Paid Family Leave and the Gender Division of Paid and Unpaid Work

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Abstract
The birth of a new child continues to exacerbate gender specialization among different-sex couples. This study considers the potential of paid leave policies to intervene in this key life-course juncture and promote more gender egalitarian divisions of paid and unpaid work. While previous research has examined the impact of paid leave policies on paid or unpaid work among mothers or fathers separately, this is the first study to examine comprehensively how these benefits shape both mothers and fathers and both paid and unpaid work outcomes. I use data from the Current Population Survey 1990-2020 and the American Time Use Survey 2003-2019 and quasi-experimental differences-in-differences models to examine the impact of the introduction of paid leave policies in California and New Jersey on paid and unpaid work outcomes among different-sex couples. I find that change was modest and uneven. California and New Jersey paid leave policies declined mothers’ and fathers’ paid work after new births, increased mothers’ care work but not fathers’, and increased fathers’ housework but not mothers’. On the whole, paid leave policies appear to have helped support mothers’ primary caregiver role while simultaneously encouraging a more gender egalitarian division of housework.

Keywords
paid leave policy, gender inequality, division of paid and unpaid work

Disciplines
Family, Life Course, and Society | Gender and Sexuality | Social and Behavioral Sciences | Sociology | Work, Economy and Organizations
PAID FAMILY LEAVE AND
THE GENDER DIVISION OF PAID AND UNPAID WORK

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ABSTRACT. The birth of a new child continues to exacerbate gender specialization among different-sex couples. This study considers the potential of paid leave policies to intervene in this key life-course juncture and promote more gender egalitarian divisions of paid and unpaid work. While previous research has examined the impact of paid leave policies on paid or unpaid work among mothers or fathers separately, this is the first study to examine comprehensively how these benefits shape both mothers and fathers and both paid and unpaid work outcomes. I use data from the Current Population Survey 1990-2020 and the American Time Use Survey 2003-2019 and quasi-experimental differences-in-differences models to examine the impact of the introduction of paid leave policies in California and New Jersey on paid and unpaid work outcomes among different-sex couples. I find that change was modest and uneven. California and New Jersey paid leave policies declined mothers’ and fathers paid work after new births, increased mothers’ care work but not fathers’, and increased fathers’ housework but not mothers’. On the whole, paid leave policies appear to have helped support mothers’ primary caregiver role while simultaneously encouraging a more gender egalitarian division of housework.

KEYWORDS. Paid leave policy • Gender inequality • Division of paid and unpaid work

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**Introduction**

Despite declines in various markers of gender inequality, parenthood continues to exacerbate economic gender gaps among different-sex couples (Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes 2008; Gonalons-Pons, Schwartz, and Musick 2021; Killewald and García-Manglano 2016; Musick, Bea, and Gonalons-Pons 2020; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). Parenthood leaves dramatic imprints on women’s economic lives – women see long-term declines in employment, work hours, earnings, and wages (Baxter, Hewitt, and Haynes 2008; Budig and England 2001; Budig and Hodges 2010; England et al. 2016; Florian 2018; Glauber 2007; 2018; Gonalons-Pons, Schwartz, and Musick 2021; Musick, Bea, and Gonalons-Pons 2020; Musick, Gonalons-Pons, and Schwartz 2021; Pal and Waldfogel 2016), and large increases in housework and care work (Sanchez and Thomson 1997; Sayer 2005; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). This effect is much less noticeable in men’s economic lives; men see no changes in employment, small or no increases in work hours, earnings, and wages (Killewald and García-Manglano 2016; Musick, Bea, and Gonalons-Pons 2020; Musick, Gonalons-Pons, and Schwartz 2021), and comparatively small increases in housework and care work (Hook and Wolfe 2012; Sanchez and Thomson 1997; Yavorsky, Kamp Dush, and Schoppe-Sullivan 2015). In other words, parenthood accentuates gender specialization, forcing a dramatic shift in women’s work effort towards unpaid work whereas men’s work effort continues to prioritize paid work.

There has been growing interest on the idea that social policy, such as paid parental leave or universal childcare, could help change gendered dynamics that unfold within different-sex couples after parenthood (Boeckmann, Misra, and Budig 2015; Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Cooke 2014; Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). Scholars hypothesize that policies might help change norms about the desirable gender division of labor (Bunning 2015; Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Gornick and Meyers 2003) and/or provide economic incentives for
egalitarian divisions of labor (Cooke 2006; England 2010). The potential impact of these social policies might be particularly ripe in countries like the United States where preferences for gender egalitarianism have increased (Gerson 2010; Knight and Brinton 2017, but see Pepin and Cotter 2018 and Dernberger and Pepin, 2020). Indeed, scholars argue that one reason why these preferences do not materialize is the lack of social policies that attenuate work-family conflict (Gerson 2010; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015).

This article examines the potential of paid parental leave to impact the gender division of paid and unpaid work in different-sex couples. Paid leave policies provide parents the possibility to step out of their jobs to care for infants while continuing to receive some part of earned income. Paid leave benefits are temporary and typically short, nonetheless, they harbor substantial potential to shift couples’ gender relations because they intervene at a key juncture when gender specialization crystalizes (Sanchez and Thomson 1997). Studies show that gender arrangements set right after births have long-lasting effects that determine couples’ gender inequalities in years to come (Abendroth, Huffman, and Treas 2014; Aisenbrey, Evertsson, and Grunow 2009; Musick, Bea, and Gonalons-Pons 2020). I draw on existing gender theories to argue that the potential of paid leave policy to transform gender relations will depend, in part, on whether these policies are framed as part of a gender equality strategy and include explicit incentives for gender egalitarian divisions of labor.

Existing research on paid parental leave is inconclusive. Most research has focused on the impact on mothers’ paid work, but relatively less is known about the impact on their unpaid work and on fathers’ outcomes. Studies examining mothers’ paid work find that paid leave policies can protect and encourage mothers’ labor market attachment (Baum and Ruhm 2016; Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Byker 2016; Dunatchik and Özcan 2021; Olivetti and
Petrongolo 2017; Rossin-Slater, Ruhm, and Waldfogel 2013), although long paid leaves tend to reinforce gender specialization (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Gangl and Ziefle 2016). Studies examining fathers’ outcomes find increases in fathers’ leave uptake, especially when leaves are reserved exclusively for fathers (i.e. so-called “daddy quota” policies) (Bunning 2015; Duvander and Johnasson 2015), and find that fathers who take leave are more involved in childcare (Bunning 2015; Haas and Hwang 2008; Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Petts and Knoester 2018; Schober 2014; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007) and housework (Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011). Despite mounting evidence, the overall picture remains incomplete because existing research has not simultaneously analyzed how paid leave policies shape both paid and unpaid work for mothers and fathers.

This study uses quasi-experimental differences-in-differences (DiD) methodology to estimate the impact of paid parental leave policy on mothers’ and fathers’ paid and unpaid work over the first year after birth. I study the introduction of paid leave policy in California and New Jersey using panel data from the Current Population Survey (CPS) and cross-sectional data from the American Time Use Survey (ATUS). Unlike prior scholarship that primarily examines one outcome at a time (i.e., only mothers’ paid work or only fathers’ unpaid work), a core contribution of the present study is to offer a comprehensive examination of how paid leave policies shape paid and unpaid mothers’ and fathers’ work. This study also contributes to the growing scholarship examining the impact of recent changes in US paid family leave policy (Bana, Bedard, and Rossin-Slater 2020; Byker 2016; Goldsmith 2019; Stock and Inglis 2021). I find that California and New Jersey policies were associated with moderate and uneven changes in the gender division of labor. The policies increased fathers’ housework and simultaneously reinforced mothers’ primary caregiver status. I interpret these findings as consistent with the
anticipated effects of gender-neutral paid leave policies implemented in contexts with intensive motherhood culture.

**Theoretical approaches about parenthood and the gender division of labor**

There are two dominant perspectives for understanding how and why parenthood exacerbates gender specialization among different-sex couples. On the one hand, *cultural perspectives* argue that the gender division of labor is deeply shaped by prevailing cultural norms about gender and childrearing (Collins 2019; Cooke 2006; Damaske 2011; Hays 1996; Macdonald 2011; Risman 2020; West and Zimmerman 1987). According to this perspective, couples’ decisions about who should cut back from paid work or who should be responsible for housework importantly respond to beliefs about the best way to care for newborns and conceptions of femininities and masculinities guiding who should provide this care. Intensive motherhood, for instance, is a cultural norm imposing specific and gendered social expectations about care for newborns, emphasizing the crucial importance of children’s first few years of life and mother-child bonding (Hays 1996). Intensive motherhood pressures mothers to prioritize childcare and accentuates the incompatibility of motherhood with full-time paid work, while confining fathers to secondary caregiver roles (Collins 2019; Hays 1996; Macdonald 2011).

On the other hand, *rational-choice perspectives* propose that couples’ division of labor results from strategic choices aiming to maximize household (economic) wellbeing (Becker 1991; Bittman et al. 2003; Killewald and García-Manglano 2016). According to this perspective, women leaving paid work after childbirth is a rational outcome when women earn less than their partners, since households lose less income by foregoing her paid work rather than his. Similarly, women specializing in unpaid work is a rational outcome of women’s lower average economic
returns to paid work (Becker 1991; Bittman et al. 2003; Killewald and García-Manglano 2016). Rational choice perspectives are often inattentive or uninterested in the foundations of gender inequalities that put women at a disadvantage and can tend to naturalize these inequalities as stemming from innate preferences (i.e., Hakim 2002). When this is the case, rational-choice perspectives depict the gender division of labor as self-reinforcing efficient outcomes (Becker 1985; 1991). Rational-choice models, however, have also been incorporated in critical frameworks that foreground structural gender inequalities and conceptualize how individuals make utility-maximization choices in unequally constrained situations (Calnitsky 2019; England and Farkas 1986; England and Kilbourne 1990).

These two broad theoretical perspectives suggest that parental leave policies can make interventions in the gender division of labor through cultural and economic pathways. At the cultural level, social policies operate as symbolic-cultural frames that define social expectations and cultural norms (Boeckmann, Misra, and Budig 2015; Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Gornick and Meyers 2003; 2009). Policies establishing long paid leaves only for women, for instance, send the message that mothers should stay home to provide childcare (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012; Gangl and Ziefle 2016). At the economic level, social policies determine the cost-benefit calculus couples and individuals make to assess which division of labor is most economically advantageous. Policies providing job protected leave with no pay make it costly to take time off and indirectly incentivize that it be the lower earner who takes the leave. Paid leave policies can reduce or even eliminate the economic costs of taking time off after the birth of a child (Gornick and Meyers 2009; Milkman and Applebaum 2013).

Paid leave policies thus have potential to transform cultural and economic motivations shaping parents’ division of labor. Whether and how this takes place depends on how the policy
is designed and rolled out. Some paid leave policies are designed to reinforce gender specialization. Germany’s 1990s policy reforms extending paid parental leaves, for instance, were motivated by the aim to support mothers’ unpaid caregiving work (Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Gornick and Meyers 2009; Morgan 2006) and have been shown to reduce mothers’ paid work commitments (Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Schober 2014). Other paid leave policies are explicitly designed to incentivize gender egalitarian divisions of labor. Daddy quota policies, for instance, reserve a set of weeks exclusively for fathers and are often introduced with an explicit motivation to increase men’s caregiving role and incentivize gender egalitarian divisions of labor (Bunning 2015; Duvander and Jans 2009; Duvander and Johnasson 2015). In so doing, these policies construct the cultural expectation that men should take some leave while also changing the structure of economic incentives.

The availability of new social benefits does not necessarily warrant take-up. Eligibility criteria, level of generosity, and administrative burdens, can importantly determine benefit take-up and the overall impact of the policy (Gornick and Meyers 2003; Milkman and Applebaum 2013). The existing cultural environment when a paid leave policy is introduced also matters. In contexts with strong support for the male-breadwinner model, paid leave policies can impact mothers’ employment negatively rather than positively (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012). Pervasive male-breadwinner norms, particularly in the workplace, can also discourage men from using paid leave benefits (Malin 1994; Petts, Knoester, and Li 2020; Reimer 2020).

Gender theory cautions that because gendered relations in different-sex couples are deeply entrenched and pervasive, large-scale transformations are unlikely to occur easily (Connell 1987; 2010; England 2010; Lamont 2014; Risman 1999; Tichenor 2005; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gendered identities, social expectations, social inertia, and institutional
incentives jointly channel behavior towards reproducing gendered outcomes (Risman 1999). Paid leave policies might remove one institutionalized incentive reinforcing the gender division of labor but they do not remove others (Walby 2009). Given this, I suggest that paid leave policies will have a stronger transformative potential when they explicitly incorporate pro-gender-egalitarian cultural and economic incentives. A paid leave policy that includes explicit economic incentives for gender-egalitarian divisions of labor (i.e., increasing couples’ leave benefit if fathers take a certain amount of leave), should have a greater impact on the gender division of labor than a policy that does not. Similarly, a paid leave benefit that is introduced through an explicit gender-egalitarian campaign framing gender equality as a core goals, should have a greater impact on the gender division of labor than a policy that does not.

The following section reviews existing research on the impact of paid leave policies on mothers’ and fathers’ paid and unpaid work before I describe the US paid leave policies that will be the focus of the analysis.

**Previous research on paid leave policy**

Most research examining the impact of paid leave policies on economic outcomes has focused on women’s paid work.\(^1\) Overall, research suggests that long paid leaves (over 9 months) can discourage mothers’ employment (Gangl and Ziefle 2016; Gornick and Meyers 2003; 2009), while shorter paid leave policies tend to encourage mothers’ labor market attachment (Gornick and Meyers 2003; 2009; Olivetti and Petrongolo 2017), particularly in contexts supportive of maternal employment (Budig, Misra, and Boeckmann 2012). One study in Germany found that paid leave policies may decline the motherhood wage penalty (Mari and Cutuli 2020). In the United States, several studies find that paid leave policies increased mothers’ labor force
attachment (Byker 2016; Goldsmith 2019; Inglis 2017), but more recent studies, some using administrative data, appear to find no significant impact on mothers’ labor force participation (Bailey et al. 2019; Bana, Bedard, and Rossin-Slater 2020; Stock and Inglis 2021). The results concerning the impact of US paid leave policies on earnings and wages are similarly mixed (Bailey et al. 2019; Inglis 2017; Stock and Inglis 2021). Research shows that paid leaves help mothers maintain employment and avoid economic hardships (Stanczyk 2019; Winston et al. 2019).

Studies considering the impact of paid leave policies on fathers’ economic outcomes have largely focused on take-up rates and paid work. Studies show that fathers’ take-up rates are lower than mothers’ and the duration typically short (Bunning 2015; Petts, Knoester, and Li 2020; Pragg and Knoester 2017). Research finds that taking leaves do not substantively impact fathers’ employment or workhours (Cools, Fiva, and Kirkebøen 2015; Haas and Rostgaard 2011), although some studies find declines in workhours (Duvander and Jans 2009). In the United States, research finds that California’s paid leave policy increased fathers’ take-up (Bartel et al. 2018).

Research on unpaid work outcomes is comparatively scarce, and it has focused relatively more on fathers than mothers. Findings from Germany, the United Kingdom, and Sweden suggest that paid leave policies explicitly designed to incentivize fathers’ leave take-up, such as daddy months, can increase fathers’ involvement in childcare (Bunning 2015; Haas and Hwang 2008; Schober 2014; Tanaka and Waldfogel 2007), but the effects on housework are less clear. Kotsadam and Finseraas (2011) find increases in laundry for Norwegian fathers. Schober (2014)
finds no changes in housework among German men; but Bunning (2015) finds changes in housework among German men who take longer leaves.

In the United States, there is one unpublished study that explicitly examines the impact of paid leave policies on unpaid work. Trajkovski (2019) analyzes how California’s paid leave shapes mothers’ and fathers’ child investments using the American Heritage Time Use (AHTUS). She finds that the policy increased mothers’ child investments, but did not change fathers’ overall child investments. Other studies have examined associations between parental leave take-up and involvement in childcare activities, finding that fathers who take leaves are more likely to be involved in childcare (Nepomnyaschy and Waldfogel 2007; Petts and Knoester 2018).

Paid parental leave policy in the United States

The United States is an outlier among high-income countries for the near absence of social policy aimed at facilitating work-family balance (Collins 2019; Engeman 2021; Gornick and Meyers 2003; 2009). Until recently, paid leave after the birth of a child was only available in states with Temporary Disability Insurance (TDI) programs, which provided on average 4 weeks of paid leave only available to mothers. Since 1994, eligible parents across all states have access to unpaid leave through the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which implemented a federal mandate on employers with 50 or more workers to provide a 12-week unpaid job protected leave for workers who need time off paid work to care for a new infant or someone else in the family (Milkman and Applebaum 2013).

Paid parental leave policy similar to that which exists in other high-income countries only became a reality in 2004, when California became the first state to provide 6 weeks of paid leave
(Engeman 2021; Kaufman 2020; Milkman and Applebaum 2013). After California, several states have followed suit, first New Jersey in 2009, then Rhode Island in 2014, and more recently New York, Washington DC, Oregon, Massachusetts, Colorado, and Connecticut. At the time of this writing, the demand for a federal-level paid leave policy is gaining momentum and many expect it might be introduced during the Biden administration.

The state paid leave policies that have passed since 2004 differ in various ways, including in benefit generosity, leave length, and eligibility. Table S1 summarizes key features of the policies. Despite differences, these policies share important features. First, these policies build off existing institutions set up with TDI and FMLA. This means that, unlike paid leave policies in Europe, US paid family leaves are not exclusively for births or adoptions and they include a broader range of situations of care need (i.e., needing time off to care for a sick child or partner also qualifies for the benefit). Despite the broader range of care needs covered in the benefit, leaves for new births or adoptions constitute the vast majority of claims (Bailey et al. 2019; Milkman and Applebaum 2013). Second, US paid leave policies are gender neutral and individual. Unlike gender-specific leave policies, such as daddy quotas, US paid leave benefits are strictly individual; all eligible claimants have access to the same benefit irrespective of the gender of the parent and of the amount of leave taken up by the other partner if there is one (Gornick and Meyers 2003; 2009; Milkman and Applebaum 2013).

This study

This study examines whether paid leave policies can transform the gender division of paid and unpaid work among different-sex couples. To address this question, I study how paid leave policies in California and New Jersey shaped women’s and men’s paid and unpaid work
outcomes. Existing studies tend to examine either paid or unpaid work outcomes and either mothers or fathers, but no studies have provided analyses including all these dimensions. A core contribution of the present study is to provide a comprehensive analysis covering women’s and men’s paid and unpaid work outcomes. This study also contributes to extend the research about the impact of paid leave policy on housework, which has been relatively less studied.

Analyses that cover a single outcome or only men or women are important but provide an incomplete picture when it comes to assessing the impact of paid leave on the gender division of labor among different-sex couples. These analyses provide evidence concerning some parts of the gender division of labor but not others. For instance, a paid leave policy may increase mothers’ employment but may not result in changes in mothers’ unpaid work, in this case the benefit only partially transforms the gender division of labor. Thus, analyzing all dimensions simultaneously may provide clues about how and why some changes occur and not others. Continuing the example above, increases in mothers’ employment unaccompanied by changes in mothers’ unpaid work suggests that time availability constraints are a weak predictor of mothers’ unpaid work.

Drawing on gender theory, I have argued that the potential of paid leave policies to transform the gender division of labor hinges in part on whether the policy design and roll-out explicitly emphasizes gender equality. Applying this argument to the California and New Jersey policies suggests that the introduction of these policies will produce moderate or little change. Neither California nor New Jersey included explicit incentives aimed at shifting gender relations in different-sex couples. As discussed above, all existing US paid leave policies create individual and gender-neutral benefits. In terms of policy framing, existing research indicates that neither California nor New Jersey campaigns featured gender equality as one of the core goals of the
policy. Instead, both campaigns focused on child benefits and the importance of child-parent bonding (Engeman 2021; Milkman and Applebaum 2013). Taken together, I expect California and New Jersey policies to result in limited and uneven changes in the gender division of labor. More specifically, I hypothesize that:

1) Paid leave policies will increase take up among women and men, reducing their paid work effort around the time of births.

2) Paid leave policies will reinforce women’s primary and men’s secondary caregiver roles. Gender-neutral paid leave benefits will support women’s primary caregiver status, by reducing economic losses during her time off paid work. Reductions in fathers’ paid work around birth will facilitate increases in fathers’ involvement in some forms of unpaid work, but will not substantially transformation their secondary caregiver role.

**Data and Method**

**Data Sources and Samples**

I use the 1990-2020 Current Population Survey (CPS) and the 2003-2019 American Time Use Survey (ATUS) to study how California and New Jersey paid leave policies impact mothers’ and fathers’ paid and unpaid work. The CPS is used to study paid work (employment, time off paid work, work hours, and wages) and the ATUS to study unpaid work (childcare and housework).

The CPS is a nationally representative household survey that began in 1968 and collects information on employment status on a monthly basis for all adult members in the household. The CPS is structured as a set of short rotating panels; respondents are included in the CPS for four consecutive months, they temporarily leave the sample for eight months, and they re-enter
the sample for four more consecutive months. The second dataset, the ATUS, is a nationally representative time-use survey that began in 2003 and is conducted annually since then. The ATUS collects detailed time diary data that provides information about respondents’ activities and their duration over one day. The ATUS sample is drawn from a subset of CPS households that have completed the eight-wave interview. One randomly selected individual per household is chosen to be part of the ATUS and this person is interviewed only once about two months after the CPS interview.

My analytical approach aims to implement robust causal identification methods adequate to the limitations of each dataset. Analyses using the CPS leverage the short rotating panel structure to estimate individual fixed effects regression models that examine how births change paid work and use differences-in-differences (DiD) methods to assess how paid leave policies affect the change in paid work outcomes pre vs post birth. The ATUS does not include multiple observations per individual and thus does not allow for individual-fixed effects models. Thus, analyses using the ATUS only leverage differences-in-differences (DiD) methodology, but include a comparison group of parents of older children to control for potential sources of unobserved endogeneity. Both CPS and ATUS analyses are conducted separately for women and men. Because the CPS includes all members of the household, CPS estimates for women and men draw on the same sample of couples. This is not the case in the ATUS data. ATUS interviews are only conducted with one randomly selected member per household, thus ATUS estimates for women and men draw on different sets of couples.

The CPS analytical sample comprises respondents residing with different-sex partners and experiencing a new birth after wave 4. I chose wave 4 because this guarantees I obtain measures on pre-birth earnings and wages that are not available in waves 1-3. New births are
identified using information on the age of the youngest own child in the household. Respondents are included in the sample if they report having a zero-year-old own child in the household after wave 4 but they did not have own children or only had older children prior to wave 4. The final sample is restricted to waves 4 and 8, which contain complete earnings information, and to ages 16-45 for women (N= 24,049) and ages 16-55 for men (N= 24,049). The ATUS focal analytical sample comprises respondents residing with different-sex partners and a zero- or one-year-old own child in the household. This analytical sample also includes a comparison group of parents in different-sex partnerships and with older own children (ages 10-14). The inclusion of parents with zero and one-year-olds allows me to examine both short- and medium-term impacts of paid leave policy on unpaid work. The sample is restricted to ages 16-55 for women (N= 18,497) and ages 16-65 for men (N= 14,033). Both CPS and ATUS analytical samples include married and cohabiting couples.

Measures

The analyses examine six paid work outcomes and two main unpaid work outcomes.

Paid work outcomes (CPS). I examine six paid work outcomes: employment, time off paid work, usual weekly paid work hours, paid work hours last week, weekly earnings, and hourly wages. Employment measures whether respondents have jobs at the time of the interview and is operationalized as a dummy variable that equals 1 if respondents have jobs and 0 otherwise. Time off paid work captures whether respondents who have jobs are at work the week prior to the interview. The reasons for not being at work while having a job can be several, including vacation or being on leave due to the birth of a child, thus providing an indirect measure of paid leave take-up. This measure is operationalized as a dummy variable that equals 1 if respondents have jobs but are not at work and 0 otherwise. The two paid workhours
measures capture paid work’s intensive margin, one focusing on a typical week and the other on the most recent week prior to the interview. Weekly earnings measure income earned from paid work over a typical week and hourly wages measure the hourly pay rate at the primary job. Both weekly earnings and hourly wages are converted to 2019 US dollars.

Unpaid work outcomes (ATUS). The analyses examine two main dimensions of unpaid work: childcare and housework. Childcare is divided into two: childcare work, and time spent with children. Childcare work measures time spent providing childcare as a primary activity, whereas time spent with children includes childcare work plus time spent with children while engaged in other activities (i.e. having a meal with children). In detailed analyses I disaggregate various types of activities: physical childcare, play, educational activities, and other childcare. Housework measures time spent doing household maintenance activities, including shopping, cleaning, or laundry. In detailed analyses I divide housework into four parts: routine housework, household maintenance, household management, and other housework. Analyses are also performed using a general unpaid work measure that captures the total time spent on housework and with children. Table 1 describes the detailed activity codes used to construct each of these measures.

Other measures used in the analyses include the following sociodemographic characteristics: age, race/ethnicity, marital status, education, partner’s education, and number of own children in the household. Age is measured in years. Race/ethnicity is measured in two categories (0 = white non-Hispanic, 1 = non-white and/or Hispanic). Marital status is a dummy variable identifying whether the respondent is married. Education variables are measured in two categories (0 = less than college, 1 = college degree and above). Number of children is measured in three categories (1 = one child, 2 = two children, and 3 = three children or more). This list of
control variables is only used in ATUS analyses that do allow for individual-fixed effects, CPS analyses only include a control variable for respondents’ age.

**Method**

I use differences-in-differences (DiD) methods to generate causal estimates about the effect of paid leave policies on mothers’ and fathers’ paid and unpaid work. DiD methods are commonly used to study the impacts of policy change, the design implemented here is adapted from existing research on paid leave policy with similar datasets (Byker 2016; Stanczyk 2019; Trajkovski 2019). The goal of DiD models is to compare outcomes before and after the policy intervention and compare this difference to analogous differences among groups not affected by the policy. I adapt the DiD design to the strengths and limitations of the two datasets. In analyses with the CPS, I use a DiD model with individual-level fixed effects. In analyses with the ATUS, I use a triple differences model (or DDD), where the third difference aims to compensate for the fact that the ATUS does not allow for individual-level fixed effects models.

The estimand of interest is the same in both analyses, the average treatment effect among the intended to treat (ITT), but DiD and DDD models estimate this quantity slightly differently. The first two differences are conceptually the same in both types of models. The first difference captures differences in the outcome before vs. after the policy is implemented (i.e. outcome pre-2004 vs post-2004 for parents in California). The second difference assesses whether this first difference is different from the analogous difference in states where the policy was not implemented (i.e., outcome pre-2004 vs post-2004 for parents in all states except California). The DiD model on CPS data adds individual-level fixed effects (which could be conceptualized as a third difference) comparing within-person outcomes before and after a birth. The DDD model on ATUS data cannot add individual-fixed effects and instead includes a third difference
that compares differences among parents impacted by the policy to differences among parents who are not impacted by the policy (i.e. outcome pre-2004 vs post-2004 for parents with older children ages 10-14 in California). This third difference controls for the possibility that parents in states with paid leave policies share unobserved characteristics that shape work outcomes but are unrelated to paid leave policy.

The model for paid work outcomes using CPS data can be formalized as follows:

\[
\Delta Y_{ismy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 POLICY_y + \beta_j X_{jismy} + \alpha_i + \mu_s + \mu_y + \mu_m + \epsilon_{ismy}
\]

where \(\Delta Y_{ismy}\) is the within-person change in a paid work outcome before vs after a birth for individual \(i\) in state \(s\) in month \(m\) and year \(y\). \(\beta_1\) is a coefficient for \(POLICY\) that equals one for years after the policy is introduced for respondents in California and New Jersey and 0 otherwise. \(\beta_j\) is a vector of individual-level control variables, \(\alpha_i\) denotes individual-level fixed effects, \(\mu_s\) denotes state fixed effects, and \(\mu_m\) and \(\mu_y\) are coefficients for month and year fixed effects, respectively. The key coefficient of interest is \(\beta_1\) which, in conjunction with state and year fixed effects, tests whether difference in outcomes before vs after the policy is introduced in the two states is different from analogous differences in other states.

The model for unpaid work using ATUS data can be written as follows:

\[
Y_{isy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 POLICY_y + \beta_2 INFANT_i + \beta_3 POLICY_y \times INFANT_i + \beta_j X_{jisy} + \mu_s + \mu_y + \mu_s \times INFANT_i + \mu_y \times INFANT_i + \epsilon_{isy}
\]

where \(Y_{isy}\) is a measure of unpaid work for individual \(i\) in state \(s\) and year \(y\). \(\beta_1\) is a coefficient for \(POLICY\) that equals one for years after the policy is introduced for respondents in California and New Jersey and 0 otherwise. \(\beta_2\) is a coefficient for a variable that classifies parents of zero-year-olds as 1s and parents of older children as 0s. \(\beta_3\) is the interaction between \(POLICY\) and \(INFANT\) that captures differences in outcomes before vs after the policy between parents of
infants and parents of older children. $\beta_j$ is a vector of individual-level control variables (age, race, education, partners’ education, partner status, employment status, weekend diary, and number of children). $\mu_s$ and $\mu_y$ denote state and year fixed effects, respectively, and $\mu_s \times INFANT_i$ and $\mu_y \times INFANT_i$ denote interactions between state and year fixed effects and the dummy variable for INFANT. The key coefficient of interest $\beta_3$ which, in conjunction with state and year fixed effects interacted with INFANT, tests whether differences in the outcome between parents of infants and older parents in California and New Jersey before vs after the policy is introduced are statistically different from the analogous differences in other states. I also run this model for the sample of parents of one-year-olds, substituting the variable INFANT for the variable ONE, that classifies parents of one-year-olds as 1s and parents of older children as 0s. Note that because both models estimate the average impact of two policy interventions (CA and NJ) instead of a single policy intervention, the model specification slightly departs from, but it is entirely equivalent to, models written for single policy interventions. All models use robust standard errors clustered at the state level.

**Results**

**Descriptive Statistics**

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for the CPS and ATUS samples. I show sample sizes and sample averages for dependent variables and key control variables in CA and NJ before and after the policies come into effect (July 2004 and July 2009, respectively), and in control states. Panel A displays the CPS sample and Panel B the ATUS sample. The characteristics of the samples are generally similar across treatment and control states, but some differences are notable. CPS California women have lower employment rates and workhours than control states.
women, whereas a similar but attenuated pattern applies to CPS New Jersey women. California men have slightly lower employment and workhours than men in control states, whereas New Jersey men have slightly higher workhours. California women’s housework and time with children is somewhat higher than in control states, whereas differences between New Jersey women and control counterparts are smaller. New Jersey men do more childcare, housework, and spend more time with children than men in control states, whereas the differences between California and control states are smaller. As expected, women’s employment rates and workhours are lower than men’s, while women’s time spent with children, doing housework, or providing care for children is higher than men’s.

Comparing before vs after the policies are implemented reveals small and inconsistent changes. Women’s employment and workhours are slightly higher after paid leave policy, but control states also see increases in these outcomes. Among men, workhours decline and time off paid work increases, whereas in control states these changes are smaller. Women’s childcare increases more after paid leave policies than in control states, but women’s housework declines in both treatment and control states. Men’s childcare and housework increases in California after the reform but declines in New Jersey. The DiD models will be able to control for compositional differences across treatment and control states and formally test the impact of paid leave policies on the gender division of labor.

Paid work outcomes

Figure 1 presents DiD estimates for the impact of paid leave policies on women’s and men’s paid work outcomes during the first year after birth. The results display a remarkable gender symmetry. For women and men, paid leave policies reduced the prevalence of paid work
in the week prior to the interview but had null effects on actual employment levels, usual workhours, earnings, or wages. This evidence is consistent with the idea that paid leave policies allow parents to spend time outside their jobs without negatively impacting their position in the labor market. Among women, paid leave policy is associated with an increase of .04 in taking time off paid work and a reduction of 2 hours of paid work the week prior to the interview; among men the magnitudes are .02 and 1 hour, respectively. These estimates are consistent with previous research showing that paid leave policies increased time off paid work among women and men (i.e., Bartel et al. 2018; Byker 2016).

Unpaid work outcomes

Figures 2-4 present results for DDD estimates for the impact of paid leave policies on women’s and men’s unpaid work in the short and medium-term. The analyses are run separately for parents of zero-year-olds and one-year-olds. Figure 2 displays results for four broad categories: total unpaid work, time with children, childcare work, and housework (see Table 1 for the activities included in these categories). The results show that paid leave policy increased total unpaid work for mothers of infants but not for mothers of zero-year-olds, whereas the reverse is true for fathers, who see increases in unpaid work only in the year after birth. Among mothers of zero-year-olds, the increase in unpaid work during a child’s first year of life is largely driven by increases in direct childcare work and it amounts to about 40 minutes per day. On average, mothers time spent with children and on housework appears to increase as well, but these differences are not statistically significant at p<.05. Among mothers of one-year-olds, the coefficient for unpaid work is not statistically significant, but the results show that these mothers do appear do more childcare work after the reform.
Among fathers of zero-year-olds, paid leave policies do not appear to affect unpaid work, but disaggregating these patterns shows that the null coefficient results from two effects cancelling each other out: paid leave policies decrease fathers’ childcare work by 35 minutes but increase fathers’ housework by 30 minutes. This result might seem paradoxical but it is consistent with studies arguing that intensive motherhood exacerbates mothers’ boundary work, which aims to protect mothers’ status as primary caregivers (Macdonald 2011). Paid leave policies provide the ability for both parents to spend time off paid work without losing a lot of income, this facilitates increases in mothers’ childcare work but reduces fathers’. Thus, somewhat counterintuitively, a measure that could be seen as an incentive to encourage men’s hands-on experience with newborns might have in fact reduced men’s childcare with newborns. Although paid leave does not appear to increase fathers’ childcare work, it does increase fathers’ housework. This finding suggests that the policy might lead to a partial shift in the gender division of unpaid work; increasing fathers’ housework but simultaneously reinforcing fathers’ secondary caregiver status. Among fathers of one-year-olds, paid leave policies appear to increase men’s unpaid work. These changes stem from small increases in childcare and a substantial 40-minute increase in housework.

Figure 3 disaggregates the analyses on childcare into five activities: physical care, play, educational activities, other child care activities, and supervisory care (time spent with children without providing direct care). Among mothers of zero-year-olds, the results show that increases in childcare work identified on Figure 2 stem from increases on educational activities, this includes activities like reading or attending activities related to children’s education. The estimates for all other child care activities are not statistically significant. The increase in educational activities with zero-year-olds is consistent with growing concerns about early
development, another landmark of the intensive motherhood ideology (Hays 1996; Macdonald 2011). Among mothers of one-year-olds there is one borderline statistically significant coefficient suggesting that paid leave policies increased physical care, but all other estimates are not statistically significant.

The disaggregated results for fathers show that declines in childcare among fathers of infants stems from declines in physical care, whereas increases in childcare among fathers of one-year-olds stems from increases in play time. This pattern is again consistent with intensive mothering accentuating the gendering of primary vs secondary caregivers; which anticipates mothers able to take paid leave to prioritize their own role as primary caregivers. Among dual earner parents, the absence of paid leave policies might increase the pressure on fathers to take on physical childcare if mothers are employed, but this involvement might be reduced when mothers can afford to spend more time off paid work. With mothers’ primary caregiver role reinforced, fathers’ childcare focuses on “fun” parts, such as play. This result is consistent with studies showing that men’s increased involvement with children has focused on play activities (i.e., Craig 2006).

Figure 4 disaggregates the analyses on housework into six categories: routine housework, cleaning and laundry, food preparation, shopping, household maintenance, and household management (see Table 1 for the list of activity codes). Among mothers of zero-year-olds, the borderline statistically significant increase in overall housework identified in Figure 2 appears to stem from increases in cleaning and household management; by about 37 and 11 minutes per day, respectively. Among mothers of one-year-olds, paid leave policy does not substantially change housework, except for a statistically significant 12-minute increase in household maintenance. All other coefficients are small and not statistically significant.
Among fathers, paid leave policy appears to induce increases in various dimensions of housework. For fathers of zero-year-olds, paid leave policy is associated with a 26-minute increase in housework time, which largely stems from increases in shopping time. For fathers of one-year-olds, paid leave policy is associated with substantial increases in all categories of routine housework, cleaning, food preparation, except shopping. Household maintenance and management also do not appear to be affected by paid leave policies.

Supplementary analyses available in the Online Appendix show similar results using the American Heritage Time Use Survey (AHTUS) data that includes a longer period prior to the California paid leave policy.

Overall, paid leave policy appears to reduce paid work and increase unpaid work for both mothers and fathers. However, while the impact on paid work is gender symmetric the impact on unpaid work is not. Paid leave policies increase men’s involvement in housework while simultaneously entrenching mothers’ primary caregiver role. Paid leave policies increase mothers childcare work, but they decrease men’s childcare with zero-year-olds and increase only fun childcare with one-year-olds. The increases on housework are substantial for fathers with zero- and one-year-olds.

Discussion

This study considers the potential of paid leave policies to challenge how parenthood exacerbates the gender division of labor among different-sex couples. I propose that paid leave policies can transform gendered outcomes through economic and cultural mechanisms, because leave benefits can change the structure of economic incentives and cultural norms shaping paid and unpaid work arrangements after having children. The study focuses on paid leave policies
recently introduced in California and New Jersey and it hypothesizes that these policies would generate moderate and uneven changes in the gender division of labor given that the policies did not include explicit gender-egalitarian economic incentives or cultural messaging. The results confirm this general expectation and show that CA and NJ paid leave policies changed the gender division of labor in some dimensions but not others. CA and NJ policies reduced mothers’ and fathers’ paid work, increased mothers’ childcare work but not fathers’, and increased fathers’ housework but not mothers’. On the whole, paid leave policies appear to have helped support mothers’ primary caregiver role while simultaneously encouraging a more gender egalitarian division of housework.

This study adds to the growing body of research examining the impact of paid leave policy on economic outcomes. While previous studies have typically focused only on one set of outcomes (i.e. mothers’ paid work or fathers unpaid work), a key contribution of this study has been to provide an integrated analysis of the impact of paid leave policies on mothers’ and fathers’ paid and unpaid work. The results on paid work are consistent with previous research finding that US paid leave policies reduce short-term paid work effort among mothers’ (i.e., Byker 2016; Goldsmith 2019) and fathers’ (i.e., Bartel et al. 2018), but have limited or no impact on longer-term paid work for either (Bailey et al. 2019). The results on unpaid work are consistent with previous research on California finding that it increased mothers’ child care but not fathers’ (i.e., Trajkovski 2019, but see Petts and Knoester 2018 or Pragg and Knoester 2017 for evidence on US fathers who take leave being more involved in childcare), and they are consistent with research in other countries showing that paid leave policies are associated with increases in fathers’ housework (i.e., Bunning 2015; Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011). Several patterns, in particular changes in fathers’ housework, appear to last over a year, suggesting
potential durability. Future research should further investigate whether these patterns are long-lasting or not.

This study also makes a broader argument to propose that the transformational potential of paid leave policies depends on the inclusion of explicit gender-egalitarian economic incentives and/or cultural messaging. Although the empirical analysis cannot directly test this argument, the results are consistent with the general expectations derived from the argument. In light of the fact that neither policy included strong gender-egalitarian incentives nor messaging and that these policies were implemented in a context with intensive motherhood culture, I expected the policies to be associated with small-to-moderate changes in the gender division of labor. Without explicit incentives or messaging for fathers to take on more caregiving, CA and NJ paid leave policies appear to have reinforced mothers’ primary role as caregivers and simultaneously increased fathers’ role in housework but not childcare. Future studies should leverage variation on policy design and messaging to further examine how these aspects moderate the impact of these policies.

This study is not without limitations. Using two separate datasets to study paid and unpaid work is suboptimal for several reasons. Importantly, it means that the analyses on paid and unpaid work do not identify the key effect of interest in the same way and that they do not reflect the same sample of couples. Causal identification is more stringent in the CPS analyses than in the ATUS analyses, because the former includes individual fixed-effects. The ATUS estimates could be biased if unobserved factors shaped the composition of the sample across states and years and the outcomes of interest. The consistency between the results presented here and prior research using a different dataset provides some reassurance (Trajkovski 2019). The CPS estimates could also be biased by time-varying unobserved heterogeneity. Lastly, the
analysis identifies the effect of the policy on the intended to treat (ITT) and does not directly measure whether parents used the benefit or not.

Among different-sex couples, parenthood continues to exacerbate the gender division of work. For women, having children is associated with increases in unpaid work and decreases in paid work; whereas for men, having children is not associated with any substantial changes in paid work and is only associated with comparatively smaller increases in unpaid work. These patterns are not solely the product of individuals’ preferences, but reflect economic and cultural structures of constraints and incentives that shape which paid and unpaid work arrangements are feasible, desirable, and encouraged. Social policies, including paid leave policy, harbor tremendous potential to shift these structures of constrain and encourage more gender egalitarian division of labor.
ENDNOTES

1 There is a separate body of research analyzing the impact of unpaid leave policies, such as FMLA, on women’s and men’s leave take-up rates and economic outcomes (Han, Ruhm, and Waldfogel 2007; Han and Waldfogel 2003; Hyde, Essex, and Horton 1993; Klerman and Leibowitz 1999; Phillips 1998; Pleck 1993; Waldfogel 1999).

2 Models for a single policy intervention are commonly written as follows: \( Y_{isy} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{CA} + \beta_2 \text{POST} + \beta_3 \text{CA} \times \text{POST} + \beta_4 X_{isy} + \alpha_i + \mu_s + \mu_y + \epsilon_{isy} \), where \( Y_{isy} \) is an outcome for individual \( i \) in state \( s \) and year \( y \), \( \beta_1 \) is a coefficient for California that captures average differences between California and other states before policy implementation, \( \beta_2 \) is the key interaction of interest that captures differences in outcomes before vs after 2004 in California vs other states. The key difference between this conventional specification and the one implemented for this study lies in how the variables \text{POST} and \text{POLICY} are defined. In the conventional specification, \text{POST} classifies all respondents across all states as 1s in the period after the policy is implemented in California, and it is the interaction between \text{POST} and \text{CA} that obtains the estimate of interest. In the specification for this study, \text{POLICY} classifies only respondents in the states with eligible policy as 1s in the period after the policy is implemented, and this variable obtains the estimate of interest because the model includes state and year fixed effects.
REFERENCES


### Table 1. Unpaid work activity classification

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories of unpaid work</th>
<th>Activity codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Physical care</strong></td>
<td>Physical care for hh children (030101)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Play</strong></td>
<td>Playing with hh children not sports (030103), arts and crafts with hh children (030104), playing sports with hh children (030105)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Educational activities</strong></td>
<td>Reading to/with hh children (030102), doing homework with hh children (030201), meetings and school conferences for hh children (030202), home schooling for hh children (030203), waiting associated with hh children's education (030204), activities related to hh children education (030299)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Other childcare activities</strong></td>
<td>Talking with/listening to hh children (030106), looking after hh children (030107), attending hh children's events (030109), waiting for/with hh children (030111), picking up/dropping off hh children (030112), caring for and helping hh children (030199), providing medical care to hh children (030301), obtaining medical care for hh children (030302), waiting associated with hh children's health (030399), using paid childcare services (080101), waiting associated with purchasing childcare (080102), using paid childcare services, n.e.c. (080199), travel related to hh children (180301-1807, 180399, 180401-180407, 180499)</td>
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<td><strong>Housework</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cleaning</strong></td>
<td>Interior cleaning (020101), laundry (020102), sewing, repairing, and maintaining textiles (020103), storing interior household items including food (020104), housework n.e.c. (020199)</td>
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<td><strong>Food preparation</strong></td>
<td>Food and drink preparation (020201), food presentation (020202), kitchen and food clean-up (020203), food and drink preparation, serving and cleaning n.e.c. (020299)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Shopping</strong></td>
<td>Shopping for groceries, gas, food (070101-070105, 070199), comparison shopping and researching shopping (070201, 070299), security procedures related to shopping (070301, 070399), travel related to shopping (180701-180705, 180799)</td>
</tr>
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<td><strong>Household maintenance</strong></td>
<td>Interior arrangement, decoration (020301), building and repairing furniture (020302), heating and cooling (020303), interior maintenance, repair and decoration n.e.c. (020399), exterior cleaning, repairs and maintenance (020401-020402, 020499), lawn, garden, ponds, pools care (020501-020502, 020599), care for animals (020601-020603, 020699), vehicle repair and maintenance (020701, 020799), appliances and home tools maintenance (020801, 020899)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Household management</strong></td>
<td>Financial management (020901), household and personal organization (020902), household and personal mail, e-mail, and messages (020903-020904), home security (020905), household management n.e.c. (020999), household activities n.e.c. (029999)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:** Activity codes are taken from the ATUS 2003-2019 codebook; hh = household.
Table 2. Sample characteristics

<table>
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<th>CPS</th>
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<th>California after</th>
<th>All other states before</th>
<th>All other states after</th>
<th>New Jersey before</th>
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Source: CPS 1990-2020; ATUS 2003-2019
Figure 1. DID estimates for the impact of paid leave policy on paid work outcomes
Panel A. Women

Panel B. Men

Source: CPS 1990-2020
Figure 2. DDD estimates for the impact of paid leave policy on general unpaid work outcomes

Panel A. Women

Panel B. Men

Source: ATUS 2003-2019
Figure 3. DDD estimates for the impact of paid leave policy on time with children

Panel A. Women

Panel B. Men

Source: ATUS 2003-2019
Figure 4. DDD estimates for the impact of paid leave policy on housework

Panel A. Women

Panel B. Men

Source: ATUS 2003-2019