

## Maternal Gatekeeping: Mothers' Beliefs and Behaviors That Inhibit Greater Father Involvement in Family Work

*Maternal gatekeeping is conceptualized within the framework of the social construction of gender and is defined as having three dimensions: mothers' reluctance to relinquish responsibility over family matters by setting rigid standards, external validation of a mothering identity, and differentiated conceptions of family roles. These three conceptual dimensions of gatekeeping are operationalized with modest reliability and tested with a confirmatory factor analysis on a sample of 622 dual-earner mothers. With cluster analyses, 21% of the mothers were classified as gatekeepers. Gatekeepers did 5 more hours of family work per week and had less equal divisions of labor than women classified as collaborators.*

Although men's and women's time in family work is converging (Levine & Pittinsky, 1997; Robinson & Godbey, 1997), women are still doing more family work than men (Demo & Acock, 1993). The prevailing explanations for this unequal distribution of family work are grounded in theo-

ries of family power and focus on four major conceptual approaches: relative resources, time availability, economic dependency, and gender ideology (Greenstein, 1996). Although research literature provides partial validity to each of these approaches, Thompson and Walker (1989) argue that these explanations do not explain why wives continue to do a larger share of family work, despite paid employment outside the home.

Perhaps a more effective approach to understanding the division of family labor is one that examines family processes by asking what conditions are necessary for wives and husbands to care collaboratively for their home and children (Thompson, 1992, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1995). Although scholars have documented that many fathers want to increase the amount of time spent caring for their home and children (Daly, 1993; Lamb, 1997; Pleck, 1997), there are many structural, cultural, familial, and personal barriers to increased father involvement in family work. Daily child care and household tasks can provide an opportunity for both husbands and wives to be connected and committed to protecting, promoting, and nurturing the growth of their children (Hawkins, Christiansen, Sargent, & Hill, 1993). However, more needs to be known about the specific contextual factors that may mediate or regulate men's involvement in family work. Specifically, how women's beliefs and behaviors toward men's

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involvement affect actual levels of involvement needs more attention (De Luccie, 1995). Scholars have noted that wives as well as husbands resist more collaborative arrangements of family work (Coltrane, 1996; Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Thompson & Walker, 1989). One way women resist increased men's involvement in family work is by "gatekeeping" the domain of home and family. The term "maternal gatekeeping," however, is somewhat problematic and needs clarification.

Briefly, maternal gatekeeping is a collection of beliefs and behaviors that ultimately inhibit a collaborative effort between men and women in family work by limiting men's opportunities for learning and growing through caring for home and children. It is clear from its frequent appearance in the scholarly literature (Coltrane, 1989, 1996; De Luccie, 1995; Dienhart & Daly, 1997; Ferree, 1991; Greenstein, 1996; Haas, 1980, 1992; Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997; Hawkins & Roberts, 1992; Hochschild, 1989; Hoffman, 1983; Komter, 1989; Palkovitz, 1984; Pleck, 1983, 1985; Schipani, 1994; Thompson & Walker, 1989; Whiteside, 1998) that maternal gatekeeping can be one important source of men's underinvolvement in domestic labor and may inhibit mutually satisfactory arrangements for sharing family work. As yet, however, no one has carefully conceptualized or operationalized the concept. Consideration of the nature of gatekeeping may prove to be useful in understanding both the ambivalence that many men and women feel toward men's increased involvement and some of the conditions necessary for men and women to work collaboratively in daily family work.

Before proceeding, a few cautionary remarks are in order that place this study within the logical geography of the division of domestic labor and men's involvement in family work. First, gatekeeping is not restricted to mothers. Fathers also may gatekeep various domains, roles, or identities within family life, which may be detrimental to more collaborative family work arrangements. Our focus in this study, however, is on maternal gatekeeping. Second, we focus on the maternal gatekeeping of men's involvement in family work in middle-class, two-parent families. We do not address gatekeeping in situations such as divorce when mothers are granted custody of their children (Ihinger-Talman, Pasley, & Buehler, 1993; Pasley & Minton, 1997; Whiteside, 1998) or when children are born to unwed teenage mothers (Rhoden & Robinson, 1997). Although these and other contexts are important in a full examination of

paternal involvement, gatekeeping in these situations is likely to result from qualitatively different circumstances. Hence, these and other contexts for gatekeeping are beyond the scope of this study. A final caveat: Maternal gatekeeping should not be thought of as the only or the primary barrier to greater paternal involvement in two-parent families. There are many correlates and antecedents of paternal involvement in housework and child care. As Pleck (1997) concluded in his thorough review of the literature on paternal involvement: "Paternal involvement is multiply determined. No single predictor exerts a predominant influence. Variables associated with paternal involvement may act together additively, paralleling the concept of cumulative risk in the study of risk outcomes" (p. 95). Hawkins and Roberts (1992) and Thompson and Walker (1989) make a similar point in their reviews of forces that restrain and drive an equitable division of domestic labor. The relative importance of maternal gatekeeping has yet to be investigated directly, but it is unlikely to exert a dominant influence on men's involvement in family work. Rather, maternal gatekeeping is likely to be one in a constellation of variables that influences fathers' involvement in family work. The lack of empirical inquiry to date on this topic, compared with others in that constellation, suggests the value of our study.

We look at specific maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors that may act as constraining forces to more collaborative arrangements for family work. Specifically, this study asks: How should maternal gatekeeping be conceptualized and operationalized? Are the measures reliable and valid? How is maternal gatekeeping associated with the allocation of family work? Are there identifiable groups or classifications in relation to gatekeeping that can be derived from the measures?

#### CONCEPTUALIZING MATERNAL GATEKEEPING

The conceptual guide for our study is the social construction of gender. It facilitates multilevel analyses and is well suited for understanding the interaction processes and contexts in which maternal gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors are created and maintained. This interactive perspective sees women and men embedded in social contexts, relations, and family and personal processes that allow them to become active participants in daily constructing, evoking, and sustaining the meaning of gender through the explicit and implicit negotiations involved in family work (Coltrane, 1989;

Greenstein, 1996; Thompson, 1992, 1993; Tiedje & Darling-Fisher, 1996; West & Zimmerman, 1987). We analyze the concept of maternal gatekeeping within the four levels of analysis outlined by the social construction of gender, including broad sociohistorical contexts, immediate structural and cultural contexts, daily interaction processes, and valued personal outcomes (Thompson, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1995).

### *Gatekeeping in Sociohistorical Context*

Exploring maternal gatekeeping in a sociohistorical context reveals three major patterns in women's and men's participation in family work: sharply differentiated family responsibilities, women's investment in domestic skills and expertise, and resistance to challenges to the prerogatives of gender specialization. Each of these patterns has implications for maternal gatekeeping.

The 19th-century ideological construct of the doctrine of separate gender spheres dictated differentiated roles and functions for mothers and fathers in family work (Cowan, 1987). The culture of maternalism (Dienhart & Daly, 1997) or the cult of true womanhood (Welter, 1966) further facilitated the polarization of the sexes into separate spheres by advocating and exalting the unique and "natural" disposition of women to care for home and family. The ideas of women as nurturers of home and children and men as breadwinners came to represent an ideal in which women, by being central to the home and family, were given the opportunity to wield some domestic power and privilege over men (Degler, 1980; Griswold, 1993; LaRossa, 1997). Thus, a wall was built around a maternal garden of home and family, complete with a latched gate to ensure the specialization of gender in "proper" spheres of influence.

Changing perceptions of the importance of childhood and the emergence of ideas about home management in the late 19th century and early 20th century also worked together to enable some women to establish themselves as highly skilled experts in domestic matters. Many home management professionals emphasized that a woman should use "the same diligence, intelligence, and sustained effort . . . [that] she would give to the most exacting profession" (LaRossa, 1997, p. 49) when she learned the "proper" techniques for raising children and doing housework (Ahlander & Bahr, 1995; Brown, 1984; Griswold, 1993; Reibel, 1960). Women who understood the specialized language and the techniques of caring for a home

and family outlined by these professionals had an advantage of expertise over men. This elevated women to new levels of respectability and authority within the home and maintained a division of labor.

The distinctiveness of mothers' and fathers' spheres of influence within the home remained fundamentally unchallenged until the feminist movement of the 1960s (Griswold, 1993). However, despite dramatic changes in women's political rights, economic privileges, and work patterns, their responsibility for maintaining the home and caring for the children remained basically the same. Historical analysis of shifts in the paradigms of mothering and fathering documents how changing expectations of motherhood and fatherhood can be shaped without refashioning men's responsibilities to include daily child care and housework, thus leaving family work as the woman's domain and ultimate responsibility (LaRossa, 1997). Furthermore, Robinson and Milkie (1998) found no evidence that "women have disinvested psychologically in housecleaning over the past 20 years" (p. 215).

Analysis of maternal gatekeeping at the sociohistorical level suggests the importance of developing conceptual dimensions that address maternal skills, standards, specialization in family work, and maternal and paternal resistance to collaborative family work.

### *Gatekeeping in Immediate Structural and Cultural Contexts*

Focusing on situational constraints and opportunities allows scholars to understand structural and cultural conditions that encourage men to take on some responsibilities of family work and women to share them (Thompson & Walker, 1995). Scholars argue that women's participation in the labor force has upset the gender-based division of domestic work by challenging the ideology of men's breadwinning as justification for men's limited contributions to home maintenance and child care (Griswold, 1993). Many assert that wives now feel entitled to more help with domestic labor as a result of the change in their contributions to the family income. In addition, scholars posit that women who work more hours outside the home, who have increased earning power, who enjoy high economic and educational resources, or who hold high-status, nontraditional, and better-paying jobs are women who have the power to negotiate more collaborative arrange-

ments (Coltrane, 1996; Haas, 1992). However, other scholars argue there is little or no connection between wives' time in paid work and husbands' time in family work, nor is there a connection between wives' earnings and their husbands' contributions to family work. This suggests that, despite the fact mothers may leave the domestic domain to enter the world of paid work, family work continues to be structurally and symbolically identified with women (Thompson & Walker, 1989), perhaps because the nature of the work that women commonly do outside the family creates maternal ambivalence toward fathers' increased involvement in family work. That is, low-paying, low-prestige, or unfulfilling jobs with few psychological rewards or prospects for advancement do not displace women's valued roles as wives and mothers—roles in which they may feel irreplaceable and can exercise significant autonomy and power (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992; Hoffman, 1983; Lamb, 1997; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990). In addition, some men actively resist increasing their participation in family work. Although many mothers have expressed dissatisfaction with family work arrangements and wish for fathers' increased participation, both men and women resist more paternal involvement (Coltrane, 1989; Mainardi, 1978). Therefore, despite changes in the structural context of family work resulting from women's employment, family work continues to be structurally identified with women, thus facilitating a gatekeeping schema.

Doherty (1991) observed that fathers' capabilities, motives, and contributions are too often conceptualized within a framework that focuses on their deficiencies. This framework tends to describe fathers as underinvolved, unskilled, inadequate, incapable, or selfish, and it dismisses too readily the contribution they make to family work. A culture that perceives fathers this way provides a powerful schema for maternal gatekeeping. Mothers may feel they need to manage or oversee their husbands' participation in housework and child care because fathers can't do it "right" without supervision from someone more competent and responsible (Hawkins & Dollahite, 1997). Thus, some women may resist relinquishing responsibility for the day-to-day care of home and family because they perceive that their husbands do not have the skills to do or are unwilling to perform family work. Such attributions by mothers may or may not be correct. Some fathers may be incompetent because of a lack of knowledge and experience (McBride, 1990) or may have a selfish

desire to be relieved of domestic labor (Thompson & Walker, 1989). However, negative maternal beliefs and expectations about fathers' participation in child care and housework discourage men from taking responsibility for family work and encourage mothers to manage, set standards, and regulate attempts by their partners to collaborate in family work (Schipani, 1994).

Specific cultural ideas of mothering also make it difficult for women to relinquish responsibility for some of their most practiced or cherished maternal repertoires. Some mothers experience ambivalence about collaborative family work because they are simultaneously attracted to the idea of fathers' involvement and repelled by the notion of sharing their domain. This may be because increased paternal involvement intrudes on a previously held monopoly over the attentive and intuitive responsibilities of family work, which, if altered, may compromise female power and privilege in the home (Coltrane, 1996; Lamb, Pleck, & Levine, 1987). This ambivalence is understandable. "Because family work is intermingled with love and embedded in family relations, it has complex and contradictory meanings for women" (Thompson & Walker, 1989, p. 855). Some women both cherish and resent being the primary caregiver and feel both relieved and displaced by paternal involvement. They are both intentional and hesitant about negotiating for more collaborative sharing and feel guilty and liberated when men become more involved in family work (Dienhart & Daly, 1997). This ambivalence about increased paternal involvement serves to keep the gate to the domestic garden periodically swinging open and shut.

Overall, analysis of maternal gatekeeping at the structural and cultural levels suggests the importance of developing conceptual dimensions that capture the cultural expectations and validation of the identities of mothers and fathers and the differentiation of these roles.

#### *Gatekeeping as an Interaction Process*

Although scholars generally agree that many women want collaborative arrangements when it comes to family work and many men are resisting these responsibilities, a social construction of gender emphasizes that both men and women are active participants in creating gender through interaction processes. They collude, negotiate, bargain, delegate, relinquish, or manage aspects of family work to maintain gender specialization (Braver-

man, 1991; Coltrane, 1996; Greenstein, 1996; Haas, 1992; Hochschild, 1989; LaRossa, 1988; Schipani, 1994; Tiedje & Darling-Fisher, 1996). One interaction that is especially relevant to the discussion of gatekeeping is a manager-helper relationship between husband and wife. Some wives may act as managers by organizing, delegating, planning, scheduling, and overseeing the work done by husbands in order to maintain responsibility for the day-to-day aspects of family work. Their husbands act as helpers by doing what is requested, but by waiting to be asked and requesting explicit directions (Coltrane, 1996). In this interaction, a mother may give verbal assent to increased paternal involvement, but because she doesn't accept or trust the father's domestic skills, she continues to manage his involvement and keep him from taking more responsibility (Schipani, 1994).

Mothers and fathers may work together in order to maintain distinct spheres of influence in families. Thompson and Walker (1989) describe this "ambivalent struggle" as "women's reluctance to give up family work and men's resistance to take it on" (p. 859). For example, mothers may accept their partners' justifications for not doing family work by assuming that men are not socialized to do family work, that men's domestic standards are too low, that they don't know how or don't like to do it, that they have less time for family work because of their demanding jobs, or that they are incompetent at it (Hawkins, Marshall, & Allen, 1998; Hawkins, Marshall, & Meiners, 1995; Thompson, 1991; Thompson & Walker, 1995). Mothers also may redo tasks, set unbending standards for family work, or criticize their husbands' work to protect their own authority in the home. Fathers also may collude or act in ways that support maternal gatekeeping to maintain gender specialization in family work. Men may choose to do less frequently performed tasks, outwait their partner, ask many questions about the task, do the task poorly, or plead ineptness (Braverman, 1991; Coltrane, 1989; Mainardi, 1978; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

Overall, an analysis of maternal gatekeeping in the context of interaction processes should develop conceptual dimensions that reflect how couples collude to maintain differentiated family roles.

#### *Gatekeeping and Valued Personal Outcomes*

Thompson (1991) posited that because mothers value many different outcomes from family work, they will continue to feel positive about less-than-equal work arrangements. Studies have confirmed

that feeling appreciated for the family work that they do is the most important predictor of mothers' perceptions of fairness in family work (Blair & Johnson, 1992; Hawkins et al., 1998; Hawkins et al., 1995). Attaining valued outcomes like appreciation may be a powerful reinforcer for the unequal allocation of family work. Other valued outcomes from family work may be enjoying ministering to family needs, validating the maternal role, maintaining peace in the home, or feeling needed and competent. Mothers may hesitate to relinquish their responsibility for family work because they also may lose valued outcomes from doing family work.

Kranichfeld's (1987) innovative analysis of family power provides insight into how influence can be a valued outcome of doing family work. Because researchers typically have defined family power in normative, male, economic, and political terms (Szinovacz, 1987), many have ignored the power that women have to influence another because of their family relationships. Kranichfeld predicts that, despite greater power from participation in the work force, some women will not want to share their family influence. Kranichfeld maintains that mothers are doing more family work than fathers, not just because men don't help out much, but because women value being able to influence the internal, domestic domain. LaRossa (1997) supports this hypothesis by stating that mothers hesitate to share family work because they enjoy the authority, privilege, and status their position gives them in the family. In addition, fathers may resist changing the allocation of family power because they value not having to be responsible for family work, which allows them to pursue other interests.

However, attributions of women's family power in domestic matters are controversial. Some scholars argue that although mothers may be making most domestic decisions about the implementation of routine family tasks, it may not be consistent with their personal wishes. Therefore, a woman's control over the domain of the family cannot be seen as power, but rather as domestic influence (Szinovacz, 1987). This may be because her husband has the ultimate power to oversee family work, which allows him to choose under what circumstances he will get involved in family work while his wife takes care of all the rest. Other scholars question the assumption of wives' powerlessness in decisions about domestic labor and assert that wives do wield significant power. However, this decision-making power tends to increase their

time spent doing family work (Ferree, 1987, 1991; Hawkins et al., 1995; Kamo, 1988; Kerpelman & Pittman, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989). As a result, Thompson and Walker have suggested exploring family work as a source of and an occasion for power, rather than evidence of powerlessness. This may reveal that although wives have ultimate power in deciding how, when, and where family tasks are completed, this same power may discourage paternal involvement in family work.

Overall, analysis of maternal gatekeeping in the context of valued personal outcomes suggests the importance of developing conceptual dimensions that reflect how mothers justify and accept diverse family work arrangements.

### *Conceptual Dimensions of Contemporary Gatekeeping*

The literature focuses on overt and covert ways that wives manage, exclude, or choose for their husbands levels and types of paternal participation in family work. We have identified three related dimensions of maternal gatekeeping: standards and responsibility, maternal identity confirmation, and differentiated family roles.

*Standards and responsibility.* The analyses of socio-historical and interaction processes suggest that this dimension of maternal gatekeeping emphasizes issues of maternal skills and standards and the mother's ultimate responsibility for family work. Some mothers act as gatekeepers by keeping their partners at an arm's length from meaningful parent-child interactions. This is most evident when wives act as household managers and use their husbands as helpers. By sustaining the manager-helper dynamic, mothers maintain their ultimate responsibility for family work and influence paternal involvement in it by choosing what fathers may and may not do (Coltrane, 1996; Haas, 1992; Hawkins & Roberts, 1992). Because helper husbands are less likely to assume responsibility for anticipating and planning what needs to be done, their involvement will probably not change the way the labor is divided (Braverman, 1991). When mothers trust their partners' interests and capabilities in family work and relinquish their control over these matters, fathers are more likely to develop competence and skill in daily family work (Hawkins, Roberts, Christiansen, & Marshall, 1994).

Mothers display mistrust in paternal involvement in family work by setting standards. A mother who responds in unsupportive ways to

paternal involvement by criticizing, redoing, or demeaning her husband's domestic efforts because he did not do it her way despite an acceptable outcome may be setting explicit or implicit standards for family work in order to preserve her domain (Coltrane, 1996). Unbending standards leave no room for men to develop their own repertoire of parenting and household skills or to become jointly responsible for them (Braverman, 1991; Schipani, 1994). However, mothers may set standards for nutrition, safety, and health out of their concern for optimal care, not as a way to control or manage paternal involvement. If done in a supportive manner, setting these standards can provide fathers an opportunity to learn how to be better caregivers.

The standards and responsibilities dimension of maternal gatekeeping refers to a mother's resistance to relinquishing responsibility for domestic labor by taking charge of tasks, doing chores herself, redoing tasks to a higher standard, or organizing, delegating, planning, and scheduling—all processes that require her partner to conform to her way of doing family work. Mutual responsibility and collaboration are neglected.

*Maternal identity confirmation.* The analyses of structural, cultural, and valued outcomes suggest that this dimension emphasizes the impact that the internalization of cultural expectations of mothering has on attitudes about maternal and paternal involvement in family work. For example, mothers have been culturally identified as the center of nurture and care in family life. If fathers join mothers in this endeavor by becoming collaborative partners in housework and child care, some mothers may fear loss of self-respect or self-identity as a woman (Haas, 1992), perhaps because doing family work is a way to validate a mothering identity externally and is the primary source of self-esteem and satisfaction for many women (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992; Lamb, 1997). Mothering may be many women's primary identity or source of satisfaction, but this does not automatically mean that they are inhibiting more collaborative arrangements of family work. Mothers in this situation may support their partners' involvement in family work. However, De Luccie (1995) posits that mothers may gatekeep the domain of home and family because they perceive paternal involvement as a threat to how they validate their irreplaceable identity as mother. A more collaborative arrangement may create guilt, regret, and ambivalence for mothers because they perceive themselves as neglecting their role. Maternal identity confirmation refers to a de-

sire for the external validation of the maternal role, which allows a woman to affirm to herself and others that she is a good homemaker because of the caring and nurturing family work she does.

*Differentiated family roles.* The analyses of the structural, cultural, sociohistorical, and interaction processes suggest that this dimension focuses on how broad conceptions of the nature and division of family work affect a mother's personal expectations for how that work should be divided in her home. Differentiated family roles are roles for mothers and fathers that reflect a clear division of labor and distinct spheres of influence within the family. Greenstein (1996) found that women's traditional beliefs or polarized expectations for family work arrangements were more important than their husbands' beliefs, whether traditional or egalitarian, in predicting the division of household labor. Mothers who think family work is only for women may hesitate to encourage paternal involvement and may increase the likelihood that they will monitor and manage fathers' involvement.

In summary, we propose that maternal gatekeeping consists of a set of beliefs about mothering and fathering that influences mothers' behaviors in relation to the allocation of family work. Maternal gatekeeping is the mother's reluctance to relinquish responsibility for family matters by setting rigid standards, wanting to be ultimately accountable for domestic labor to confirm to others and to herself that she has a valued maternal identity, and expecting that family work is truly a woman's domain. These three dimensions create a schema that builds, maintains, and reinforces the gate to home and family, which, if opened, could encourage more father involvement in housework and child care.

## METHODS

### *Sample and Procedures*

Data for this study were collected in 1996 from women in Denver, Phoenix, Portland, Sacramento, and Seattle. We used a mailing list of a random sample of 1,500 women in these five areas who met the following criteria: married, wife and husband employed, and at least one child living at home. Of the 1,500 surveys sent, 19 were undeliverable. A follow-up postcard and second mailing encouraging participation in the study (Dillman, 1978) resulted in questionnaires being returned from 681 wives (response rate of 46%). We excluded wives who were employed fewer than 15 hours a week to

more accurately reflect the dynamics of dual-earner households (59 wives). The resulting sample size was 622.

Demographic information from the survey revealed that wives, on average, were 39 years old and had two children younger than 18 years living at home. Forty-two percent had received a 4-year college degree or a higher degree. Wives' median income was \$28,000, which accounted for a little less than half of the family income. The sample was 87% Anglo American. The respondents were employed an average of 39 hours per week ( $SD = 10.9$ ) and reported spending 35 hours a week in domestic labor ( $SD = 20.8$ ), compared with reports that their husbands spent 20 hours a week ( $SD = 15.3$ ) in domestic labor.

The limited geographical areas surveyed and the modest response rate left open the possibility that our sample differed from a nationally representative sample on important demographic characteristics. We explored possible differences by comparing our sample with a sample of U.S. dual-earner, married couples with at least one child living at home from the 1993–1994 wave of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH). Wives in the NSFH sample were also, on average, 39 years old and had two children in the home. Participants in our sample had received more education than the national sample; 42% versus 27% of the wives had obtained a 4-year degree or beyond. Not surprisingly, then, wives in our sample had slightly higher incomes than those in the NSFH sample, although wives from both samples contributed about the same proportion to the family income. Wives in our sample were employed an average of 4 hours more a week than those in the NSFH sample—39 versus 35 hours per week. Also, our sample was a little less racially diverse—87% White, compared with 83% in the NSFH sample. Thus, although we cannot claim to have a representative sample of dual-earner wives in our study, our sample is similar to a national sample on important demographic characteristics, except for respondents' level of education. We have a more educated sample of dual-earner wives than exists in the population, which may be due to sampling only metropolitan areas of Western states.

### *Measures*

Maternal gatekeeping is operationalized according to the constructs of standards and responsibility, maternal identity confirmation, and differenti-

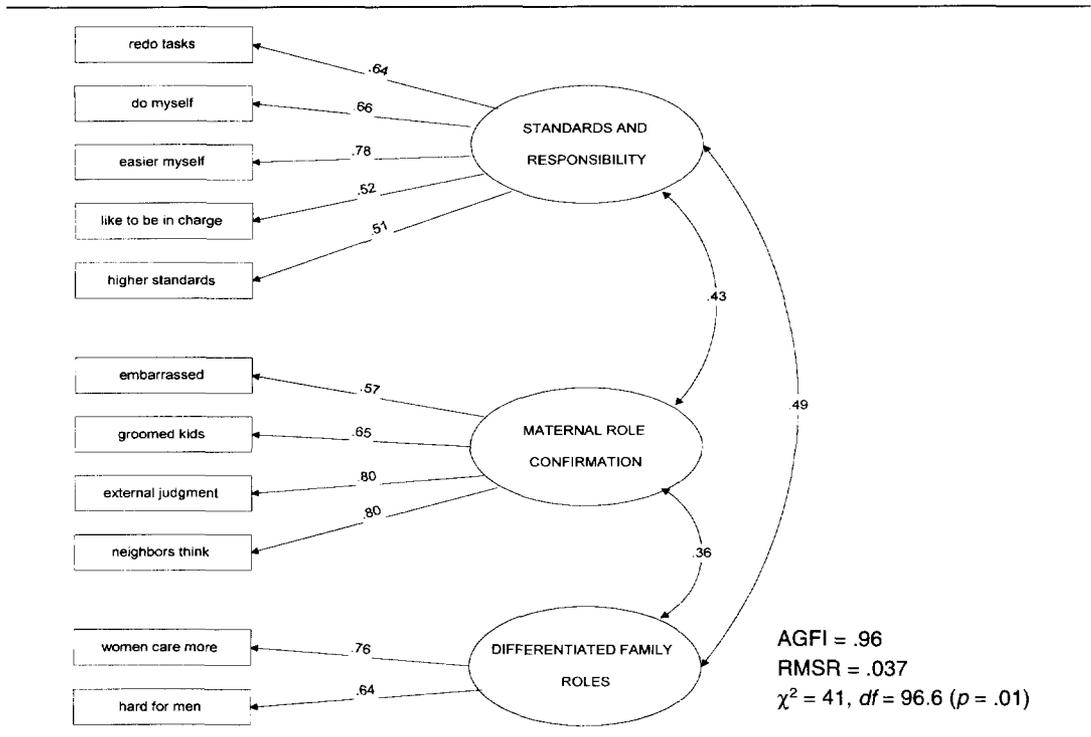
ated family roles. These dimensions are hardly orthogonal. Indeed, the literature review suggests that the dimensions are intricately intertwined. Hence, the separate discussions of the three dimensions contrasts with our hypothesis that they are significantly interrelated.

*Standards and responsibility.* Initially, we separated responsibility and standards into two related but distinguishable dimensions. However, for conceptual and empirical reasons, we eventually decided to collapse the dimensions of standards and responsibility into a single dimension. We decided to eliminate the following responsibility items that were originally included in the survey: "In the final analysis, I am the one responsible for how well cared for my house is"; "in the final analysis, I am the one responsible for how well cared for my children are." We did this because of the potential confusion in interpreting responses. Some mothers may affirm these statements but may not want or may not enjoy the responsibility. Others do want and enjoy the responsibility. We were alerted to this possible confusion by the low empirical correlations between these two items and the third item originally intended to measure responsibility, "I like being in charge when it comes to domestic responsibilities." Eliminating these two items left us with only one responsibility indicator. Knowing that single-item indicators can be empirically problematic, we loaded this item with the standards items, which are conceptually close. This worked well empirically. Our final conceptualization of standards and responsibility, then, emphasized the importance of women maintaining ultimate responsibility for family work by setting standards for the skills necessary to "properly" complete a task. Our five items representing this dimension assess whether mothers feel they have higher standards for family work, whether think they must redo tasks or do tasks themselves because their partners either don't know how to do them or because they feel their partners are not skilled enough to complete the tasks correctly, and whether mothers like being in charge of family work. Responses on a 4-point Likert scale ranged from *not at all like me* to *very much like me*. Thus we were able to distinguish between mothers who struggled to relinquish responsibility for family work by setting standards for that labor and mothers who were willing to allow fathers to perform domestic labor in their own ways and according to their own standards. Cronbach's alpha for this composite scale was .76.

*Maternal identity confirmation.* Our conceptualization of maternal identity confirmation focuses on how strongly a mother associates doing family work with affirming to herself and to others that she is a good wife and mother. Our four items for this dimension assess two aspects: how strongly a woman connects her feelings of worth as a wife and mother with a clean house and well-groomed children and how strongly a woman is influenced by her family's and friends' judgments about her ability as a wife and mother based on how well cared for the house and children are. Again, one of our initial items, "keeping everyone in the family happy is my job," was dropped. We realized that some women may not have responded to this item with the implicit reference to domestic labor. We suspect that this lack of clarity in the item created measurement error that substantially reduced the correlation of this item with the others in this construct. Responses on a 4-point Likert scale ranged from *not at all like me* to *very much like me* and reflected the poles of this dimension: women who strongly correlated their identity as mothers with observable competence in family work and women who based their maternal identity on other criteria. Cronbach's alpha for this composite scale was .79.

*Differentiated family roles.* Our conceptualization of differentiated family roles emphasized mothers' global expectations and beliefs about the allocation of family work as the domain of women. We initially included five items in our survey that assessed women's expectations and beliefs about family work and the more general topic of men's and women's participation in the paid labor force. Again, we decided to eliminate three items assessing mothers' expectations about paid employment so that our final items more closely reflected mothers' expectations about unpaid family work. The relatively low intercorrelations between the set of items concerning paid employment and the two items concerning unpaid family work prompted this decision. Our two-item scale, then, focused on women's general expectations and beliefs about men's enjoyment of and capabilities for doing family work. Responses were on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree* and reflected the poles of this dimension: mothers who expected family work to be the sole domain of women and mothers who expected their partners to be more interested and involved in family work. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .66. (For a summary of items,

FIGURE 1. CONFIRMATORY FACTOR ANALYSIS FOR MATERNAL GATEKEEPING MEASURE



scales, and alpha coefficients for each dimension, see the Appendix.)

*Family work.* To evaluate the validity of the maternal gatekeeping measure, we included a measure of the allocation of family work. We measured family work as estimated hours in an average week spent doing housework, child care, extended family chores, consumer and finance activities, repairs and maintenance, and outdoor work. Although many studies have separated housework from child care, we have been influenced by scholars who downplay the distinctions, emphasize the overlap, and stress the need to include both in research for a more complete picture (Hawkins & Roberts, 1992; Olson, 1979; Ruddick, 1984; Thompson, 1991). In our survey, wives were instructed first to estimate how many hours they spent during an average week doing the tasks mentioned above and then to estimate their husbands' hours. From these two estimates, we constructed a proxy measure for the relative allocation of domestic labor by subtracting the estimates of fathers' time in family work from mothers' time. (Direct reports of relative involvement were not available in this data set.) A global estimate of time in domestic labor often is ineffective, perhaps due to the difficulty that people have

in making accurate time estimations (Robinson & Godbey, 1997). A discrepancy score, however, creates a distribution that functions much like reports of relative involvement (Hawkins et al., 1998). We hypothesized that gatekeepers would perform more hours of domestic labor and do a greater proportion of the labor than those who were not gatekeepers (Ferree, 1987, 1991; Kamo, 1988; Kerpelman & Pittman, 1993; Thompson & Walker, 1989).

VALIDITY FINDINGS

*Confirmatory Factor Analysis*

We hypothesized that maternal gatekeeping consists of three interrelated but conceptually distinct dimensions. In order to maintain the conceptually driven nature of these dimensions (Sabatelli & Waldron, 1995), we employed a confirmatory factor analysis using LISREL 7.2. The measurement model portion of Figure 1 shows that each of the items loaded significantly and highly on their respective hypothesized latent constructs. Note that the three dimensions were significantly and positively related to each other, although there was enough independence in the dimensions to warrant a differentiated model instead of a global model.

We compared this differentiated model with a model that had all indicators loading on a single, global construct of maternal gatekeeping. The former model was clearly better (three-construct model  $\chi^2 = 41$ ,  $df = 96.6$ , AGFI = .96, RMSQR = .037; one-construct model  $\chi^2 = 44$ ,  $df = 723.4$ , AGFI = .68, RMSQR = .11). Statistics for the differentiated model indicate a reasonable model fit. The fit of the measurement model could have been improved by allowing the responsibility item in the standards and responsibility construct ("I like being in charge when it comes to domestic responsibilities") to load on the other two constructs, as well. Although the conceptual link between this item and the other constructs is reasonable, we opted for the simple structure initially tested, instead of the marginally better fit. Our conceptualization, then, of maternal gatekeeping received support from this confirmatory factor analysis.

#### Cluster Analysis

One way to assess the validity of our measure was to investigate whether the three gatekeeping dimensions could produce and replicate conceptually meaningful classifications of dual-earner wives in terms of the salience of the gatekeeping dimensions. Some scholars argue that this way of organizing a set of beliefs and behaviors within groups yields valuable information that is not obtained by simply focusing on how isolated variables are associated with outcomes (Jain, Belsky, & Crnic, 1996; Magnusson, 1995). We used cluster analysis—a multivariate technique for grouping individuals—to see if the gatekeeping dimensions would produce conceptually coherent groupings of mothers. The clustering variables (the three gatekeeping dimensions) were standardized before we used Statistical Application System's FASTCLUS procedure, which employs Euclidean

distance measures and the nearest centroid method (Anderberg, 1973).

Instead of a two-cluster solution, with one group high on gatekeeping and the other low, we specified a three-cluster solution. We hypothesized that there would be a gatekeeping group, a generally collaborative group, and a more mixed, intermediate group. Despite only modest separation of the clusters, this three-cluster solution produced a clear gatekeeper group ( $n = 128$ , 21%) that was highest, on average, on all three gatekeeping dimensions. This suggests that gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors generally operate as a package deal. Mothers concerned about managing or controlling paternal involvement are likely to score high on all three dimensions of gatekeeping. A second cluster, the collaborators ( $n = 230$ , 37%), had the lowest means of the three groups in terms of standards and responsibilities, as well as maternal identity confirmation, but this group was essentially equal to a third, intermediate cluster in differentiated family roles. Mean differences on the three gatekeeping dimensions between gatekeepers and collaborators were all significant. With limited information, it is hard to assess the nature of this third, intermediate group ( $n = 264$ , 42%). The primary reason for specifying a third cluster in this analysis was to illustrate that, given an opportunity to recluster beyond a high-low, two-cluster solution, the sample continued to cluster in groups that are generally high and low on the three dimensions of gatekeeping. Information from the three-cluster solution is presented in Table 1.

To determine the reliability of this cluster solution, we randomly divided the sample in half and attempted to replicate the same three-cluster solution on each sample half, a technique recommended by Aldenderfer and Blashfield (1984) and B. Thompson (1996). Despite only modest separation of the clusters identified in the analysis

TABLE 1. CLUSTER ANALYSIS OF DUAL-EARNER WIVES ON THREE DIMENSIONS OF MATERNAL GATEKEEPING: MEANS (AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS)

Cluster	<i>n</i> = 622 %	Standards and Responsibility <sup>a</sup>	Maternal Identity Confirmation <sup>a</sup>	Differentiated Family Roles <sup>b</sup>
Gatekeeper <sup>c</sup>	128 21%	2.79 (0.81)	3.47 (0.64)	3.65 (0.61)
Intermediate	264 42%	2.10 (0.66)	3.35 (0.67)	1.92 (0.81)
Collaborator <sup>c</sup>	230 37%	1.60 (0.87)	2.20 (0.60)	2.09 (0.66)

Note: Although the cluster analysis was performed using standardized variables, the cluster means were recreated in their original metric for ease of interpretation.

<sup>a</sup>A Likert scale from 1 to 4 was used for this measure. <sup>b</sup>A Likert scale from 1 to 5 was used for this measure. <sup>c</sup>Gatekeeper and collaborator group means differed from each other significantly on all three dimensions.

of the full sample, there was clear replication of the gatekeeping cluster. In both half samples there was a group highest on all three gatekeeping dimensions. However, there was some fluctuation of the constructs in the collaborator and intermediate clusters. Accordingly, we recommend caution. The gatekeeping group appears stable, but further replication is needed before we can be confident that the other groups represent reliable classifications.

In addition, to assess the validity of this clustering solution and the constructs that produced it, we tested whether the gatekeeping mothers were significantly different from the collaborating mothers. As predicted, gatekeepers did significantly more family work (about 5 hours) than collaborators and intermediates,  $F(2,613) = 2.87, p = .05$ . Moreover, the relative allocation of family work, indicated by the difference between wives' and husbands' time in family work (reported by wives), also was significantly different,  $F(2,611) = 7.37, p < .001$ , as hypothesized. Gatekeepers had a larger discrepancy than collaborators—about 8 hours more. There were no differences between the clusters in paid employment hours.

#### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Although research has addressed many of the structural and cultural conditions necessary for greater father involvement in daily family work, the influence that mothers have in inhibiting their partners' involvement has not been empirically investigated with a large sample. This study looks at specific gatekeeping beliefs and behaviors that may limit fathers' opportunities for learning and growing through the day-to-day care of home and family and that may discourage collaborative family work. By exploring the conceptual and operational dimensions of maternal gatekeeping, researchers and practitioners can more clearly understand how mothers support or discourage fathers' efforts to care for their home and family. Our most significant finding is that the validity of our three-fold conceptualization of maternal gatekeeping—standards and responsibilities, maternal identity confirmation, and differentiated family roles—received modest empirical support. It may be useful in future research on family-work issues in dual-earner households. Because maternal gatekeeping has not been carefully and systematically conceptualized or operationalized, we believe this study makes a valuable contribution to the understanding of family work.

The conceptual dimensions tend to be a package deal. Mothers higher on one dimension were generally higher on the other two. The triple combination created a reliable group of gatekeepers—about a fifth of our sample—who did more domestic labor and had less equitable arrangements. The proportion of gatekeepers in our sample is similar to the 25% reported in a survey by Genevie and Margolies (1987).

The limitations of this study should be noted. First, our conceptualization of the gatekeeping dimension of standards and responsibility does not isolate the motive behind the beliefs and behaviors. As one review pointed out, these beliefs and behaviors may not reflect a mother's choice. Rather, they could be the result of her partner's insistence or his refusal to participate or cooperate in domestic labor. Thus, future research on this topic would do well to modify the standards and responsibility dimension to account for this power dynamic or include measures of family power that can capture this potential confound.

Similarly, the causal direction of relationships between the gatekeeping measures and the outcome variables in this study cannot be confirmed with our data. A gatekeeping schema could be the result of low paternal involvement, rather than low paternal involvement being the result of maternal gatekeeping. The inability to confirm the causal direction between gatekeeping and various outcomes was exacerbated by having both reported by the same informant, one report likely biasing the other. Because these weaknesses limit the interpretation of the results, future longitudinal research needs to address issues of causality.

Another limitation of this study is the sample. More than half of the mothers in the study who were sent questionnaires did not return them. This may introduce an unknown selection bias. In addition, the samples were mostly White, middle-class women in major, Western, U.S. metropolitan areas. The salience, qualitative nature, or implications of maternal gatekeeping may change according to race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or religion. Maternal gatekeeping also may vary according to different family contexts and situations (e.g., full-time homemakers, stepmothers) and periods in the life course (e.g., transition to parenthood, adolescent years, empty nest stage). We attempted to understand maternal gatekeeping in the specific context of family work within married, mostly White, middle-class, dual-earner families with children. We cannot make generalizations about the nature of maternal gatekeeping in all contexts

or family structures. Further research is needed to distinguish contexts, structures, and situations in which maternal gatekeeping is detrimental to increased paternal involvement. This could be done with larger, more diverse samples in quantitative research.

Another limitation is the measure of paternal involvement—time spent doing family work (estimated by mothers). Although this is an important perspective on paternal involvement, a maternal gatekeeping schema may make an important impact on other, nontemporal dimensions of paternal involvement (such as commitment, care, and responsibility) not measured in our study. A multi-dimensional assessment of paternal involvement would allow researchers to make clearer connections between maternal gatekeeping and father involvement. In addition, the accuracy of mothers' reports of paternal involvement in family work should be investigated. Given that maternal gatekeeping is a set of beliefs about mothering and fathering that influences mothers' behaviors in relation to the allocation of family work, it seems likely that such beliefs would also influence mothers' estimates of the amount of family work that they perform and that their spouses perform. Gatekeeping mothers might overestimate their own involvement and underestimate their spouses' involvement in family work in order to confirm their position as leader in the domestic sphere. Collaborating mothers might exhibit the opposite pattern. Exploring mothers' overestimation and underestimation of spousal involvement in family work may provide evidence for a gatekeeping or collaborating orientation. Similarly, qualitative research will illuminate more of the interactive process between mothers and fathers and the intent and outcomes of specific maternal beliefs and behaviors.

Finally, there is ample room for improvement in the measurement of the three gatekeeping dimensions, especially the dimension of differentiated family roles. The items included in this survey were about mothers' beliefs that fathers do not fit well in the domestic domain. We recommend testing additional items that look at beliefs about mothers' irreplaceability in the family realm. Further, we did not have a direct measure of the concept of maternal ambivalence about sharing family work. We recommend including the ambivalence concept in future research. In addition, more items that are specific to either housework or child care may prove valuable. Separate items in our data set for housework and child care that

asked about the same content correlated strongly, and further analyses (not shown here) that separated housework and child care into unique measures produced similar results. Nevertheless, there still may be merit in investigating whether gatekeeping housework is stronger than gatekeeping child care for some mothers. Some scholars recommend looking at housework and child care separately (Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992).

Despite its limitations, this initial empirical study into maternal gatekeeping has moved research forward in several ways. Most important is the contribution to conceptualizing and operationalizing maternal gatekeeping, although more measurement work is needed. This conceptual and measurement work is preliminary to a better understanding of some of the conditions necessary for fathers and mothers to work as equal partners in caring for their homes and families. In addition, this study offers an understanding of mothers' specific expectations, beliefs, and behaviors that inhibit greater paternal involvement in family work. With more attention to these issues, perhaps more fathers will pass through the gate of daily family work to achieve more collaboration with their partners.

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## APPENDIX

MATERNAL GATEKEEPING DIMENSIONS, ITEMS,  
CRONBACH'S ALPHAS, MEANS, AND STANDARD DEVIATIONS

Standards and Responsibilities (Cronbach's alpha = .76;  $M = 1.9$ ;  $SD = .78$ ) Scale is 1 = not at all like me; 2 = a little like me; 3 = like me; 4 = very much like me.

- I frequently redo some household tasks that my husband has not done well.
- It's too hard to teach family members the skills necessary to do the jobs right, so I'd rather do them myself.
- My husband doesn't really know how to do a lot of household chores . . . so it's just easier if I do them.
- I have higher standards than my husband for how well cared for the house should be.
- I like being in charge when it comes to domestic responsibilities.

Maternal Identity Confirmation (Cronbach's alpha = .79;  $M = 2.9$ ;  $SD = .75$ ) Scale is 1 = not at all like me; 2 = a little like me; 3 = like me; 4 = very much like me.

- If visitors dropped in unexpectedly and my house was a mess, I would be embarrassed.
- When my children look well groomed in public, I feel extra proud of them.
- I know people make judgments about how good a wife/mother I am based on how well cared for my house and kids are.
- I care about what my neighbors, extended family, and friends think about the way I perform my household tasks.

Differentiated Family Roles (Cronbach's alpha = .66;  $M = 2.3$ ;  $SD = .95$ ) Scale is 1 = strongly disagree; 2 = disagree; 3 = neutral; 4 = agree; 5 = strongly agree.

- Most women enjoy caring for their homes, and men just don't like that stuff.
- For a lot of reasons, it's harder for men than for women to do housework and child care.