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The Motherwork Effect: The Role of Cognitive Labour in the Motherhood Penalty

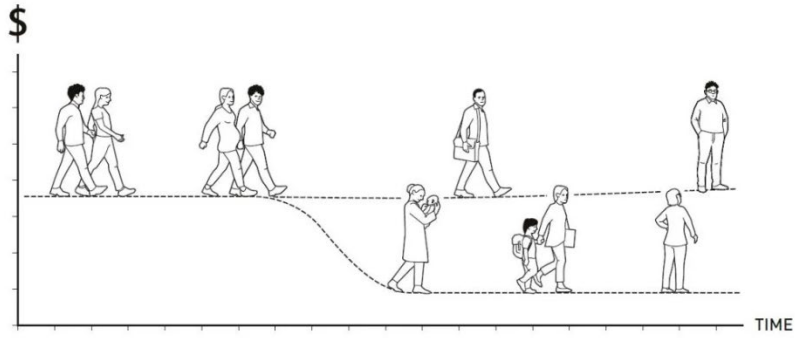
In 2023, economist Claudia Goldin was awarded the Nobel Prize for her analysis of the gender wage gap in the United States. Goldin demonstrates that most of today's gender wage gap for American college graduates starts with marriage and/or children, which is referred to as the "parenthood effect." This article argues that the "parenthood effect" is a "motherwork effect" (as defined by Andrea O'Reilly). The income inequality identified by Goldin is heavily gendered, substantially driven by the labour of motherwork, and affects mothers all over the world. To identify and understand the problem, we must first acknowledge that this issue is not just about women: it is also, and mostly, about mothers. This article uses a matricentric feminism lens to highlight this distinction and to propose a paradigm shift in gender equality policies, guided by Gooden's "name, blame, claim framework." It explores why and how motherhood accentuates gender inequality by analyzing a recent study that quantifies the amount of household labour that mothers of young children tend to be responsible for and proposes a solution to the unequal division of household labour: the Fair Play cards. Finally, this article uses concepts from multiple matricentric feminist scholars to both commend and critique the Fair Play approach. Although this approach is an important contribution towards the goals of matricentric feminism, it may inadvertently reinforce the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy because it does not reach far enough in advancing empowered mothering (O'Reilly). It concludes by offering a few recommendations as next steps.

Introduction

> Matricentric feminism is needed because mothers—arguably more so than women in general— remain disempowered despite sixty years of feminism.
>
> —Andrea O'Reilly and Fiona Greene 10

In 2023, economist Claudia Goldin was awarded the Nobel Prize for her analysis of the gender wage gap in the United States (US). Her work explores the reasons why women have struggled to achieve a career and family to the same degree as men. From the 1930s to the 1950s, significant factors explaining this gap include explicit discrimination, bias, and sexual harassment, particularly when intersectional data are considered. Today, these factors account for a smaller share of the earnings gap, and another small share is attributed to "occupational segregation"—the fact that women and men are selecting professions that are typically gendered and where there is an existing pay gap (such as nurses and doctors, as well as teachers and professors). Goldin demonstrates that most of today's gender wage gap for American college graduates starts with marriage, having children, or both, approximately ten years after college graduation (The Harvard Gazette, "Economist"). Goldin refers to this as the "parenthood effect" (see Figure 1)

We can now see that the earnings gap between women and men in high-income countries is somewhere between ten and twenty per cent, even though many of these countries have equal pay legislation and women are often more educated than men. Why is this? Goldin attempts to answer precisely this question and, among other things, succeeds in identifying one key explanation: parenthood.



The parenthood effect. © Johan Jarnestad/The Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences

Figure 1. The parenthood effect (Nobel Prize)

This article argues that the "parenthood effect" is a "motherwork effect" (as defined by Andrea O'Reilly). The income inequality identified by Goldin is heavily gendered and substantially driven by the labour of motherwork, particularly, its invisible dimension. This is the case not only in the US and Canada, but also worldwide. Internationally and nationally, mothers and motherwork should be a starting point when analyzing intersectional inequalities in labour dynamics. To identify and understand the problem, we

must first acknowledge that this dynamic is not just about women: it is also, and mostly, about mothers. This article uses a matricentric feminist lens to highlight this important distinction and to propose a paradigm shift in gender equality policies, guided by Gooden's name, blame, claim framework. We must recognize mothers and motherwork as a standalone category in all international and national data to see a more complete and accurate picture.

This article then explores why and how motherhood accentuates gender inequality by analyzing a recent and pioneering study quantifying the amount of household labour mothers of young children tend to be responsible for. One of the authors of that study, Eve Rodsky, had previously launched a gamified card system to help families redistribute domestic labour: the Fair Play cards. This article explores the system's proposal to distribute household labour more equally and discusses the role of the study and the cards in the Gooden framework.

Finally, this article uses concepts from multiple matricentric feminism scholars to commend and critique the card system's approach to improving gender inequality. On the one hand, the system illustrates Sara Ruddick's maternal thinking concept, and it aligns with Sarah Lachance Adams's maternal ambivalence concept. On the other hand, the system would benefit from some adjustments to ensure it does not reinforce normative motherhood (as defined by O'Reilly). This paper concludes that while Fair Play is an important contribution towards the goals of matricentric feminism, it may inadvertently reinforce the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy because it does not reach far enough in advancing empowered mothering (as defined by O'Reilly). The article also offers a few recommendations as next steps.

Part One: The Role of Greedy Work in the Gendered Oppressions of Motherwork

One of the key issues driving the gender wage gap in the US is what Goldin calls "greedy work"—work that is inflexible and involves overtime, weekend time, and/or evening work. Greedy work is incompatible with caregiving responsibilities in that it cannot accommodate things like flexible work hours (e.g., for children's appointments or activities) or work after hours (e.g., when schools and daycares are closed). American couples today manage this by having one member of the couple take a high-paying job, while the other takes a job that allows for caregiving responsibilities to maximize family earnings. In heterosexual couples, it is typically the man who takes on the greedy career. In sum: "Women have been swimming upstream, holding their own but going against a strong current of endemic income inequality.… Gender norms that we have inherited get reinforced in a host of ways to allot more of the childcare responsibilities to mothers, and more of the family care to grown daughters"

(The Harvard Gazette, "Gender Pay Gap"). However, the greediest work of all is motherwork, given it is a 24/7 job, 365 days of the year, and is the most difficult to outsource.

In Canada, we see a similar story. In 2022, the Vanier Institute of the Family published a research snapshot, showing that the Canadian gender income gap is "related to the amount of time spent on household work and child care, which is done primarily by women" ("Research Snapshot"), that it becomes important with marriage, and that it is the largest among married couples with children. In 2024, the Vanier Institute published its full report on family work. It highlights that while most mothers of young children work for pay, they continue to face the "motherhood penalty" once they have children, which typically includes lower employment rates and incomes (The Vanier Institute of the Family 44). Women also continue to be more likely to be pushed into part-time work (44) or self-employment (64) to care for children. The report also shows that the gender gap persists at home, with women spending more time per day on housework and mothers spending more minutes per day with children (56). Caregiving generally (for children and care-dependent adults) continues to affect women more than men (49), and working from home increases the time spent on care-related activities more for women than for men (57). The report emphasizes why this matters: "The division of tasks remains gendered: women continue to do most meal preparation, laundry, and indoor housework in family homes" (56), which affects women's wellbeing and participation in the labour force. The report also highlights that mothers are affected the most, since the largest gender income gap is among married couples with children. Since time spent on unpaid labour is more important with children than without, it likely grows with each additional child.

The United Nations (UN) also recognizes the importance of domestic work and carework in gender inequality. In its 2024 Progress Report towards the Sustainable Development Goals, the UN states that progress was "clearly off track" for the fifth goal (Achieve Gender Equality and Empower all Women and Girls) due to a lack of nondiscriminatory laws, a lack of quotas in national parliaments, gendered unpaid domestic and carework, and a lack of systems to track public allocations for gender equality. Domestic and carework is tracked as target 5.4 of the fifth goal, and the 2024 report indicates that on an average day, "women spend about 2.5 times as many hours in unpaid domestic and care work as men, according to the latest data from the period 2000–2022" (11). Regional differences are important: The figure is 3.1 times for Sub-Saharan Africa, and 4.9 times for Northern Africa and Western Asia (UN, *Gender Snapshot* 13).

The UN's International Labour Organization (ILO) adopted a resolution in June 2024 to highlight "the essential links between the care economy, gender

equality, decent work, sustainable development, and social justice" (ILO, "News Release"); it recognizes that women "make up the majority of paid and unpaid care work throughout the world" (ILO, "Texts Adopted"). The ILO's 2018 report on unpaid carework highlights how "the provision of unpaid care mirrors disadvantages based on gender, class, race and location, disability and HIV and AIDS status, and nationality, among others" (ILO, *Care Work* 38). Unpaid carework continues to be the main barrier preventing women from entering, remaining, and progressing in the labour force. Despite this, care work data continues to be underestimated due to methodology gaps (*Care Work* 42–46) and even excluded from measurements of national wealth, such as the gross domestic product (GDP) (47).

The 2018 ILO report is one of the rare publications that includes data specifically on mothers, highlighting that "the amount of time dedicated by women to unpaid care work increases markedly with the presence of young children in the household" (*Care Work* xxxii) and that "it results in what can be termed a 'motherhood employment penalty,' which is found globally and consistently across regions for women living with young children" (*Care Work* xxxiii). The report also includes data on grandparents, showing how grandmothers provide a substantial amount of unpaid care across the world (*Care Work* 51), and data on children, showing how teenage girls are important contributors of carework and household work (*Care Work* 63). Global attitudes and preferences related to the gender division of paid and unpaid labour are also discussed, highlighting that gendered stereotypes and social norms remain strong in most countries and that women are still expected to fulfill caring and nurturing roles not only towards their children but also towards their husbands and other family members (*Care Work* 103). This ILO report highlights how mothers and motherwork are critical data elements in understanding intersectional inequalities present in labour dynamics, including because motherwork tends to be provided by multiple women, it tends to represent multiple types of labour being provided simultaneously (e.g., making dinner while helping with homework), and it tends to be present even without children (e.g., when a man gets married, some of the motherwork provided to him by his mother gets transferred to his wife, a phenomenon Goldin and the Vanier Institute note is happening even in North America).

Worldwide, women and mothers have increased their paid labour participation while continuing to do substantially more unpaid work than men. The gender wage gap is also a gender labour gap at home, and it is not just about women: it is also, and mostly, about mothers. Mothers continue to face unique challenges in the fight for gender equality due to household labour, including caregiving responsibilities. The "gendered oppressions of motherwork" (O'Reilly and Green 9) have long been explored and theorized in matricentric feminism, but most research outside of that space does not

systematically disaggregate mothers from women, thereby invisibilizing many of the key issues. Although this problem is widely discussed, only matricentric feminism has identified that we must start by recognizing the category of "mother" separately from the category of "woman" (O'Reilly and Green 9). Similarly, we cannot solve issues related to carework without discussing motherwork specifically.

To create meaningful and lasting progress in gender equality policies worldwide, we must begin by recognizing mothers and motherwork as standalone categories. Gooden's name, blame, claim framework is a well-established tool to improve equity and diversity in public administrations (McCandless et al.). The first step, naming inequities, is to identify and admit issues, an important part of which is data collection and analysis. We have seen that mothers and motherwork are frequently rendered invisible in other datasets (e.g. women or parents). Organizations should consistently produce disaggregated and intersectional data on mothers and motherwork when reporting data on labour, leadership roles, and more. With the correct data, we can move to step two, blaming inequities, which is to understand why the inequity exists and persists. The third step, claiming inequities, is to take meaningful actions to improve the situation.

Although we know that motherhood and motherwork accentuate gender inequality, household labour has been historically difficult to study and measure. One recent study published in the *Archives of Women's Mental Health* proclaims to be "the first to investigate cognitive and physical dimensions within the same household tasks" (Aviv et al. 5). The study identifies that mothers are disproportionately affected by cognitive labour, which contributes to answering step two of Gooden's framework.

Part Two: The Role of Cognitive Household Labour in Gender Inequality

One of the difficulties in measuring household labour is that this type of labour requires a significant amount of invisible tasks, such as planning and anticipating. Elizabeth Aviv and colleagues have demonstrated that "women's share of cognitive labor was more disproportionate than physical household labor" and that "cognitive labor was associated with women's depression, stress, burnout, overall mental health, and relationship functioning" (5). If cognitive labour is a key factor driving gender inequality and impacting maternal health and wellbeing, it is important to dive deeper into what this looks like. Elizabeth Aviv et al. developed a household labour inventory based on the Fair Play cards framework, each of which represents a domestic task and a statistical tool to analyze the data. The authors explain why the cards merit empirical assessment:

> The Fair Play card deck includes 100 cards, each representing a

> category of household or childcare tasks, and was developed for public dissemination. The original author of the cards interviewed more than 500 families to qualitatively pilot and test the set of tasks. The card deck has sold over 85,000 units, of which 44,000 were sold in the last year alone (NPD Circana BookScan n.d.). Thus, given that this measure is already being used by thousands of families to quantify household labor, it merits empirical assessment. (8)

The paper selected thirty out of the one hundred cards representing common and frequently performed tasks that were specifically applicable to parents of two- to three-year-old children. The results show that mothers reported greater cognitive labour for twenty-nine out of the thirty tasks (see Figure 2)—72.75 per cent of all cognitive labour and 63.64 per cent of all physical domestic labour (Aviv et al. 9).

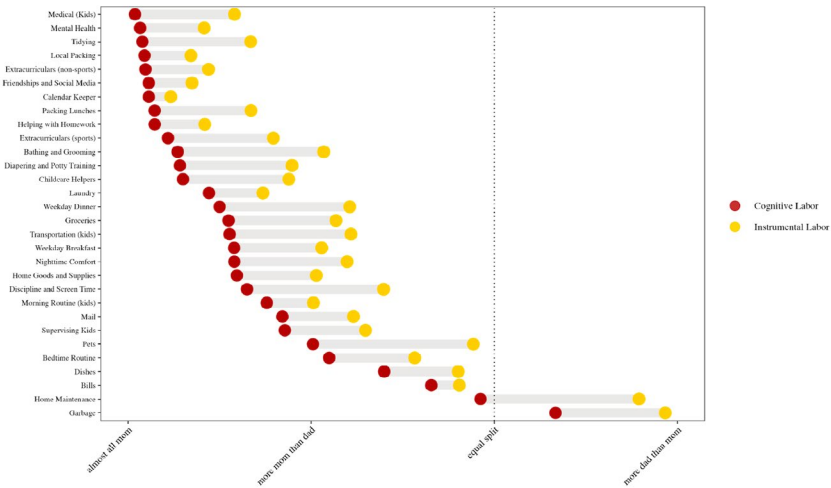


Figure 2. Division of domestic labour by household task (Aviv et al. 9).

Although physical workload is not associated with depressive symptoms, stress, personal burnout, or overall mental health, cognitive workload is, and therefore it is identified as a "meaningful correlate of psychological functioning in mothers" (Aviv et al. 10). The data also show that "less cognitively demanding tasks that do not relate to childcare (e.g., garbage, home maintenance, and bills) tended to be divided more equally between mothers and their partners, whereas cognitively demanding, child-related tasks (kids' healthcare, tidying, and packing kids' backpacks) were most gendered, with mothers shouldering a larger share of these responsibilities" (Aviv et al. 10). The study also notes that "the particularly deleterious effects of cognitive labor may be due, in part,

to its invisibility" (Aviv et al. 11). Cognitive labour can often go unrecognized by others and by oneself, and it can take away mental resources for other work or leisure (Aviv et al. 11).

The authors emphasize that this study lays the groundwork for future research that "should incorporate other aspects of the construct of cognitive labour that have been outlined in the qualitative literature, such as the degree of its invisibility and its time-boundedness" (Aviv et al. 12). The authors also note that this study was "limited by its well-educated, high-income convenience sample" and that a lower socioeconomic status sample would likely reveal "more striking discrepancies in domestic labour, and a greater impact on wellbeing" (Aviv et al. 11). Upcoming research projects are expected to include a comparison of parenting and nonparenting couples to better understand how the division of cognitive labour might change during parenthood, and an analysis of income and occupational status to better understand how couples make decisions about their division of cognitive labour (Aviv et al. 12).

Now that we have analyzed how household cognitive labour influences gender inequality, maternal health, and maternal wellbeing—answering the "blame" in Gooden's framework—we will explore the Fair Play system's proposed solution to see if it could contribute to the "claim" in Gooden's framework. Is redistributing cognitive labour enough to make meaningful progress on the road towards gender equality?

Part Three: Fair Play's Proposal to Redistribute Domestic Work

The Fair Play Institute is a private foundation created by Eve Rodsky, a Harvard-trained organizational management professional. In 2019, she created four rules and a card game to make invisible work visible and divide household tasks for couples more equitably. Rodsky then partnered with Procter and Gamble in 2023 to publish a curriculum to "provide resources for the next generation to change the narrative around the gendered division of domestic labor" ("Fair Play Newsletter"). In 2025, she contributed to the first study quantifying cognitive labour and its impact on maternal mental health (Aviv et al., 2025). The Institute's home page states that "by making the invisible care historically held by women visible, Fair Play inspires a more equitable and intentionally balanced future" ("Fair Play Method"; see Figure 3). Both Rodsky and the Institute have active Instagram accounts (@everodsky and @fairplaylife), which they use to promote the Fair Play brand and share like-minded content.

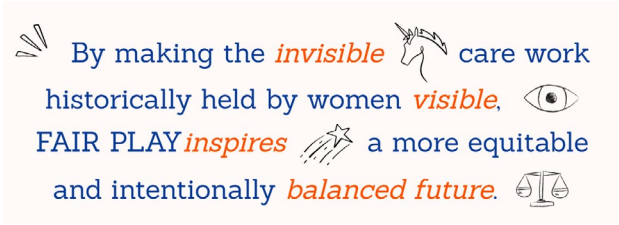


Figure 3. FairPlayPolicy.org

The cards represent a gamified system of the invisible tasks it takes to run a home. There are one hundred cards, each listing one household task (examples in Figure 4).

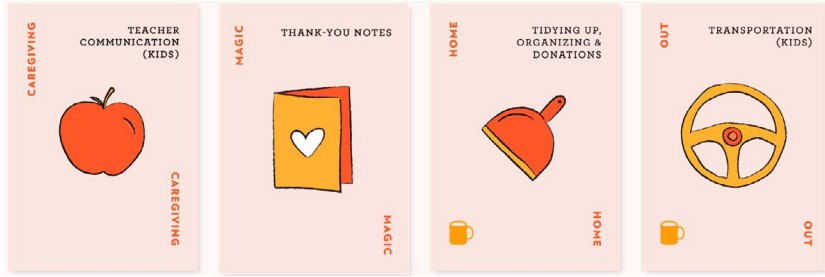


Figure 4. Illustration of Fair Play cards

Each of the cards breaks down the conception, planning, and execution for each task, thus recognizing both invisible and visible parts of household labour (example in Figure 5).

Definition
Your family needs to eat. Can we all agree on that? Good. So how do the pantry and refrigerator get stocked on an ongoing basis? With CPE. This includes noticing what's about to be used up or expire, keeping a running grocery list, and getting to the market . . . ideally before you realize there's not a drop of milk in the fridge. Even if your family orders groceries online and your go-to dinner is frozen pizza, this card requires CPE nearly 365 days a year. Consult the various "meals" cardholders regularly so you can be sure you have taco shells in the cupboard for taco night.
**You have selected a Daily Grind card! On any given day there are 30 of these time-sucking jobs that must be done regularly, repetitively, and many at a very specific time.*

Conception
GROCERIES (DG)*
Planning
- Making a master list (consulting with "meals" cardholder)
- Checking refrigerator and pantry for what is low and adding to list
Execution
- Shopping (grocery stores and/or online), loading and unloading groceries
- Placing items in pantry/refrigerator
- Throwing away expired items from refrigerator/freezer
Minimum Standard of Care
Are the appropriate, agreed-upon groceries in the home when you need them?

Figure 5. Conception, planning, and execution (CPE) breakdown for the groceries card. https://www.fairplaylife.com/the-cards

Each of the cards is associated with one of six categories: home, out, caregiving, magic, unicorn space, and wild. Figure 6 lists all the cards and groups them into their respective categories.

Home	**Out**
Childcare Helpers (Kids)	Auto
Cleaning	Birthday Celebrations (Other Kids)
Dishes	Calendar Keeper
Dry Cleaning	Cash & Bills
Garbage	Charity, Community Service & Good Deeds
Groceries	Civic Engagement & Cultural Enrichment
Home Furnishings	Electronics and IT
Home Goods and Supplies	Extracurricular (Kids; Non-Sports)
Home Maintenance	Extracurricular (Kids; Sports)
Home Purchase/Rental, Mortgage, & Insurance	First Aid, Safety & Emergency
Hosting	Packing & Unpacking (Kids; Local)
Laundry	Packing & Unpacking (Travel)
Lawn & Plants	Points, Miles & Coupons
Mail	Returns & Store Credits
Meals (Kids; School Lunch)	School Breaks (Kids; Non-Summer)
Meals (Weekday Breakfast)	School Breaks (Kids; Summer)
Meals (Weekday Dinner)	School Forms (Kids)
Meals (Weekend)	Social Plans (Couples)
Memories & Photos	Transportation (Kids)
Money Manager	Travel
Storage, Garage & Seasonal Items	Tutoring & Coaching (Kids)
Tidying Up, Organizing & Donations	Weekend Plans
Caregiving	**Magic**
Bathing & Grooming (Kids)	Adult Friendships (Player 1)
Bedtime Routine (Kids)	Adult Friendships (Player 2)
Birth Control	Birthday Celebrations (Your Kids)
Clothes & Accessories (Kids)	Discipline & Screen Time (Kids)
Dental (Kids)	Extended Family
Diapering & Potty Training (Kids)	Fun & Playing (Kids)
Estate Planning & Life Insurance	Gestures of Love (Kids)
Friendships & Social Media (Kids)	Gifts (Family)
Grooming & Wardrobe (Player 1)	Gifts (VIPs)
Grooming & Wardrobe (Player 2)	Hard Questions (Kids)
Health Insurance	Holiday Cards
Homework, Projects & School Supplies (Kids)	Holidays
Medical & Healthy Living (Kids)	Informal Education (Kids)
	Magical Beings (Kids)

Caregiving (continued)	**Magic (continued)**
Morning Routine (Kids) Parents & In-Laws Pets School Service (Kids) School Transitions (Kids) Self-Care (Player 1) Self-Care (Player 2) Special Needs & Mental Health (Kids) Teacher Communication (Kids)	Marriage & Romance Middle-of-the-Night Comfort (Kids) Partner Coach Showing Up & Participating (Kids) Spirituality Thank-You Notes Values & Good Deeds (Kids) Watching (Kids)
Unicorn Space	**Wild**
Answer this question, then make a commitment to setting aside the time to pursue it: What makes me feel at least two of the following emotions: exhilarated, content, fulfilled, or focused? My Unicorn Space for the next six months will be: _____. I will commit _____ a week to pursue it.	Aging/Ailing Parent Death First Year of Infant's Life Glitch in the Matrix / Daily Disruption Home Renovation Job Loss & Money Problems Moving New Job Serious Illness Welcome a Child into the Home

Figure 6. Fair Play Cards Broken Down into Card Categories. The table was compiled using the ninety-nine cards listed at https://www.fairplaylife.com/the-cards.

Three outcomes are promised for using the card system: a new vocabulary to change the couple's conversation on domestic life; a system to set them up for success in their relationship and with parenting; and a way to discover their "unicorn space," defined as something that makes one "feel at least two of the following emotions: exhilarated, content, fulfilled, or focused."

The website states that 61 per cent of individuals who have participated in the Fair Play method have seen "an increase in overall egalitarianism at home" (56 per cent cognitive labour and 54 per cent instrumental labour) and measurable decreases in depression, personal burnout, relationship functioning, and perceived stress ("The Fair Play Method"). In addition, 91 per cent of participants indicate that they would recommend the method to others. The website provides a link to the documentary made about the book (available to paying subscribers of Apple TV, Prime Video, Hulu, YouTube, and Google Play) and provides free discussion questions that help begin the conversation about rebalancing household work.

This article will now explore how these results contribute to matricentric

feminism. Since mothers are disproportionately affected by cognitive labour, do the method's tools provide a solution to the unique problems faced by mothers?

Part Four: Echoes of Maternal Thinking and Maternal Ambivalence

The *Archives of Women's Mental Health* research paper defines cognitive household labour as planning tasks, anticipating needs, and delegating responsibilities (Aviv et al.). This type of labour could be analyzed through Sara Ruddick's concept of maternal thinking, which is described as the intellectual capacities, judgments, metaphysical attitudes, and values that an individual develops once they become a mother (Ruddick 69), and maternal practice is described as follows: "Children 'demand' their lives be preserved and their growth fostered. Their social group 'demands' that growth be shaped in a way acceptable to the next generation. Maternal practice is governed by (at least) three interests in satisfying these demands for preservation, growth, and acceptability." (71).

The categories from the Fair Play cards fit within the realm of maternal thinking and maternal practice, and the data on cognitive household work present an empirical analysis of different elements of maternal thinking and maternal practices. The deck helps everyday people understand the invisible labour that mothers practice daily and helps everyday people try and redistribute the labour within a couple to make it fairer for the mother.

The cards could also help mothers struggling with maternal ambivalence—"the simultaneous and contradictory emotional responses of mothers towards their children" (Adams 556)—that can occur when navigating the many conflicting demands of motherwork There is a card for self-care that highlights the importance of guilt-free health and wellness routines, and there is a "unicorn space" card that highlights the importance of committing some time every week for something beyond career and family that makes mothers feel at least two of the following emotions: exhilarated, content, fulfilled, or focussed. These cards could help mothers struggling with balancing their needs and their children's needs because they validate that mothers do have needs and that they should be able to satisfy those needs without needing permission or feeling guilty. These needs would include, at the very minimum, some self-care routines and some passions outside of career and family.

Part Five: Shadows of Normative Motherhood

Both the UN and the ILO have highlighted the importance of redistributing unpaid care work, with the ILO's 2018 report specifically citing that "a more equal sharing of unpaid care work between men and women is associated with

higher levels of women's labour force participation" (*Care Work* xxxi). Fair Play proposes a concrete measure that can support mothers in managing their share of unpaid labour with their partner. However, redistributing motherwork between two parents is not enough. Organizations, such as the UN and Fair Play, may inadvertently be reinforcing the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy if they do not actively question Normative Motherhood and if they only offer solutions within this narrative.

Using O'Reilly's ten dictates of normative motherhood (Figure 7)—how mothers are oppressed and regulated by the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy (discourses and practices) (O'Reilly 478)—we can see that Fair Play does not consistently contribute a social-political analysis of the institutions of normative motherhood, nor does it consistently invite others to consider this question.

Essentialization positions maternity as the basis of female identity
Privatization locates motherwork solely in the reproductive realm of the home
Individualization causes such mothering to be the work and responsibility of one person
Naturalization assumes that maternity is natural to women and the work of mothering is driven by instinct rather than intelligence and developed by habit rather than skill
Normalization limits and restricts maternal identity and practice to one specific mode: the nuclear family
Idealization sets unattainable expectations of and for mothers
Biologicalization positions the cisgender birthmother as the "real" and authentic mother
Expertization causes childrearing to be expert driven
Intensification causes childrearing to be all consuming
Depoliticalization characterizes childrearing solely as a private and nonpolitical undertaking, with no social or political import

Figure 7. The ten dictates of normative motherhood

The Fair Play method does not consistently question the fact that motherwork should not be limited to the nuclear family (the normalization dictate). Rodsky's Instagram account recently highlighted this fact when she posted the following statement emphasizing that the solution to women's unpaid labour is men's unpaid labour:

> After 14 years of @fairplaylife research I have come to the conclusion that every patriarchal system is designed to force women into unpaid labour—of their children, their homes, their schools via PTAs, their in-laws, their parents. Some patriarchal systems are willing to accept labor force participation of women but only because one income households are not sustainable in late stage capitalism. I have testified

> for women in family courts and I feel their pain. The only long term societal solution is men doing unpaid labor in the form of housework, childcare and kinkeeping – period. End of story. When men step into their full power in the home women can step into their full power in the world. Even if you don't participate in a hetero cis relationship your life is affected by this structure. (Instagram)

While this post and many others like this one are in the right direction—denouncing the patriarchy and emphasizing that motherwork should be shared with fathers (contributing to denouncing the individualization dictate)—the solution reinforces the normalization dictate. This is problematic for many reasons, including because of certain assumptions related to the functioning of a nuclear family: The card system heavily relies on a couple having good communication and shared priorities and being self-reliant for most motherwork. Many mothers would not be able to use this method, including mothers in a difficult coparenting situation and single mothers. Socioeconomic background and other intersectional elements also affect how useful the cards would be to a mother.

With its long list of cards that are supposed to be divided mostly between two parents, Fair Play also seems to further entrench unattainable expectations for mothers (the idealization dictate) and even the all-consuming nature of childrearing (the intensification dictate). Finally, it seems to adopt a view that childrearing is a private and nonpolitical undertaking, with no social or political import (the depoliticalization dictate). The Fair Play method also does not question the role of the cisgender birthmother (the biologicalization dictate). There is a card for other caregivers—such as childcare helpers (kids) under the home category—but the definition is mostly anchored in normative motherhood:

> It takes a village, and you're fortunate if your village includes a nanny, babysitter, family caregivers, or others who pitch in with the kids. It can be a lifesaver to have the help, but it still requires someone to Conceive and Plan before Nanny Poppins or Grandma Shirley shows up to help Execute. They don't magically appear when you want them to, so schedules need to be managed, along with payment, delegation of responsibilities, and ongoing communication. Heads up: When your helper cancels or quits, this cardholder is not necessarily the one who drops everything. Rather, engage in Fair Play immediately to re-deal the applicable cards, for example, "transportation (kids)" and "watching." ("Welcome to Fair Play")

More generally, the cards would require additional adjustments to make them more inclusive. For example, one task may seem quick and easy to someone without a physical or cognitive disability, but it may take someone else much

longer and be more complex if they have one. Another example would be managing tasks for a child with a physical or cognitive disability, although the caregiving category has a special needs and mental health (kids) card; however, just one card does not seem to be enough to recognize and validate all of the different areas that would require additional support. Making this more visible would be important to families living with this reality. A similar lens could be applied to cultural diversity, for example, including additional cards for community caregivers. Another example is the transmission of language and cultural heritage, which can be much more work if a mother is in a mixed marriage or lives far away from their community.

Part Six: Reaching for Empowered Mothering

While Fair Play mitigates the oppression of the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy by helping to equalize household labour, it does not go far enough in questioning the institutions themselves, which is problematic. Making motherwork visible and helping mothers redistribute this work are important, but dismantling normative motherhood is even more vital if we want to truly improve societal outcomes for mothers. This can be done with the help of O'Reilly's theory of empowered mothering, which aims to "reclaim the power for mothers and to imagine and implement a mode of mothering that mitigates the ways that patriarchal motherhood, both discursively and materially, regulates and restrains mothers and their mothering" (O'Reilly 608).

Each of the Fair Play cards should not be dependent on only one other person. A mother should be able to outsource motherwork in a way that aligns with personal choices and values without having to negotiate heavily with anyone else, via a comprehensive societal support system. This support system should be aligned to the five dimensions of motherwork (O'Reilly 611): agency, authority, authenticity, autonomy, and advocacy-activism. The Fair Play Institute should become an advocate for matricentric feminism and incorporate empowered mothering into its mission. We must remember that "matricentric feminism is needed because mothers—arguably more so than women in general—remain disempowered despite sixty years of feminism" (O'Reilly and Greene 10). Circling back to Goldin, solving the "greedy work" problem and closing the gender gaps will require implementing empowered mothering.

Given that the Fair Play method has created an empirical system of different elements of maternal thinking and maternal practices, it could be used as a policy tool to expand the current card categories, explanations, and related datasets, using a cross-cultural and intersectional lens and paying particular attention as to why the method works for some mothers and not for others. The overarching question would be to identify how the Fair Play method

empowers some mothers and their mothering and why it does not work for some mothers (i.e., why was it effective against the regulation and restraining of mothers and their mothering in some situations but not in others?). Reasons could include the partner's willingness to collaborate, marriage, culture, physical or cognitive abilities, housing constraints (i.e., sharing space), and finances.

If so much of the data discussed in this article shows that mothers have been doing excessive unpaid labour for a long time, yet so many have not been able to find a solution, some or many may be trapped in this situation for a variety of reasons, and we need to understand these reasons a lot better. Further, if the excessive unpaid labour was prevalent in the Elizabeth Aviv et al. study of well-educated and high-income mothers, one can only imagine what a more diverse, inclusive, and cross-cultural dataset may reveal (11). This additional data could inform a policy discussion on empowered mothering to provide recommendations to help free mothers from unpaid labour permanently and redistribute motherwork across society. Using the Fair Play method as a stepping stone towards a broader, more inclusive, and matricentric (O'Reilly) sociopolitical analysis would contribute to the third and final step of Gooden's framework.

Conclusion

This article has discussed how mothers are uniquely affected when it comes to gender inequality, arguing that the "parenthood effect" should in fact be termed the "motherwork effect." Marriage and children are consequential for gender inequality because they result in ongoing visible and invisible unpaid labour for mothers that affects their paid labour and their health and wellbeing. Matricentric feminism and Gooden's framework highlight why we must start by discussing mothers and motherwork (naming the inequity). The article then discussed part of why the inequity exists (blaming the inequity). A key factor is cognitive household labour, which is part of the invisible, unpaid labour and underpins the motherhood penalty worldwide. The article discussed the Fair Play Institute's proposal to help mothers manage their domestic labour better and discussed whether this solution is improving the situation (claiming the inequity). While the Fair Play method supports some of matricentric feminism's goals, it does not go far enough in questioning the institutions of motherhood and patriarchy or advancing empowered mothering. To bridge this gap, I recommended using the Fair Play method as a policy tool to expand the current dataset on maternal thinking and practice, which could inform a policy discussion on empowered mothering. I also recommended that Fair Play Institute become an advocate for matricentric feminism and incorporate empowered mothering into its mission.

Since the UN has acknowledged that its goal of achieving gender equality and empowering all women and girls is "clearly off track," urgent action is required by all levels of government and from all areas of civil society. It must start with recognizing mothers separately from women and motherwork separately from carework. Given that it has been seven years since the ILO report on carework and that the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated motherwork issues, the ILO should focus one of its next major reports on mothers and motherwork and include both visible and invisible labour in its analysis. With international and national organizations collecting the right data and having policy discussions informed by empowered mothering, policymakers will be able to effectively work towards closing gender gaps and solving the "greedy work" problem.

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