation, women tend to find themselves overstretched at work and home. According to Lewis et al. (2012), "becoming a black superwoman" is one of the unique coping mechanisms that Black females employ to overcome gendered racial microaggressions "by taking on multiple roles and responsibilities as a way to exemplify strength and resilience" (p. 64). During the pandemic, most working mothers may develop this 'superwoman' complex regardless of race because they have the shared experience of guilt and time management crisis, especially with the limited access to conventional 'mothering aids,' such as child care and babysitters. Consequently, this study has two hypotheses:

1. During the pandemic, working mothers intentionally or unintentionally allocate substantially more hours to childcare and household chores than before the pandemic at the expense of work hours.
2. Working mothers in senior management positions are more determined to get back to the traditional workday where they work away from home compared to working mothers in middle or junior positions.

Methodology

The study will employ a mixed research design. A questionnaire containing close-ended questions will be completed by the participants. Krosnick (2017) argues that respondents often rely on shortcuts to develop answers to a questionnaire by circumventing the three-stage process of generating optimal responses, which involves understanding the question, searching one's memory for relevant information, creating a summary judgment, and articulating the summary judgment in the expected answer format (p. 441). Close-ended questions are preferred to simplify the process of creating responses. In some instances, a Likert scale was provided as opposed to yes or no responses. The questions focus on collecting information about the work-family

balance before the onset of the pandemic. The questionnaire will be issued one week before the focus group meeting is held.

Given the social pressure to make decisions to favor one's children and family, a semi-structured focus group discussion was selected to collect information concerning the recent experiences. Guest et al. (2017) found that the focus group setting encouraged participants to reveal more sensitive and personal aspects of their experiences than individual interviews (p. 706). The focus group would help the participants to speak more openly about private experiences and feelings surrounding working from home. The data from the questionnaires would be analyzed using correlation and descriptive statistics to reveal notable trends. The data derived from the focus group would be exposed to thematic analysis.

Participants

A sample of 10 participants would be selected for the study based on three-point criteria. Firstly, the participants should be working women in STEM-related professions, where males have a dominant presence in the workplace. Secondly, the participant should have two or three children between the age of six to eight years. Lastly, the participant should be married to a man with a full-time job in a managerial post. The convenience sampling technique will be employed during the selection process.

Conclusion

The findings of this research will contribute to the ongoing discourse on the continuous negotiation of gender roles across many American households. Moreover, the findings should demonstrate the effect of distance from family during working hours in enabling working mothers to establish a balance between their family and work. The research provides evidence of the value of working at the office in managing work-family guilt. Nonetheless, this research is

constrained by two limitations. Firstly, the study does not compensate for gender and racial differences in the lived experiences of working mothers. Secondly, the participant sample is selected using a non-probabilistic sampling approach, which limits the generalization of the findings.

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