SERVING MOTHERHOOD: ANALYZING THE BALANCE AND JUSTICE OF FOODWORK IN THE LIVES OF WORKING MOMS

Kaitlyn Paige Hall
University of Mississippi

Follow this and additional works at: https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd

Part of the Sociology Commons

Recommended Citation
https://egrove.olemiss.edu/etd/2008

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Graduate School at eGrove. It has been accepted for inclusion in Electronic Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of eGrove. For more information, please contact egrove@olemiss.edu.
ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses on the foodwork that working mothers do at work and at home in order to support and provide for their families. It explores how women in low-paid food service jobs talk about and manage the work of feeding their families at home and customers at work in order to better understand the gender dynamics of this work and the conditions necessary to achieve “work-family justice”—structural solutions to work/family conflict. The study is based on qualitative semi-structured, in-depth interviews with 12 mothers who are between the ages of 24 and 43 from Mississippi and Arkansas. While some held multiple positions in the restaurant, the majority of my participants were servers. In terms of foodwork at work, women in this study were expected to perform in gendered ways while interacting with customers and co-workers. The “invisible labor” of foodwork included managing some customers’ assumptions about the status of this work and the legitimacy of their right to tell customers what to do (i.e., wear masks). In terms of foodwork at home, women in this study were “doing gender” by taking on the primary work of cooking in the home, regardless of whether they enjoyed it or not. In terms of COVID-19, mothers experienced exponential stress during Covid-19. This impacted “foodwork” differently at work and in the home. Lastly, in terms of work-family justice, it was found that women make up the majority of restaurant workers. While these interview participants experienced positive aspects of “like a family” support at work; they did not have access to policies that would help support work-family justice and appeared to lack information from supervisors or managers regarding existing workplace policies. The thesis concludes with a discussion of limitations, implications, and potential future studies.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to thank the twelve working moms who took time out of their day to speak with me about their experiences during COVID-19. Without them, this project would not be possible. I would like to thank my committee Chair, Dr. Kirsten Dellinger, for meeting with me weekly and encouraging me throughout this journey. I would also like to thank my committee members, Dr. John Sonnett and Dr. Kirk Johnson, for teaching me methodological approaches, the role of ethics in research, and encouraging me to always ask questions no matter how big or small.

I would especially like to thank Dr. Mark Frezzo for reassuring me that the University of Mississippi is where I belong, and that I am in good hands. His passion for human rights inspired me to further research women’s rights in America, and his contribution to this research will not be forgotten. I would like to thank Dr. Jeffrey Jackson and Dr. John Green for their encouragement and messages of motivation to my cohort and me throughout these two years. I would like to thank Dr. Oh for teaching us new theoretical concepts, critical thinking skills, and improved writing techniques. I would like to thank Dr. Theresa Starkey for introducing new gender theory and methods and providing positive reinforcements during my year with the Gender Studies department.

I would like to thank the Sociology Master’s cohort of 2021 for being available in times of uncertainty and reminding each other that we are capable of great things. Lastly, I would like to thank my friends, family members, and undergraduate research advisors from Henderson State University, Dr. Shari Valentine and Dr. Malcolm Rigsby, for periodically checking in and sending positive, inspirational messages throughout my Master’s degree.
Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 2: METHODS</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 3: FOODWORK AT WORK</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 4: FOODWORK AND EXPERIENCES AT HOME</td>
<td>52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 5: FOODWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 6: WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF REFERENCES</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LIST OF APPENDICES</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM</td>
<td>130</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APPENDIX C: DEMOGRAPHICS CHART</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VITA</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on how women feed the family as both paid and unpaid work. I am interested in how women experience work in both settings—at work and at home. In order to explore the characteristics of and connections between paid and unpaid foodwork, I chose to interview women who are mothers who work in food service jobs with children under the age of 18. The main focus of the thesis is on learning how women in low-paid food service jobs talk about and manage the work of feeding their families at home and customers at work.

At a personal level, my interest in foodwork at home started young. I did not have a traditional family—my grandmother raised me. However, I was fascinated when I would go to friends’ houses who did have a traditional family. My memory is that the mother was often cleaning the house or in the kitchen and the father was in the recliner or on the couch watching sports, the news, or a hunting show. The only cooking I saw men doing was grilling. We would eat out a lot, especially on weekdays, so watching these dynamics in other people’s houses was so strange, but I was intrigued. However, my interest in foodwork at work started when I got accepted into the Ronald E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Program, and I had to move closer to campus for the summer, which meant getting a job. A woman in my cohort said she could guarantee me a job at Pizza Hut. I noticed that Pizza Hut seemed to employ many female servers, specifically ones who did not have families or school and who had free time to work. When I did see managers hiring a mother to work, she was most likely in a server or driver role and not in a
higher paying position. Serving at this restaurant came with some great benefits including health insurance to any employee, first access to buffet foods after the lunch hour, a 20% discount on any item(s), and free salads. I would bring home as much as I could and feed my family at least twice a week. So, foodwork at work, for me, was much more than only serving the food. Despite the low pay and the challenge of living off of tips, the job’s “perks” helped me make sure I could feed myself and my family as needed.

In this chapter, I begin by reviewing the literature on women’s invisible labor in the home, especially as it relates to feeding the family. I then discuss some background information on the conditions of women’s service work in the restaurant industry. I introduce a theoretical framework that suggests that a structural analysis of “work-family justice” is a better way of understanding the paid and unpaid labor of women than the more individual-level focus on “work-family balance.” I also draw on the “doing gender” framework, to highlight the ways that “feeding the family” is a set of practices that can “do,” “undo,” and “redo” societal gender dynamics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Concept of Foodwork

I begin with Devault’s book *Feeding the Family* because this is a foundational study on invisible labor and feeding the family. Devault (1992) introduces her book by explaining that feeding is women’s work. If women refuse to work, they are thought of as unloving and unnatural. Devault uses the term “feeding the family” because this work is all about the human necessity for food. She points out that we only rely on solely women to provide for us something that is a necessity for survival. The unpaid work of feeding the family is only one type of everyday caring, and she analyzes it as an activity instead of an image or emotion. As an activity, it is something
that is being actively done. If it were an image, it would be for show or display and require little work. If it were an emotion, it would be a natural, instinctual reaction to an action. However, feeding is actively accomplished. For many generations, women have been responsible for sustaining life and community. Caring work, and specifically feeding the family, has become a part of a larger social structure—the traditional view that this is a woman’s work. By being the primary member of the family who provides care, these necessary activities are what coerce these women into this subordinate position. This is because women are expected to perform certain tasks, and when they participate in this carework, these expectations are reinforced.

Devault looks at women who experience both feelings of satisfaction and resistance from feeding others. However, shared work between partners can lead to satisfaction for some. She finds that shared work is not the same as equal work in most households. The skills that are needed to feed a family, whether this is work shared between partners equally or not, involve planning and coordination—invisible labor. It takes a lot of time and energy, and feeding is better accomplished when someone is home to devote their time and energy, but this does not have to necessarily be a woman. The family’s feeding practices depends on women’s work.

Devault (1992) informed my decision to use the term “feeding” because she stresses that it is an active process. The term “feeding” explores real work conducted by women that is often overlooked or unrecognized as “work.” She argues that this is a part of how people “do gender.” Devault is looking at foodwork as carework, and carework is invisible labor. Invisible labor is unpaid work that is unnoticed and unacknowledged such as making shopping lists, knowing family members’ food preferences, and juggling schedules. This leads us to explore how invisible labor emerges when cooking and feeding the family.
Cooking for and Feeding the Family

Some major themes that have emerged in the literature on cooking for and feeding the family include: support at home, responsibility, the ideology of intensive mothering, and family food preferences.

Support and help at home.

The “second shift” is the double burden that women and mothers experience due to the expectation to come home after working at work to continue working at home—specifically by feeding and caring for her family (Hochschild 2012). Hochschild points out that to look at the workplace is only half of the problem. We must also look at what occurs in the home. She discusses how some women feel “lucky” that they have a man who is willing to be equal in the home since this is so rare and unusual. The fact that this feeling of luck exists shows what is so fundamentally wrong with how men view work at home, how women view men’s help, and the cultural world of work that creates and reinforces these feelings. She found that most women felt that the second shift was their responsibility, and most husbands agreed. She also found that men have more control over their time than women do. When men do the “women’s work,” this is socially devalued, causing men to be less likely to help women in different parts of house work and caring work. However, Milkie, Raley, and Bianchi (2009) found that mothers’ total workload is greater than the fathers’ by about a week-and-a-half per year. In Milkie et al.’s (2009) study, they found that while the mothers in their sample have less leisure time than fathers, they do not experience less sleep or less unpaid work. Blair-Loy, Hochschild, Pugh, Williams, and Hartmann (2015) discussed linked trends between changes at work and changes in family life. “Social class inequality is further refracted onto family life by the growing number of high-school educated, working-class white
men, who have become disengaged from civic and family ties” (445). One study shows that men are more likely than women to drop out of their children’s lives to go to work (Murray 2012, cited in Blair-Loy et al. 2015).

Responsibility and rationalization.

The literature suggests that women use several rationales for assuming primary responsibility for foodwork in the home. Beagan et al. (2008) found that women were the most responsible for family foodwork, shopping, planning, preparation, and clean up. While we see from Oleschuk (2019) that children learn cooking habits from their mothers, and while it is mostly young girls who learn this, we see with Beagan et al. (2008) that while other family members helped with cooking and food preparation habits, they had no primary responsibility to do so. Many of the women who do all of the cooking say they do so because they are the most concerned in their family about what they eat both in terms of health and in terms of them having a balanced, sit-down meal. This leads to women rationalizing their choices to participate in and contribute to this gendered work on the assumption that the partner with fewer hours is the one who contributes to the caring and feeding work. Many women were uncomfortable saying that foodwork is women’s work, but they acknowledge that they have to do all of the foodwork or else their family’s health would be in question. Beagan et al. (2008) informed my decision to look at the rationalization of foodwork because I am interested in which my respondents feel that whether their time and money spent on foodwork and care work are their own individual choice, if it feels like a burden, what support they receive, and if they feel comfortable talking about this job that is perceived to be a woman’s job in society.
Intensive mothering.

Elliot and Bowen (2018) discuss the ideology of “intensive mothering,” which means these mothers feel pressures to be what society calls a “good mother.” This could mean anything from financially providing for their family to intensively spending quality time with their children. They find that mothers used the words “right” and “good” to describe their feeding practices. For these mothers, providing sufficient food to “buffer” their child from hunger was a main goal. Financial limitations sometimes prevented mothers from feeding their children what are perceived to be nutritious foods, but most mothers said that they were able to control what their children ate. While my study is not specifically focused on “good mothering” or what children eat, I did expect to find mothers discussing their feeding practices and how that reflects how they feel about themselves as mothers, and I am interested in how class dynamics and low-wage labor might affect how women work to provide for and feed their family.

Preferences.

Devault (1992) finds that the husband’s preference plays a large role in what and how meals are planned and prepared. Some mothers completely go without some of their favorite foods because the husbands do not like them. The child’s preference also matters, but the husband’s preference is the larger factor. I did expect that mothers that I interview will discuss how preferences in the family affect their buying and serving routines in the home, and I am interested in how much they allow preference to matter in their individual households. For example, how do cultural tastes get mobilized or neutralized in the power dynamics of these relationships?

Restaurant and Serving Work
In order to study working mothers in the dine-in service industry, I must first look at issues and interactions that these mothers may experience in the workplace. Since I am investigating work-family justice, I must give both aspects of these mothers’ lives equal attention. The main issues I have found in the literature on women working in restaurants or service work include a variety of dynamics related to the conditions of this work: violations of wage and hour laws (Petrescu-Prahova and Spiller 2016), tip inequality and lack of benefits (Restaurant Opportunities Centers United 2012), and sexual harassment (Matulewics 2016; Giuffre and Williams 1994).

Petrescu-Prahova and Spiller (2016) found that women have higher rates of minimum wage and lose more of their earnings to institutional wage theft than men, which means that these women have earnings missing from their paychecks that are not explained by taxes or insurance. Women dominate occupations that are vulnerable to workplace violations, and are at greater risk of this than men in certain areas of employment, especially in the restaurant industry.

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (2012), a nonprofit organization whose mission is to improve wages and working conditions in restaurant work all over the nation, shows us several things. First, 71 percent of servers were women. 52 percent of men made up non-tipped restaurant workers with $7.25 federal minimum wage, while only 48 percent were women. However, 66 percent of the tipped restaurant workers, who earned an hourly wage of $2.13—significantly below the federal minimum wage of $7.25—plus tips, were women, while only 34 percent were men. In many areas of employment, women experience lower wages as a product of workplace discrimination, but in the restaurant sector, lower wages for women are set by law (5). Despite the poverty rate being 6.7 percent for the overall workforce in 2012, states that follow the federal tipped subminimum wage of $2.13 have a higher poverty rate (19.4 percent) for servers than states with the federal minimum wage (13.6 percent) (6). Because 71 percent of servers were women,
this poverty burden disproportionately affected women in server positions. While women are most likely to be the one to cook at home, they represent only 19 percent of chef positions—one of the highest paying positions in dine-in restaurants.

Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (2012) also shows us that a lack of benefits prevents restaurant workers from receiving proper health care and caring for their families. They surveyed 4,300 restaurant workers across the country. Ninety percent of these respondents did not have sick days, and 90 percent of these respondents also did not have health insurance through their employers. One third (33.4 percent) of all female workers did not have any type of health care from their employer or independent means, such as through DHS or the HealthCare Marketplace. 26.8 percent of all female restaurant workers were mothers—over 10 percent are single mothers—so this absence of paid sick leave and health insurance added to these women’s burden. Women workers even reported that they would go to work sick because they could not risk losing their earnings or their job.

One last burden that we see from Restaurant Opportunities Centers United (2012) is that restaurants demand that employees work evenings, nights, and weekends. The inconsistent shifts cause women employees to experience fluctuating scheduling, meaning that employees have to work different hours on different days each week, and they usually do not have the same day(s) off each week.

Lastly, we see from Matulewicz (2016) that women must also endure sexual harassment at work. This study shows that the law embodies, creates, and recreates the “gendered subtext of the workplace” (127). As servers are mostly women, and servers are expected to “earn” their pay from customers, and because, from my own experience, mostly men pay for the meal and choose how much to tip, restaurants are considered sexualized workplaces (Giuffre and Williams 1994;
McLaughlin, Uggen, Blackstone 2012). According to a study conducted by Giuffre and Williams (1994) using in-depth interviews with 18 restaurant servers in Austin, Texas, most restaurants are seen as highly sexualized environments. When sexual harassment complaints are filed in a sexualized workplace, they are often written off as a “joke,” which is the norm (Dellinger and Williams 2002). How servers and other restaurant employees engage with the customers influences the customers’ tipping practices. How a woman responds to sexual harassment on the floor influences how much she gets paid that day. Most women in Matulewicz’s (2016) study dealt with customers’ inappropriate behavior by shrugging it off, laughing, playing along, quitting their job, or talking back to the customer. None of them complained to the manager on duty or initiated a sexual harassment complaint.

GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

The two main guiding frameworks for this thesis include West and Zimmerman’s (1987) doing gender, and Collins’s (2020) work-family justice. These theoretical frameworks allow for a deep analysis of gender inequality, gender performance, and societal values, specifically in terms of motherhood and womanhood. Society may value the work that is done by a mother, but mothers are often not valued as individuals. I focus on these two perspectives because they help in examining the individual and structural levels of social interactions. I am only using these two frameworks because doing gender is a very well-known and often critiqued theory, and work-family justice is a new framework from January 2020. By using doing gender, I am able to look at power dynamics at play in the workplace and in the home. By using work-family justice, I am able to look for structural injustices at work and at home in the lives of my participants.

The theoretical perspective “doing gender” is an interactionist perspective that assesses how the meanings around masculinity, femininity, and power emerge out of social interactions at
the *individual* level. However, work-family justice is a guiding framework that is assessing the changes that should take place at the *structural* level so that women would be able to escape the stress they experience at the individual levels. By bringing the frameworks of doing gender and work-family justice together, I hope to understand how the structural level dynamics at work and at home affect how women “do gender” at the individual level in both settings—work and home. When talking about both work and home, sometimes workplace is associated with “structure,” and this sometimes leads to a lapse into thinking of dynamics in the home as occurring at an individual level, or outside of structure. By using the doing gender and work-family justice perspectives together, I try to find an understanding of both work and family as structures that affect the individual level experiences of how women do gender (or undo or redo gender).

**DOING GENDER**

West and Zimmerman (1987) explain that gender is a routine and recurring accomplishment. “We contend that the ‘doing’ of gender is undertaken by women and men whose competence as members of society is hostage to its production” (126). The use of the word “hostage” here is interesting. It encourages the notion that men and women cannot escape the roles and displays of their gender. In our society, one could argue this to be true. With societal pressures, specifically those from the family, it could be hard, or even impossible, for one to escape the constructed gender norms. Doing gender occurs during interactions where masculine and feminine “natures” are expressed (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126). When gender becomes an accomplishment, then a specific code of conduct is instated, directly or indirectly, that polices an individual’s actions, holding them to a standard of masculine or feminine. While West and Zimmerman have been critiqued and discussed by several scholars (Weber 1995; West and
interaction shows importance in each piece because interaction is the embodiment of gendered performances.

The distinction between sex, sex category, and gender is important here in understanding doing gender. Sex is a biological classification as female or male determined by genitalia at birth or chromosomal type before birth, but sex and sex category do not always agree with one another. Sex categorization is established by the “socially required identificatory displays” that allow one to have membership in either the male or female category. “One's sex category presumes one's sex and stands as proxy for it in many situations, but sex and sex category can vary independently; that is, it is possible to claim membership in a sex category even when the sex criteria are lacking” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). Gender is the category with which one identifies. It is managed through the “normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one’s sex category” (West and Zimmerman 1987: 127). Gender activities come from the membership in a specific sex category.

Doing gender manages situations and interactions in a way that is gender appropriate, and where done is held accountable to their gender. Doing gender means creating differences between women and men that are “not natural, essential, or biological”. These differences reinforce the essentialness of gender (West and Zimmerman 1987: 137). While gender is something for which one is to be held accountable, we can see how women in today’s society are held accountable for feminine tasks such as childcare, cooking, and cleaning. Meanwhile men are held accountable for masculine tasks, such as working, building, and fixing things.

West and Zimmerman (1987) claim that doing gender is unavoidable due to sex category membership. “If we do gender appropriately, we simultaneously sustain, reproduce, and render legitimate the institutional arrangements that are based on sex category” (146). In this sense, I go
back to this notion that there is no escaping one’s gender expectations, and therefore no escaping this action of doing gender. While I would say that there is some flexibility, and that society is slowly progressing to understand the non-binary and slowly abandoning the accountability of gender, we have a long way to go before gender is rendered irrelevant. Therefore, until then, people are stuck in this “doing female/male” box. However, there has been some discussion of undoing and redoing gender.

*Undoing Gender*

Deutsch (2007) challenges this doing gender perspective in a number of ways. She points out that it “undermined the goal of dismantling gender inequity by, perhaps inadvertently, perpetuating the idea that the gender system of oppression is hopelessly impervious to real change and by ignoring the links between social interaction and structural change” (107). She says that we need to start a new conversation about the social processes that enact resistance against the socially accepted gender relations and that there is a chance for a successful change in the power dynamics and gender inequalities. Anywhere that there is a gender inequality, there is always a potential for resistance.

Deutsch (2007: 108) says that the doing gender perspective implies that since gender is constructed, it can be deconstructed. With this in mind, we can consider the gender norms from within the home. Men are expected to be the breadwinners while women are expected to be the bread-bakers. Women are expected to cook, clean, and take care of the children, and more recently, they are expected to do this after working a full shift and earning money for the household, too. This act of women working is one act of resistance that is more so necessary today with the need for two incomes in the home. This is an act of undoing gender because women are participating
in the work that men were traditionally expected to do. Also, we can think of the woman’s work being done by the man in heterosexual relationships, which appears to be more common. While the division of labor is still far from becoming equal, there is evidence (Kolpashnikova 2018) that husbands are putting in more of an effort when it comes to helping their wives at home. With the husbands and male partners helping, this is also an act of resistance to the gender that these men are expected to do.

Deutsch (2007) points out that West and Zimmerman (1987) make resistance appear invisible. “Moreover, since people are still doing gender when they transgress according to this view, it is difficult to imagine how the theory could ultimately lead us to understand how gender inequality could be dismantled” (Deutsch 2007:109). This is an excellent point. Deutsch helps us imagine a world where there is a way to escape our process of doing gender within our interactions, and specifically, in housework and foodwork.

Whenever you can do something, you can undo something. By using the undoing gender perspective, we can imagine social interactions that can reduce gender differences and inequality, and it creates a focus on one central question: “How can we dismantle the gender system to create real equity between men and women?” (Deutsch 2007: 123). Keeping this question in mind, it is reasonable to say that women and men are continually doing gender, especially in the home, but once they can undo gender, they are working towards a more equal life, which seems to be the goal today in Collins’s (2020) concept of work-family justice, discussed below.

**Redoing Gender**

Kelly and Hauck (2015) research how queer couples negotiate the household division of labor and suggest that heterosexual couples could learn from this type of negotiation. Queer
couples can redo gender by “challenging normative gender roles or creating alternatives for how
gender organizes social life” (438). They interviewed 30 queer people who were cohabitating with
a partner at the time of the interview in Portland, Oregon. The participants identified as cisgender,
transgender, and non-binary. They found that very few queer couples participate in an egalitarian
domestic division of labor, and that most couples do what they are good at (in other words, their
specialization in the home). If one partner is good at cooking while another partner is good at doing
dishes, taking out the trash, and shopping for groceries, that is what they do. While this lifestyle
does not express an equal division of labor, they do what works best for them. This study
demonstrates that the couples did not do the same work in the home, but instead, chose different
tasks that matched their abilities.

“In the context of queer relationships with specialized divisions of labor, there is still the
opportunity to redo gender” (Kelly and Hauck 2015: 439). They are not suggesting that queer
couples are not within the social context where housework has gendered meanings. They are clear
that they do not view the experiences of queer and same-gender couples through a heteronormative
lens and view them in the specific context of queer relationships. They examine how these queer
couples shared housework to assess how participants arrange and process the housework that they
do, whether they assume that their partner shares the housework 50/50, 60/40, 70/30, and so on.
They found that only eight out of 30 participants split their division of labor 50/50. Within these
eight couples, the partner who earns more does less housework. In the other 22 couples, both
partners earn the same amount, do equal amounts of housework, or the partner that earns the most
does more housework. For 10 out of 30 couples, the partner who works more paid hours does less
housework. 19 out of the 30 participants said that their division of labor was based on their personal
preference. This preference is based on tasks that one would want to accomplish, such as cleaning
or cooking. Some couples, however, split or share these tasks. However, among all couples and couple types, their participants do not draw on gendered identities when explaining why certain tasks are accomplished by which partner. Also, they found that most participants, regardless of their unequal division of labor, see their arrangement with their partner as “satisfactory” due to availability and personal preferences (Kelly and Hauck 2015: 457).

Kelly and Hauck (2015: 461) pose the question: “If we take seriously the idea that queer couples can redo gender in the domestic sphere, does it not follow that heterosexual couples might also be able to engage in these practices as well?” In queer relationships where gender roles are different from heterosexual relationships, they are able to find a unity between them so that one partner does not have to carry the weight of all household duties.

While Kelly and Hauck’s (2015) piece is an example of redoing gender within queer couples, this reinforces the notion that heterosexual couples are doing gender. If heterosexual relationships are perpetuating housework and foodwork as women’s work, then this unequal division of labor in the home will remain constant, causing the oppression of all women to continue. While doing gender was expected to be prominent in my interviews and analysis, this study looks at how the work done at home could reflect a more equal set of practices. I am using these critiques of doing gender to open the analysis to attention to undoing and redoing gender.

WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE

Work-family balance is a commonly used concept when discussing women’s paid and unpaid labor. To be considered a “good parent,” one must spend time with his or her children and have the responsibility of their child’s well-being. Milkie, Kendig, Nomagucki, and Denny (2010) find that interactive quality time comes from mothers more than fathers. Laurijssen and Glorieux
(2013) examine how some women reduce their hours at work after having a child, while some find a job that allows them to participate in family life more. While many scholars have been advocating a work-family balance at the individual level, there has been little research of work-family conflict at the societal and institutional level. At the societal level, women perform most of the carework in the home, causing a work-family conflict. At the institutional level, there is a class inequality in who receives benefits at work, causing an inequality in hours at work and at home, further contributing to work-family conflict.

I did a search to estimate how many times the phrase “work-family balance” appears in the literature on women and work. I did a general search in One Search and Google Scholar. Then I did a narrower search in the database, SocIndex, and the academic journal, Gender & Society. In One Search, I refined the search to only: Full Text Online, Peer-Review, Journal Article, Book, English, and 1992-2020. I chose these dates because Devault’s *Feeding the Family* was published in 1992, and Collins’ *Making Motherhood Work* was published in 2020. With this search, I found that work-family balance was mentioned 552,189 times. In Google Scholar, only being able to refine by search by language (English), work-family balance was mentioned “about 29,000 times.” In SocIndex, I did not refine the search, and I found that work-family balance was mentioned 2,997 times. Lastly, in the academic journal, *Gender & Society*, I refined the search by: Full Text Online, Peer-Review, Journal Article, English, and 1992-2020. I found that work-family balance was mentioned 237 times. This shows that work-family balance has a significant presence in prior research.

Collins (2020) encourages us to abandon this idea of work-family balance because it is such an individualistic approach to fixing a systemic social problem. She conducted a cross-national comparison looking at gender inequality and work-family policy by investigating how
working mothers’ experiences can differ depending on context. She conducted in-depth interviews with 135 working, middle-class mothers to bring individual agency to conversations about work-family policy. These interviews took place in four countries: United States, Italy, Germany, and Sweden (Collins 2020: 1).

During the interviews she asked questions about navigating motherhood with a career, workplace interaction, work-family conflict, employment history and future plans, dividing care with a partner, opinions about parenting, use and perceptions about work-family policies, and the general view of a working mother in their country. Her most relevant finding for my study is that mothers in each of these four countries experience a conflict between their work and family life and responsibilities. She says that while working mothers are held to such high standards in each country, the best way to alleviate the stress and worry that mothers experience is to redefine the concepts of motherhood, work, and family.

Work-family balance encourages the individual woman to develop her own balance within her home. While this is a great idea, it rarely ever works in the woman’s favor because society does not back the mothers up. She says that we live in “a nation of mothers engulfed in stress” (6), and the concept of work-family balance does not account for the stress women experience in specific institutions.

Instead of work-family balance, Collins calls for work-family justice. She says that this change in framing the work-family conflict “politicizes our understanding of mothers’ stress and socializes the responsibility for solving it” (7). In the United States, mothers are told that the work-family conflict is their fault and their responsibility to fix. Achieving balance alone can potentially help one woman in one family, which is a great thing, but we are ignoring the problems that all of US society experiences. Collins reminds us that we need to create a society that values both the
care that we receive and the person giving the care. Mothers need justice as opposed to balance because justice emphasizes the need for societal change as opposed to individual persuasion.

Work-family justice could allow for a society where every individual has the ability to fully participate in both paid work and family care. This would mean that men and women have equal opportunities to work the same jobs and earn the same pay, but this also means that both men and women have the same ability to participate in the second shift at home. Collins is not saying that this is an easy fix, but a doable transition over time. In order to achieve work-family justice for working mothers, she says we must have “(1) cultural changes in the definitions of motherhood and fatherhood, (2) structural reorganization at work, and (3) a new public commitment to supporting all working mothers and their families” (263). Our society puts the blame on mothers, and we must move away from that. We cannot continue to have this mentality that mothers must serve and take care of us. We have to move to a nationwide focus on “we”—all adult family members must take on responsibility and care work in the home. We must stop viewing mothers’ choices as an individual decision, and start viewing them as a product of societal barriers and pressures that must be reformed.

One finding that was consistent in her study was that women wanted to be able to live their lives in a way that their paid employment and home life hold no disadvantages, and they can live both parts of their lives knowing they have true equality. Work-family justice will allow working mothers the security of support when she needs it both at work and at home—not only for women but for men too. She concludes by saying, “The costs of child-rearing cannot remain private and feminized if we seek to reduce the conflicts borne by working mothers today” (265). This is central to work-family justice. We, as a society, cannot continue to expect care from women and mothers while we do not value the invisible labor in which women and mothers participate. We take them
for granted, and it has been happening for too long. We must leave this traditional mindset, and move towards a collective understanding and appreciation of respect, equality, and justice for all members of society. By using the frameworks of doing gender and work-family justice together, I am able to look at both the individual level and structural level of conflict in my participants’ lives.
II. METHODS

This qualitative research study explores foodwork at work and at home through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with mothers who are between the ages of 24 and 43, who work as servers or cooks in dine-in restaurants, and who have at least one child under the age of 18 living with them at least half of the time. I recruited 12 women who are working in dine-in services in Mississippi and Arkansas. I used the snowball sampling method by asking servers and cooks that I already know who are mothers if they would be willing to participate. After this interview, I asked these participants if they knew of anyone that is also a working mother in food service, and if they would be willing to contact her on my behalf to ask permission to share her contact information with me. I also asked my professors and colleagues if they would be willing to refer me to working mothers in the food service industry as well. I lastly made a post on my social media (Facebook, Instagram, and Snapchat), which several of my friends and colleagues shared.

My research questions include the following: How do working mothers in low paid food service jobs talk about and manage foodwork at home and at work (and how has COVID-19 impacted foodwork in both places)? What do these experiences tell us about the gender dynamics of this work and the conditions under which work-family justice might be achieved in these women’s lives?

Once I gained approval of my research proposal, I submitted an application to the University of Mississippi’s Institutional Review Board, and was approved. Participants were
informed of their right to refuse to answer a question or to terminate the interview at any time. Each participant was asked what pseudonym they would like to be referred to once the recorded interview was complete. All respondents’ identifiers remain confidential. I emphasized that no hard identifiers would be released, and the only people who have access to this information will be my research advisor, Dr. Dellinger, and myself. (To review my consent form, see Appendix B.) All interviews were recorded on my phone or laptop, and all transcriptions are kept on my laptop which has a sensitive password entry. For the transcriptions that were printed, they are kept in a locked filing cabinet in my house.

All interviews except one were held over zoom. (Grey, Wong-Wylie, Rempel, and Cook 2020) discuss the benefits of using Zoom instead of face-to-face interview methods in qualitative research due to it saving time and money, but they also find that their participants showed positive reactions to the Zoom interviewing. The one person interviewed that was conducted in person was held in her front yard while masked due to the lack of internet connection. The video call interviews were audio recorded, and lasted between 35 minutes and two hours. Upon completion of the interview, each participant received a $15 gift card as compensation for their time.

While there was a lot of skepticism around sharing certain information, all of my participants felt comfortable with either a CashApp transaction, Facebook pay, or delivering the money in person. Four of my research participants acknowledged that I am a college student and said that they understood my struggle, encouraging me to keep the money for myself. However, I simply stated that it was part of our agreement and paid them anyway. The funding came from the 2020 Summer Research Assistantship from the University of Mississippi’s Graduate School, totaling $2500.
The Sample: Interview Participants

I interviewed 12 individuals for this study. They range from age 24 to 43. Nine identified as white, and three identified as African American. The children living with them ranged from ten months old to twenty years old. Six women were married, two lived with their boyfriends, two were single living with their mothers, one was single living with her sister, and one was single with no other family in town. Ten women are servers, two are cooks, one is a busser, two are delivery drivers, and one is a bartender. While there are only twelve research participants, some hold multiple positions.

In Appendix C, you will find my demographic chart. By summarizing my participants in this context, I hope to showcase the basic demographics of the women I interviewed in order to gain some basic insight in who they are and what they do. This helps the reader see the participants as a human, and not just words on a page (Singleton and Straits 2010). This also helps the reader better understand the context of Zoom interviewing. While in person interviews have to be carefully scheduled where you find a public, quiet, common meeting place, interviews over Zoom can be held anywhere with a WiFi signal. The Zoom interviews took place in their homes, in their yards, at the laundromat, and in their cars. They ranged from early in the morning to after dinner time. Zoom interviews help us to better understand the interactional nature of doing gender because for one, I was able to hear about their experiences and interactions at work and at home, but I can also see—in more instances—into their homes where these interactions take place. Also, some women were still performing motherly tasks while speaking with me, such as watching their children, texting or taking a phone call from the babysitter, or thinking about and mentioning the tasks that they must complete after the interview.
Next, I will give details about the women I interviewed and the setting of their interviews. The purpose of this is to give the reader a better sense of who these women are as individuals. These details about the individual research participants are listed below and in Appendix C in alphabetical order.

Aly is a white, 41-year-old server and manager at a fine dining restaurant in Arkansas. She has five children living with her ages 9, 12, 17, 19, and 20. She has five other children not living with her ages 15, 20, two 21, and 23. She lives with her husband. Her Zoom interview took place at her kitchen table.

Anna is a white, 37-year-old server at a southern style New Orleans family-owned restaurant in Mississippi. She has two daughters—a 10-year-old and a 12-year-old—and she is pregnant with her third child. She lives with her husband but co-parents with her daughters’ father. Our interview was conducted over Zoom in her kitchen.

Brit is a white, 24-year-old server and cook at a franchised pizza restaurant. She has three children who are four years old, three years old, and one year old. She lives with her husband. Our interview was conducted over zoom, with her camera turned off.

Cate is a white, 39-year-old server and bar tender at a family-owned American restaurant in Arkansas. She has a ten-year-old son living with her, and two step sons, 21 and 23, who do not live with her. She lives with her husband. She also works at a bank part-time. Her Zoom took place in her bedroom after taking her son to a birthday party.

Cece is an African American, 25-year-old server, cook, and delivery driver for a franchised pizza restaurant in Mississippi. She has a two-year-old daughter, and Cece lives with her mom. She also works at a franchised grocery store part-time. Her Zoom interview took place in her car while she was at the laundromat because that is the only time that she has to herself.
Elizabeth is a white, 43-year-old server at a southern style New Orleans restaurant in Mississippi. She has a five and a half-year-old daughter, and lives with her husband. She also fosters children. Her Zoom interview took place in a quiet room in her house.

Gean is a white 28-year-old delivery driver at a family-owned pizza restaurant in Mississippi. She has a four-year-old son, and they live with her mom. Her Zoom interview took place in various rooms of the house and in the front yard because she was having to entertain her son during her interview.

Marie is a white, 25-year-old server at a family-owned barbecue restaurant in Arkansas. She has a 6-year-old son and shares a home with her husband. Her Zoom interview took place outside of her house, on her front porch.

Michelle is an African American 26-year-old server at a Southern style New Orleans diner in Mississippi. She has an 11-year-old son and a 1-year-old daughter. Her boyfriend lives with her. Her Zoom interview took place in her car outside of her house at night, after she got off work. Her children were inside the house with her boyfriend.

Mo is a white 24-year-old server and busser at a fine dining restaurant in Mississippi. She has a 10-month-old daughter, and she lives with her boyfriend. Her Zoom interview took place in her living room on the couch. Her daughter was in the other room with her boyfriend.

Ro is an African American, 40-year-old cook at a franchised pizza restaurant in Mississippi. She has three sons ages 7, 10, and 17 years old. Her sister lives with them. I met her at her house, and I conducted our interview in my car while masked. I recorded the interview on my phone. Her son played in my backseat during the interview, fascinated with my clothing rack.
Sarah is a white, 42-year-old server at an American family-owned restaurant in Arkansas. She has one thirteen-year-old daughter. She is a single mom with no family in town. She works a second job during the day at a bank. Our interview took place over Zoom in her kitchen.

*Interviews: Context, Emotion, and Reflexivity*

Singleton and Straits (2010: 367) explain that interviews are a way for researchers to get an insider’s view of reality. We hear the participants’ stories, and we are able to learn more about their lifestyles, their struggles, and the choices that they have to make each day. We also learn their feelings, motives, and interpretation of events through interviews. This information given to us from our participants will not only spark interest, but will also be a way to validity check the researcher’s initial assumptions and research questions. With qualitative methods, and more specifically, in-depth interviews, we learn the how and the why from our participants. Bednarek-Gilland (2016: 53) explains that qualitative fieldwork is never a simple observe-record-analyze process, as it often may feel. It is deeply affected by the emotions one feels while both conducting and participating in interviews or observations.

The context of these interviews is important. They took place between the months of June and October of 2020, during the height of the global coronavirus pandemic in the United States. At this time, information about the coronavirus was emerging rapidly and it was not being communicated clearly and consistently to the public. This context led to a great deal of misunderstanding about the coronavirus, its seriousness, and how it worked and could best be combatted. An example of a misunderstanding would be Donald Trump’s persistent traveling leading up to his positive COVID test, along with his fast recovery, and encouraging US citizens to view the virus as smaller in concern than previously described by the CDC (Petras et al. 2021).
While there were no outward expressions of fear or anxiety from the participants in this study, some of their words and expressions showed this fear that was sweeping the nation at this time. They sometimes covered their faces when talking about COVID-19, or accelerated and elevated their speech.

Many mothers in the social context, and in my sample, are juggling having their children home more due to the schools closed for remote learning. While some mothers were able to find a quiet, secluded area to participate in the interview, some had to juggle their children while speaking with me. For the interview with Gean, there were several interruptions from her son, which I reassured her were okay and emphasized that I understood that she has to make time for her son. He wanted to go outside and play in the dirt, which he was able to do while Gean took a smoke break. After going inside, he asked if he could play on her phone, which she was using for the interview, so she let him play on the iPad. He seemed content after this. During my only in-person interview with Ro, her son played in my backseat. I have a clothing rack in my backseat since I travel back and forth between Mississippi and Arkansas often, and he had never seen one before and started hanging his toys off of it to swing the rack and see which toy would fall off first and which toy would be “superior.” He also got out of and into my back seat a few times, and politely asked me mid-interview, “Excuse me, can I bring my puppy in here?” Ro did not seem frustrated, but did often tell him to be quiet or “shhh.” However, Ro seemed to be used to this need for attention that her son was displaying.

There were two instances where participants outwardly expressed their emotional responses to this interview that were not related to COVID. The first was with Elizabeth. When sharing with me what she enjoys about her work and talking about how leave policies are enacted, she shared that a few years ago, she was struggling to get pregnant. She openly spoke with her
manager and co-workers about needing time off for invitro fertilization. When this treatment did not work, she found out that she was actually unable to get pregnant. When she shared with me that she found a young mother wanting to give her unborn child up for adoption after birth, she became overcome with emotions. Then she shared with me that she was at work when she got the text that this mother was going into labor and was worried because it was an exceptionally busy night. However, she shared this with her manager and fellow servers, and they began cheering with excitement. As she told me this, she had to take a moment because she began tearing up, reminiscing on this feeling and joy of both finally becoming a mom after trying so hard for years, and at the appreciation for her co-workers being so understanding and allowing her to leave work right that minute to meet her new daughter.

The second was with Sarah. When we discussed what she likes about foodwork at work as a server, it was clear that she was only working in the restaurant sector for the money, because she showed disgust when talking about her job. She shared that she only works there because it pays the bills, and she does not see this job as fun or rewarding. She wiped her eyes and her voice shook while she shared this.

My positionality played a role in these interviews. While I do hold an insider status as a restaurant worker, I hold an outsider status because I am not a mother. I work at Pizza Hut as a server, delivery driver, and Customer Service Representative. When COVID-19 hit in March 2020, we shut down the dining room, and I have been primarily a delivery driver ever since. While being a server, I did have customers that were kind and generous, complimenting me on my good, hard work. I also had customers who were demeaning. At Pizza Hut, there is always only one server at a time, so the whole dining room was my responsibility which can cause for extremely stressful shifts. This means I could have up to eighty customers to myself, depending on the location.
Customer dynamics could either soften or extend this stress. As a delivery driver, however, the process works much smoother, especially with the contactless delivery option made available at the beginning of the COVID-19 shutdown. However, tips are less as a driver because you can only take so many deliveries on a shift, and some people would not tip me at all. Delivering is much less stressful than serving because there is much less demand from the customers, and less time in the store. From this experience, I am able to connect with my participants and understand their struggles at work. However, one limitation of this is since we have this understanding, I often did not feel the need to ask follow up questions when I probably should have. I do not have children, so I held an outsider status when discussing their home lives and experiences being a mother. I do hope one day to become a mother, so while I could not share in their experiences, I can learn from them, which caused me to ask more follow up questions in regards to their home lives.

Data and Coding

I coded my interviews by hand by printing each transcription and carefully reading each interview to note key points and common themes. I then created an open coding sheet in Google Sheets. In this sheet, I first put the name of the theme (i.e., cooking satisfaction), and then followed it with copied and pasted quotes directly from my interview transcriptions that discuss or introduce these themes or categories (codes) in order to organize my analysis. Next, I categorized these codes by focus coding into four categories or main themes. My open and focused coding were inspired by Esterberg (2011). The four main themes I found are: Feeding and Foodwork at Home, Foodwork at Work, Work-Family Justice, and COVID-19. Within these main themes, I have a total of 63 codes. These codes were informed from the guiding theoretical frameworks and existing literature (Beagan, Chapman, D’Sylva, and Bassett 2008; Collins 2020; Devault 1992; Hochschild
2012; Oleschuk 2019; West and Zimmerman 1987), but also through common themes that were arising in the interviews. However, most of the codes did resonate with the four main themes.

The codes for Feeding and Foodwork at Home include: help cooking at home, cooking satisfaction, health of food, food preferences, buffer the hunger, meals for foster kids, help at home, help cleaning at home, and time at home. The codes for Foodwork at Work include job satisfaction, fast paced work environment, tips, pay, responsibility to feed, good experiences at work, bad experiences at work, and negative views of the food service industry. The codes for Work-Family Justice include: personal struggles as a mom, providing for her family, lack of benefits at work, definitions of a good working mom, navigating motherhood, and advice for new working moms. Finally, the codes for COVID-19 include: hours cut at work, changes at work, customer dynamics, mask difficulties, taking food home from work, cooking and eating at home, more mouths to feed, feeding/shopping, and stress and worry.

In the next section of the thesis, I will turn to my findings. The chapters include a discussion of foodwork at work (Chapter 3), feeding and foodwork at home (Chapter 4), the impact of COVID-19 on foodwork at work and at home (Chapter 5), and work-family justice (Chapter 6). The foodwork at work chapter will explore motivation for doing foodwork at work, a “like a family” system at work, and dislikes about working in food. The feeding and foodwork at home chapter will discuss the participants’ satisfaction with cooking, motivation for doing foodwork at home, their experiences at home, what help these women receive at home, and how they view their time spent at home. The work-family justice chapter will discuss the participants’ definition of a good working mom, the advice they would give a new working mom, their lack of benefits at work, and how they navigate motherhood while having personal struggles of their own. I conclude by discussing the implications and limitations of this study, as well as avenues for future research.
III. FOODWORK AT WORK

I am studying paid work with food to explore the interactions and experiences that these women have at work with others and with food. The findings in this chapter answer the question: How do working mothers in low paid food service jobs talk about and manage foodwork at work? This chapter will explore motivations for doing foodwork at work, a “like a family” system at work, and dislikes about working in food. The participants’ motivations for doing foodwork at work include enjoying their time at work, being able to work together, and the fast-paced nature of the restaurant. Some women also discussed how their restaurant setting is like a family at work. Lastly, several women mentioned things that they dislike about working in food, such as the negative stigma around foodwork causing a class dynamic, issues with customers, being bullied at work, and their tips and pay. I explore these themes below.

MOTIVATION FOR DOING FOODWORK AT WORK

The mothers I interviewed discussed five motivations for doing foodwork at work. The first is low pressure in the workplace and a sense of belonging. The second is the comfort of working together. The third is working a job where she can provide a service for others. The fourth is enjoying the fast-paced environments of the restaurant. The last is good interactions with customers.
Low Pressure and Belonging

Most participants seem satisfied with their job in foodwork due to the low pressure at work and the feeling of belonging. One specifically, Cece (African American, 25, Mississippi), worked at the same pizza restaurant for 5 years now. She came to work there by going to pick up an order one day and saw that they were advertising a job opening. She asked the manager if they needed help and then put in an application, and she’s never left them since. She says that she enjoys working as a server, partially for the money, but also because she has a sense of belonging. “The most rewarding thing is that I like to keep going, like I don’t mind staying there to make the money. When I go there, I don’t feel pressured. You know, it’s like smooth. I feel like I belong there when I’m there.” She enjoys the freedom she has when working there, compared to a grocery store where she works for a second job. At the pizza place, she is able to serve food, interact with customers, and move around the store, compared to at the grocery store where she says it feels she is in prison.

I was able to interview another employee of the same pizza restaurant, Ro (African American, 40, Mississippi) who repeated throughout her interview that this is a job that she loves. She describes her job as “pizza, pizza, pizza.” She enjoys spending time with her co-workers and is able to get along with everyone in the workplace. Having a good work environment leads these two employees to continue to do foodwork at this specific pizza restaurant.

Working Together

Some women in my sample discuss the importance of being able to work together. Anna (white, 37, Mississippi) describes her motivation for doing foodwork as coming from the people she works with and their sense of working well together. She describes the restaurant at which she works as a Southern New Orleans style restaurant that provides soul food and home cooked meals.
She describes her workplace as meaningful to the town and people. She describes her work experience as feeding the customers every day, and getting it done “together”. She has a sense of pride in being part of this group of people that feeds the town the food that they love. Anna’s motivation comes from being able to feed the people of Oxford meals that they will enjoy, as well as working with a team of people that can perform well working together.

*Fast Paced*

Many mothers said that they enjoy doing foodwork because it is fast paced. Cece (African American, 25, Mississippi) describes serving as fun because she’s running back and forth from the dining room to the kitchen, and when she works in other positions, such as a cook or delivery driver, it gets boring because it is not as fast paced. However, Mo (white, 24, Mississippi) who works in a fine-dining establishment, discusses the fast-paced component as working out at work. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) works at a diner. She enjoys the fast-paced component because she is able to quickly help her customers and make them happy. “I like how quick I have to be. I like the challenge. I like getting 6 tables when we first open and getting all the drinks myself before the busser can get to the table, or I like seeing attitudes change once they start eating.”

Aly (41, white, Arkansas), who has five children currently living with her, and five who have already moved out, wears many hats while working at a fine dining establishment. She can go from seating someone as a hostess, to serving tables, to working in the kitchen. Her job responsibilities can be very chaotic at times, and she calls her customer base as very well-to-do type members of society. While she says that her restaurant is one of the most demanding waitress jobs she has worked, she finds it rewarding being able to provide a level of service that she feels
her customers would not get at most restaurants. By working in this fast-paced environment and wearing these many hats, she is able to provide this welcoming experience and oversee these interactions between herself, her employees, and her customers.

Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) gives us insight into how even though the fast-paced lifestyle can be frustrating at times, she loves this work. A typical work day for her is making and cooking pizza all day long. This makes for a busy day, but she has learned how to maintain and not get frustrated while at work. She says over and over during her interview how much she loves doing foodwork, despite the high intensity of her work environment.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) explains her fast-paced work environment as a work out similar to Mo. She is never still enough to realize that she has been working for twelve hours. She works twelve hours on Saturdays, and at two o’clock it feels like eleven-thirty, so the work goes by fast. She does not feel the need to work out as much because her Apple watch, on a busy Friday night, shows that she walked six miles in one single shift in the small restaurant.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) discusses this fast-paced work style at length. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, the Southern New Orleans style diner where she works would have a line of customers outside waiting to come in and eat. She would go from morning relaxation to an immediate morning rush. She called this beginning of chaos “being on,” which signifies the relation between serving and performing. Suddenly she is on a platform where she must work at this fast-paced speed in order to please her customers, her audience. At her restaurant, the servers are known for being busy and straightforward while serving. She says this type of performance is fun and warm. She describes this restaurant as having this hometown feel, and that there is a directness to the whole scene of serving there, which she finds nice. By directness, Anna means that this is a quick, straight-and-to-the-point exchange. This adds to the fast-paced nature of the
restaurant. She calls this work constant and demanding. She enjoys the physical, mental, and emotional intensity. She also enjoys being very stimulated by being fully on and performing well.

Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi), who works at the same Southern New Orleans-style restaurant, says that she enjoys foodwork because it is a fast way to gain cash. She is able to make a lot of money in a short period of time. This fast way to make money is a great motivation to do foodwork because in making fast money, these women are able to buy groceries, pay bills, and provide for their families quickly and daily, instead of every two weeks to a month at a non-tipped job.

While most women talk about the fast-paced nature of foodwork as a good thing, it is also emotional labor. They must put their own feelings and troubles aside in order to serve their customers in a timely manner, because this is how they are able to receive money (tips) fast. This fast-paced component seemed to be the most talked about, agreed upon form of emotional labor in this study.

**Interactions with Customers**

Some women discuss the importance of being noticed by customers which led to good interactions with her customers. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) says one thing she likes about doing foodwork is when customers notice how good of a job she is doing. “Like I really thrive on people noticing the heart and good work ethic.” Meanwhile, Ro’s (40, African American, Mississippi) motivation for foodwork is that she can get along with everyone. The crew at the pizza restaurant is not disrespectful, and she finds this very important in restaurant work. She is comfortable there and looks forward to getting up every day and going to work. This level of comfort and respect
within the workplace between co-workers and customers is very important in foodwork in a restaurant.

Another motivator for doing foodwork is rooted in the positive relationships with customers. Marie gets excited when she sees her regulars’ vehicle pull up because she automatically goes and gets their drinks before they even walk through the door. They order the same thing every time so she can put their order in early. She also knows that they want to sit at the same table every time, so she can have the table set up and waiting for them. This satisfies the customers because they feel recognized and welcomed. Marie explains that this kind of knowledge comes from experience and cannot be taught, but must be done. This work that she is doing for her returning or regular customers is invisible labor (Daniels 1987). This work comes only from experience in an individualized nature. She may not treat every “regular” the same, but she has worked and learned their habits and tastes so that she can serve them to the best of her ability. While no one may notice this extra work that she is doing to satisfy her customers, the work is still being accomplished.

We also see this discussed in Erickson (2009) The Hungry Cowboy. Erickson spent two years conducting participant observations and interviews with servers, managers, and customers. She also conducted a survey of customers. She found that recognizing regular customers contributes to the success of the restaurant (7). She also found that customers report the quality of service is the reason they keep coming back, similar to this invisible labor that Marie is doing for her regulars.

Gean (28, white, Mississippi) says that her most rewarding experience being a delivery driver is seeing children light up with excitement when they get their pizza. She has been delivering pizza on and off since she was 20, and she has had this experience all through her career as a
delivery driver—children always get excited when they see the pizza car pull up, and she loves to be the one to give them joy and excitement, as well as a meal.

Aly (41, white, Arkansas) enjoys foodwork so much that she would rather work in the food service industry than any other arena. She’s been to college and has received degrees in several different fields, but she chooses restaurant work. “This is where my heart is. This is what I enjoy doing.” She also enjoys foodwork because of the customers. At her fine dining restaurant, she gets a lot of returning and regular customers. They come every week over generations just to eat at her restaurant. She shared with me the story of one family that she is now working on the fifth generation of serving. Over the years she has seen them have children, and watched their children grow up, go to prom, graduate, then get engaged. Some customers have their wedding receptions with them. She even had a bride get married in her restaurant one time. When the work environment is welcoming and the customers feel like family, it makes it easier for her to go to work every day.

Cate (39, White, Arkansas) is motivated to do foodwork because she does not have to work a nine to five job and miss out on too much of her son’s life because of it. Bartending and serving allows her to make money and take care of her family without having to work 40 or 50 hours a week, like she sees her friends working. She appreciates not having to work so many hours. She calls bartending and serving fruitful. It has provided for her and her family even when she was a single mom before she got married. Anna (37, white, Mississippi) also enjoys the flexible hours and fast pay. She is able to work fairly and make a decent amount of money each week with fairly short shifts. It helps her be able to provide for her family and not be away from home for too long. A typical restaurant worker is part-time with an average of 25 hours a week, allowing them to be
considered both essential and flexible workers (Cho and Johanson 2008). Because of this, Cate and Anna can work a short amount of time and make the money they need for their families.

“LIKE A FAMILY”

Interestingly, some of the women interviewed discuss how their co-workers were like family to them. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) feels that her workplace is a safe space for her as if she is a member of the “family,” and that motivates her to continue to do foodwork. She says that at her workplace, they don’t see color, they see family. Once someone has worked there for a year or two, they are considered family. She discusses this further by telling the story of her being pregnant and experiencing morning sickness at work. She went to the bathroom, vomited, and locked herself in the bathroom. She cried because she felt helpless and weak. A friend and co-worker of hers came into the bathroom and told her she would talk to the manager and clean up the mess.

She came back and said the manager said, “Go home, we got this,” and it just made me cry even more that they took the time to clean up my vomit. It brings tears to my eyes now because that’s how much I love where I work.

She says that at the Southern New Orleans style diner where she works—the same one where Anna and Elizabeth work—that they do not let each other fall behind. If another employee were to get pregnant, they would be treated with the same kindness and respect because it is the kind of operation they run. She considers the staff more of a family than coworkers. One last example that she provides is the dialogue exchanged when she told her boss she was pregnant. She was afraid that he was going to fire her because she thought he would not want an unreliable, pregnant woman “wobbling around the restaurant.” However, when she told him, his reaction was the opposite of what she expected. He threw her, a new employee that he barely knew at that
moment, a baby shower. She started crying because she could not believe the reaction that her boss gave her. She was so hard on herself for a whole week because she did not know how to tell her boss that she was pregnant. This idea of having a family at work can be a motivator to do foodwork because it allows the workplace to be a safe, familiar space, especially for mothers who often are disadvantaged when working in the food service industry. At this specific restaurant, the manager reinforced this notion of having a family at work, which promotes a safe, healthy work environment that motivates these servers to continue to do foodwork at this restaurant.

Marie (26, white, Arkansas) also speaks about her workplace as family-like. Being friends with your co-workers and seeing your bosses as family contributes to a good working environment for Marie. She can go into work and joke with them for a while before the rush hits. The employees at this barbecue restaurant know each other on a personal level and help each other. With the hours available at this restaurant, most of the employees are full time, so the employees are available for most of the time if somebody needs an ear to listen. They are very close at this restaurant, and Marie finds this very rewarding.” Marie explains that this friendly exchange can reach to outside of work too if someone does not have a family. This was not common in other restaurants at which she has worked.

Hernandez (2007) and Sosteric (1996) discuss this notion of having a workplace that is like a family. Hernandez’s (2007) ethnographic study took placed in an American Chinese restaurant. Hernandez says that this workplace is just like a family—he can be honest with his managers and co-workers by telling them that he is not perfect, and they will still accept him and his work. Sosteric (1996) found that in the restaurant industry, staff is described as more like a family than people who they simply work with. Both studies are evident in this research because the women in this study feel like they can joke or talk to their co-workers and managers about anything. They
can be honest, ask for help, or just listen to each other, just like one would do with a family. Ollilainen and Calasanti (2007) conducted a study using participant observation and interviews with 39 men and women in service-oriented self-managing teams, and found this idea of working “like a family” emerge. In this family metaphor, women were performing roles that encouraged emotional labor, which causing women to face more difficult tasks. While my participants did not discuss how being a woman puts them at a disadvantage standpoint in this “family” setting—workplace—there may still be gendered dynamics at work causing them to perform more emotional labor, such as connecting with customers and keeping a positive attitude while working, similar to the study of Ollilainen and Calasanti (2007).

DISLIKES ABOUT WORKING IN FOODWORK

Negative Stigma

Some participants had a dislike of foodwork because of the negative stigma around food service work. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) says,

I feel like a lot of people look down upon service industry employees because they think that it’s just not hard work, and that couldn’t be farther from the truth. The service industry is extremely difficult, and it can be extremely rewarding.

While Mo enjoys her job, she points out how one bad apple might not ruin the whole batch, but it does leave a bitter taste in your mouth, meaning the memory of them sticks with you. One thing she does not like about being a parent and working in the service industry is how certain people view food service work as less reputable than a desk job or professional job. However, she makes more money serving than she has at any desk job she has worked before. She makes enough money serving that she does not want to use her college degree. She wishes that there was not a negative view of the service industry because it is a way for her to provide for her family. Similar to Mo,
Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) does not think that people even consider the fact that there are moms waiting tables. They are only looked at as waitresses, to be of service to their customers. By not seeing these women as anything more than someone who serves, this ignores any other status they may have, such as mother, or simply, woman. This is an interesting point indicating that the doing of service work in this setting is somehow symbolically separated from mothering work.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) also experienced a negative stigma. She says that people have ideas about servers in terms of class or what their role is. She is made to feel like her only role is to serve others instead of being a participant in a pleasurable exchange. She does occasionally experience feelings of respect from her customers, saying that there was a cold constitutional respect between her table and herself. This means that most of the time, the customer understood that her job is to provide a service, but take care of the customers, while also having a mutual respect for each other. However, every now and then, she experiences interactions that cause her to feel demeaned because of the position that her customers see her in. She claims that this view of her is “rudely transactional,” and this is what often leaves servers drained. By rudely transactional, she means that she is supposed to do whatever they ask in order for her to be paid (tipped) by the customers.

Gean (28, white, Mississippi) discusses how hard this type of work is. People may make comments about her as a person for working in foodwork, or they may joke about it not being a legitimate job. But she explains that it is just as legitimate as any job. The only difference is in food work, she gets paid less but deals with more angry people.

Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi) discusses how this stigma is very present in the college town where she works. She wishes customers could be nicer to the staff.
Customers, I just wish they’d be a little nicer to the staff. I mean it’s just working at a college town, there’s a lot of entitled people that think they’re way above beyond restaurant workers and that’s always been annoying and they act like, there’s a lot of waitresses there that have master’s degrees and there’s nothing wrong with being a server. That’s always annoying when people can be just downright mean to you as if you’re nothing. It’s always been frustrating, and I just want people to be nicer.

In her southern style New Orleans restaurant, there are servers who have Master’s degrees, and she feels there is nothing wrong with being a server. Some customers are so mean that they treat the servers like they are nothing. This is the root of her frustration, and she wishes that people could be nicer to restaurant staff and foodworkers.

Some women in this study describe going to work every day knowing that some customers will look down on them. They explain that they keep these potential feelings of doubt or hesitation at bay so that they can perform their duties as a restaurant worker. This is a form of emotional labor.

_Issues with Customers_

Some participants discussed specific negative interactions they experienced with customers. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) says:

I’m used to dealing with hungry people and seeing their moods change after food has hit their stomachs. It’s kinda hard because people give you attitude when you can’t do something the way they want it or their food doesn’t come out the way they wanted it to taste or it’s taking too long or this table got my food before me and I ordered first. It’s just hard because they don’t understand.

This expectation of servers becomes a burden that they must carry when working their jobs. They aim to please, but sometimes it seems unattainable, because as Michelle points out, some customers just do not understand the struggles of a server. This struggle consists of keeping up
with the fast-paced lifestyle of the restaurant, keeping up with the demands of the customers and management, and even worrying about what is happening at home while on the job.

Michelle also tells the story of a customer who did not tip her well because she forgot to bring him a lemon. He asked her when he first placed his order for water with lemon. She brought him water. She refilled his drink at least five times. He did not ask her again for the lemon. She also had five other tables at the time. When it came time to pay his bill, he tipped 10 cents and wrote, “You forgot the lemon.” She thought to herself, “What if that was my last table and their 18 percent was all that I needed to pay my light bill and he decided not to tip me because of the lemon?” She feels as though he did not take into consideration that she is a real person, a human being, and not a robot. She admits that she makes mistakes and forgets things at times, but sometimes she does remember things, but sometimes it is too late. While servers have historically suffered at the hands of customers, in this specific example, Michelle is being demeaned, but also unfairly paid, at the hands of a male customer.

This experience that Michelle had could be an example of this rude transactional experience that Anna discussed earlier. Interestingly enough, Michelle and Anna work at the same restaurant. This coincides with class dynamics as discussed in Joan Acker’s (2006) Inequality Regimes. Acker explains that class is complicated by multiple gendered and racialized differences (442). “Job classification systems describe job tasks and responsibilities and rank jobs hierarchically. Jobs are then assigned to wage categories with jobs of similar rank in the same wage category” (448). While Acker (2006) discusses a class (race/gender) system between workers, there is little discussion of the class hierarchy between worker and customer as described by Michelle. Social class here is defined by occupational status and not necessarily income or education. This rude, transactional experience as expressed by Michelle and Anna is a type of class
hierarchy because their position as a server puts them “beneath” the customers, at least in terms of how the customers treat the servers.

Brit (24, white, Arkansas) also has experienced issues with difficult customers. It is hard for her to be serving and the customers not understand that she is busy, such as during the lunch rush. At her franchised restaurant that serves pizza, they always only have one server during each shift, so that one server is responsible for every customer and table that she has at any given time. Her customers seem to forget that they are not the only customers, and they get upset with her and make her feel like the busy-ness of the restaurant is her fault, as if she could multiply herself into twenty different versions of herself to take care of all of the families in the restaurant. She labels this emotional labor the worst part of the job.

Bullying at Work

While I did! not find bullying at work a theme, I do find this experience important to discuss because this negative experience at work affected Gean’s decision to quit her job and move to a different restaurant where she knew she would be respected. Gean (28, white, Mississippi) shared a personal experience with me: “I had recently quit my other job because I was basically being bullied and made fun of all the time so I left and I just quit. Like I wasn’t gonna do it anymore.” After quitting at this chain burger restaurant, she ended up working at a pizza place in her hometown where she has known the owner for almost eleven years. She had brought this experience to her boss’s attention, telling him that on multiple occasions she was picked on, bullied, or attacked, but he never did anything about it. She called this burger restaurant an unstable environment and the worst experience she has ever had at work. She shared the story of a time when she had a panic attack at work—which the doctors at the hospital diagnosed as a mini-stroke—and when she
returned to work, her co-workers were standing together laughing. She overheard one of them say, “Maybe I need to have a stroke to get some time off of work.” This infuriated her, as she knew that her situation was serious. She also felt that she was experiencing racism being the only white manager among black managers. She considered that it might be because she was a woman, but she found out that the black women managers were making more than her.

“It was literally the worst job I’ve ever worked at. And I found out after being there a few months that I was the lowest paid manager there. And I don’t know if it was because I was a female or if it was because of the color of my skin. I found out later that I was the lowest paid manager and I don’t know if it was, I can’t say it was because I was a female because the other two female managers over there were getting paid substantially more than I was. So, at the end of the day, I honestly think it was because I was white.”

While reverse racism is often discussed in the field of sociology, it was clear that she felt disadvantaged in some way. Sociologists find that in a system of institutionalized racism where whiteness is explicitly valued over blackness, individual level acts of discrimination against white people may take place. However, broad-based discrimination against white people as a race is not possible. Nelson, Hynes, and Sharpe (2018) conducted a national survey in Australia of witnessing racism, and found that ten percent of respondents reported an event where a white person was the target of an anti-white racist act. While it is not clear if this is an example of white privilege being challenged, or if she simply was applying her feelings of being bullied to the color of her fellow managers’ skin, we still see an example of inequality and bullying in the workplace, and this situation deserves to be acknowledged.

**Tips and Pay**

While most of the women that I interviewed felt that they make good money, some of them still feel as though they are not paid fairly. When asked what she would change about foodwork at
work, Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) spoke about tips and pay. At the time of the interview, she worked three positions at her franchised pizza restaurant—server, driver, and cook. Speaking as a driver, she makes the comment that she does not work for free. She receives a small hourly pay of $3.25 while driving, but she feels that she works hard and deserves more compensation. She goes to work, and does everything she needs to do, but she does not think people understand how hard she works for tips. However, she is more satisfied with tips received when serving than when driving. As a server on a Friday lunch shift, she would go home with at least 60 dollars more than what she had when she walked into the restaurant at 10 AM that morning. Servers tend to make more in tips than drivers at her franchised pizza restaurant because as a server, she makes $4 per hour, and she could have countless tables between the hours of 10 AM and 3 PM. Meanwhile, as a delivery driver making $3.25, she can only take so many deliveries between the hours of 10 AM and 4 PM, so unless she gets a very generous tipper on a delivery, she is more likely to make more in tips as a server. While she also holds a cook position in order to work more hours during COVID, she is making $8 an hour, but the tips are much more inconsistent because people do not know to tip the cook.

Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) shares her story of working for tips:

It’s just sometimes I bust my ass and it’s still not enough money. That’s the stress that comes behind it, or knowing how much you need to make that day and somebody’s stiffing you on a 65 dollar tab when you know you’re 12 dollars short of meeting your goal. I don’t think people take into account how much our tips mean to us. I’m not asking you to tip me because I just took my hat off for you and did a dance, I’m asking you to tip me because this is my livelihood. I don’t get a paycheck. This is how I feed my kids.

Working for tips is hard, but very important for Michelle. She is clearly a hard worker, and she uses her tips to pay her bills and feed her family. Without this money, she cannot do these things, and she feels that customers do not understand, or consider, that the tips that they give
server are used to keep them afloat. Michelle told me that if the customers do not tip her, she does not get a wage from the family-owned restaurant, therefore, she does not make any money. She calls it a slap in the face when she works so hard to serve a table and there is no tip on the ticket. She says it is hard to deal with because she still has to keep her composure and maintain a positive attitude for her next table in order to put on a good performance for the next crowd. But she often asks herself, how? She compares this to working a job and not getting paid for it, and says that not being tipped is the most stressful part of working in foodwork. She feels as though her customers in this college town think that the servers are all college students looking for free money, when in reality, they are trying to pay their bills with their tips.

This coincides with Joan Acker’s (1990) idea of the ideal worker. The ideal worker is “the male worker whose life centers on his full-time, life-long job, while his wife or another woman takes care of his personal needs and his children” (149). Applying this framework, and accounting for women being the dominant worker in food service, the “ideal server” would be a young, white, energetic college student with no real responsibilities besides buying books and completing homework assignments. They work for “free money,” not to buy food for their children, although maybe they have a car payment because they have to get to work somehow. However, while that may be the ideal server, it is clear that this is not always the case. While customers may consider their server to be this “ideal server,” and they do not consider that she may need the money for groceries, bills, or their children’s school supplies, so they do not consider these things when deciding how much to tip, if any. Acker (1990) uses the term “ideal worker” to explain that workers with certain characteristics are favored and seen as the best workers. While Acker does not explicitly state this, or is reinforced by unstated assumptions about who best “fits” the role. There may not be a “perfect” worker, but the ideal worker is who plays the role the best.
Michelle has an interesting idea about being paid fairly. She wishes that her boss would pay them a base pay that they could receive every two weeks on top of the tips that she makes. I was unaware that in some restaurants, the servers are not paid the federal tipped minimum wage of $2.13 an hour, but hearing the perspective of these women, I am learning that that is not true at every restaurant, and I am not sure why. According to the Wage and Hour Division of the U.S. Department of Labor (2021), the state of Mississippi is required to pay all employees the federal minimum wage of $7.25 per hour, and tipped employees are to be paid $2.13 per hour. As I have interviewed three employees from this same restaurant that expressed that they do not receive a pay check of any kind, insinuating that they do not receive the federal tipped minimum wage of $2.13 per hour, this could mean that this payment method for this restaurant may not be entirely legal.

Michelle says this extra compensation would make life easier for her and take some stress off of her. She would appreciate an extra one hundred or two hundred dollars every two weeks. She goes on to explain how helpful this would be during the holiday months of November through January when people do not eat out as much and the college students are back home. This way, she could be able to pay her bills and buy Christmas presents for her kids. Servers are fighting for shifts, or fighting to stay on a shift. They are hoping to make money through tips because their bills do not go away in those months—they are still coming in and more expensive than ever. She encounters this challenge each year, and thinks that an hourly or base compensation paid every two weeks would be fair, especially during the holiday season.

Gean (28, white, Mississippi) also spoke about this idea of not making tips. At the pizza place, she works as a delivery driver. She says the tips are similar to being a server at previous restaurants where she has worked. While she says that delivery driving is more relaxed than
serving, if she’s not making the tips, she’s not making the tips. She is expected to make up her pay with tips, and if she does not, then she is still not paid minimum wage, which also seems to be not legal. While she did not tell me how much she makes per hour, it is enough to suffer when she does not make much in tips on a shift.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) explains that she can do the best job in the world, but some people do not tip well, and some people do not tip at all. On the other hand, she says some people may not know to tip. Sometimes she cannot put in her best effort, but still be tipped twenty or thirty dollars. “You never know what to expect when serving, or how much money you will leave with each night.” She considers this a downside.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) describes a drawing system that allows the five servers for that day to have a fair shot at what section they will be working that shift. In this drawing system, each server comes to work at about the same time and draws out of a cup or bucket of some sort, and the number that they get corresponds to which section they get. Section one leaves first, and section five leaves last. Since COVID-19 impacted the restaurants, someone draws curbside. Since curbside can be the busiest during the pandemic, they began to tip share. This way, the tips are split evenly between each server. She shares that not all servers are completely on board with this, but it is put in place to ensure that all servers are treated fairly. She says that most servers are comfortable and happy with the tip sharing idea, and she certainly is.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) says if she could change anything about foodwork, it would be the pay. She says that she makes more than the tipped minimum wage being paid $3 an hour, but she is concerned if servers were paid more than the tipped minimum wage that the prices of the food would increase and that employees’ hours would be cut. This would cause there to only be one server working at a time, and she says that this would simply not work.
While most women that I interviewed were not satisfied with their pay or their tips, Cate (29, white, Arkansas) had a differing opinion. Cate works at a mom-and-pop American restaurant, and the tips and pay are the main reasons she works in foodwork. “The most rewarding thing about my job, being able to pay the bills for my kid. That’s probably the most rewarding thing. I know that I’m able to make the money I need to pay my bills without working 40 hours a week.” It is important for Cate to be able to work less than 40 hours a week so that she can go home and spend time with her son and husband, and she is able to do this without suffering in terms of pay.

While some women enjoy working for tips because they can provide for their family, other women wished for some type of base pay or extra compensation because tips can be unsteady and sometimes fall short. When working for tips, these women in my sample are doing gender because they are performing the expected roles of the servers to “take care” of their customers in a timely manner in order to please them, so they, in turn, pay their servers. Being that servers are mostly women, there is an emotional labor being done here while they are doing gender because each server must adhere to her customers’ needs no matter what may be going on in her own life—whether they are wondering what their children are doing, or worried about paying the bills. There is also invisible labor because these women must constantly keep in mind how to address each customer individually, and in a crowded restaurant, this is not an easy task. However, these women must do this if they want to be tipped.

CONCLUSION

These findings suggest that foodwork is gendered in a number of ways for the women I interviewed. To begin, serving and restaurant work are predominantly occupied by women. When
women discussed their co-workers, they named mostly women, except for instances with Anna, Elizabeth, and Michelle, whose manager is a man.

These women are motivated to do foodwork for various reasons, but the most commonly mentioned one is to provide for their families. These women are expected to perform for their customers and keep a smile in order to get paid through tips, which sometimes fall short of what they need. Customers expect women to be polite, laugh at customers jokes even if they may not be funny or are inappropriate, engage in small talk even when the they are busy with other customers. Similar to when a child is served a meal at home, women have been socialized to engage in these same behaviors and activities with mothers or other women in the family who are typically the ones to serve us at home. This perpetuates the idea that women are expected to serve meals even when outside of the home, and servers are expected to engage in the same behaviors with the customers as mothers are with their children.

Some also see their co-workers as a family. They feel like they can help each other, and ask for help, almost in a sisterly way—similar to that mentioned in Harris and Giuffre (2015: 132) where the women professional chefs in the study were expected to work with a big sister attitude—while the managers were expected to be the “parents” of the restaurant family. In Harris and Giuffre’s book *Taking the Heat*, they studied women professional chefs and the difficulties faced in the culinary industry to examine gender disparities within this high-class occupation. One finding was that there are three different management styles among women chefs. The first is a “bitchy” form of leadership which is performed by adopting a masculine, authoritarian management style. The second is a “girly girl” management style which is more feminine and friendly. These two management styles are not seen as the ideal style when navigating professional life as a woman chef. The last management style is to perform the role of the “mom” or the “big
“sister” which they found to be the preferred leadership style. “It relied on qualities that, in their view, made women chefs different and better than men who lead” (Harris and Giuffre 2015: 132).

While the big sister or mom role is preferred in professional kitchens, some of the women in my study felt that they could depend on each other in a sisterly way, which allowed for relationships to strengthen in the workplace.

While these women described some less than satisfactory experiences at work (negative stigma about their position, being devalued by customers, and bullying at work), some of them did have positive experiences such as making enough money to provide for their family or enjoying the fast-paced lifestyle of foodwork. With these interviews, I see that these women are contributing to the household income with as much time, if not more, than their husbands or partner, or if they are a single mom, they are able to provide for their children with little financial assistance. These women are working hard and serving food to people who do not always properly appreciate them, and that is a hard, emotional performance to do. This entails that the interactions required in serving are a gendered performance.
IV. FOODWORK AND EXPERIENCES AT HOME

While women participate in most of the foodwork and childcare responsibilities in the home, the mothers I interviewed shared their stories on all things cooking, foodwork, and childcare. I focused on foodwork at home to learn about these responsibilities in which they must participate in the home, specifically foodwork. The findings in this chapter will answer the question: How do working mothers in low paid food service jobs talk about and manage foodwork at home? First, I will address cooking satisfaction and motivation for foodwork at home. Then, I will discuss more general experiences at home, including what help these women say they receive at home, and how they view their time spent at home. These motivations are different from cooking satisfaction because their satisfaction is a reflection of their personal feelings about the relationship between cooking and themselves, meanwhile their motivations for doing foodwork reflects their family’s needs and preferences. These motivations are what shape the ingredients and meals that the mother prepares.

COOKING SATISFACTION

While some of my participants love to cook, some had neutral feelings about it, and some hated it, there is still a heavy burden placed on them to cook for their family whether they enjoy it or not.
Many women expressed reasons for why they like to cook. While Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) does not cook often, she does enjoy making things that she sees her mom make. She is happy when the food comes out close to how her mom’s recipe would, and it tastes good. She also likes to put her own spin on her mom’s recipes, such as adding a new spice to the meat or a new vegetable to a stew.

Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) really likes to cook. However, her boyfriend and son are picky eaters, so sometimes meals are tricky. She enjoys healthier foods such as eggplant, cabbage, and brussels sprouts, while her boyfriend and son enjoy nachos and chicken strips. Because of this, she usually brings food home for herself, and then cooks something for the others. Sometimes after a long day at work, she will simply bring home a pizza from Dominoes, or pick something else up to avoid cooking because it will take such a long time. However, if she took the time to cook a full meal after getting off work, this would take more time and energy than what she has. The meals she cooks are not always healthy because she wants to cook something to put on everyone’s stomachs—to buffer the hunger (Elliot and Bowen 2018). By practicing this buffer, providing any food that the child will consume to keep them from being hungry is the goal. This could depend on the child’s preferences, or simply what is in stock at home at the time. She thinks if she had enough time to meal prep and fix meals differently, the meal would be better. But for now, she cooks what she can. She does say that she cooks bigger meals on Sundays because her restaurant is closed that day. With the restaurant being closed, she is able to spend more time on meals and put more effort into them compared to the meals she prepares on a weekday.

Gean (28, white, Mississippi) says that she loves to cook. She finds this funny because people often ask her how she could stand to cook so often when she works with food all day. This
is an interesting assumption that one would get tired of working with food. Regardless, she repeated many times that she loves to cook tacos, brisket, and other crock pot meals. She shares with me that she started cooking when she was eight years old because she could do it with her mom.

Momma worked two jobs so I had to learn how to cook. I’ve always loved cooking, I like making new things, I like inventing things. I make this stuff called taco spaghetti which is amazing, and, yes, it’s exactly what it sounds like. It’s tacos and spaghetti mixed together. Not the spaghetti sauce, you use the taco seasoning and the meat and then add the noodles, and when you get done you put salsa and cheese, a little bit of sour cream, and you mix it all up. It’s really good. There’s no need for taco shells. It actually saved you a little bit of money.

Gean likes to make easy meals that are large and last a few days. This way, if she does not have time to cook for her son every day, she will have something already ready in the fridge that he would only need to warm up. As she expresses in the quote above, she gets excited about cooking fun meals, which makes the experience that much more meaningful.

Like Gean, Aly (41 white, Arkansas) also loves to cook. She enjoys easy recipes and seeks out new things to try on Facebook and other social media. She also loves using her instant pot and crock pot. Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) also enjoys cooking, especially home cooked country meals, which she considers to be better than anything she could buy when going out to eat. Ultimately, she enjoys providing for her daughter, and as a single mom, she thinks it is empowering.

Cate (39, white, Arkansas) says that the effort she puts into a meal depends on the day of the week, but she enjoys taking care of her family, so she likes to cook. She cooks more on days that she is off work because she has more time to prepare them. She remarks that cooking at home is safer in times of COVID-19, it is cheaper, and it allows them to eat as a family. Overall, cooking is an enjoyable experience for her because she is able to provide for her son and husband. Brit (24,
white, Arkansas) has similar feelings to Cate. When she does not have a headache or her kids are not bombarding her about how hungry they are, she loves to cook. She usually cooks every meal and if she does not cook, she still fixes something for her kids, such as cut up fruit. She shares with me that sometimes her kids say they are hungry, but then do not finish a meal because they really only wanted something to snack on. This could be frustrating for her, but once she learned that they only need a snack, it became routine for her. This also helped her learn to prepare healthy snacks that her kids can enjoy.

Debating what meals to make, negotiating with kids about snacks versus meals, and finding meals on social media is a form of invisible labor. This work that goes unseen is very important work that not only feeds their families, but also ensures that their families can enjoy the food that they prepare.

Neutral Feelings about Cooking

A few women have more neutral feelings about cooking. Anna (37, white, Mississippi), tells me that she loves food and feels adventurous about food. She loves to try new, strange foods, but she does not feel like she is the best cook.

I feel like a really selfish cook, like, I love to make something that I really want, but I sometimes, honestly my husband is a little bit better at putting together a meal. But lately, especially after being home with the pandemic, it’s a lot less takeout and a lot more exploratory.

She likes to use recipes that she and her family already love and add their own touches to it. They like to make muffins and energy bites that they consider better than the store bought. They also have their own garden at their house, so they often explore how they can use what they have to make new things, and that is important to her as a mom. At this moment in her life, she is pushing for less take out and more discovery with what her family can grow. She is interested in
reimagining healthier ways to feed her family, such as country folk food done vegetarian style, such as potatoes with gravy or green bean casserole with no bacon. She does not always love cooking, but she is interested in expanding her tastebuds and options.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) discloses that she likes to cook sometimes, but sometimes it is a chore. She likes to try new recipes and have a homecooked meal. While she likes to cook, sometimes she does not exactly feel like it. Marie likes to cook because she can experiment and try new things, but she does not like the responsibility of cooking. Differently, Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) never thought that she would have to cook. If it were only her, she would grab something to go from the pizza restaurant or eat a bag of chips and call it a day. But when she has to cook for her three sons, she enjoys it. She does not necessarily like cooking for cooking’s sake, but she enjoys providing for her sons.

While some women have neutral feelings, and some feel that cooking is a chore, the women I interviewed still feel as though cooking is their responsibility. This is similar to Beagan et al.’s (2008) finding that women were the most responsible for family foodwork, shopping, planning, preparation, and clean up. This finding of Beagan et al. (2008) also applies to the next subsection titled, I Hate Cooking.

I Hate Cooking

While some women love to cook, and others tolerate it, Elizabeth absolutely hates cooking. “I hate cooking. I’ve never liked it. I’m terrible at it. I mean I hate everything about being in the kitchen. Just I can, I would be the one to mess up a frozen pizza. I mean it’s bad.” Her husband does most of the cooking, but since he is a musician and travels most of the year for work, she has to cook for her children, and since she fosters children as well, she has to provide these children
with nutritious meals because they most likely do not get them elsewhere. When she cooks, she considers it “awful,” but I am curious what her children actually think. She does disclose that her hatred for cooking means a lot of takeout when her husband is gone, especially when meals burn or do not work out. She does not understand why, but she simply does not enjoy cooking.

I don’t know, some people they just love it and I just don’t understand how people love to cook. I’m trying to understand. I try something. I mess it up. And then the whole cleaning up afterwards, and it’s just the whole process I don’t like it. I like eating it and that’s it. But I mean I don’t know I just don’t enjoy cooking I don’t really know why. And going to the grocery store is just awful, just all of it I don’t like. I like to eat and that is it.

When Elizabeth has foster children in her home, she has to change her feelings about cooking slightly. She feels that she has to make sure they have a good meal. Specifically, during the times that her husband is gone, she has to buckle down and make herself make good meals for the kids. She does not like it, but she has to do it—it is all a part of being a foster parent. Her meals change all the time depending on if it is just her and her daughter, if her husband is home, or if she has foster children living with them. When she has foster children, she feels the need to cook more sustainable meals because she says that they do not eat good meals in other homes. “And, of course, then when we have foster kids here with us, we have to change it up because I mean we need to make sure they’re getting good meals.” She wants to make sure that the foster kids receive good meals because while she knows that her daughter will have good meals because of their healthy habits, she wants to ensure that the foster kids can experience these healthy habits as well. Normally, she would either have her husband cook, or have a lot of takeout. However, when she has foster kids in the house, she tries to cook better, more healthy meals.

While some women love cooking, some have neutral feelings about it, and some hate it, the foodwork is still being performed due to the societal pressures of the mom to adequately feed their children. However, there is not as much of a push on the fathers to be concerned about their
children’s hunger. The responsibility to feed falls on women in the home. While some women, like Elizabeth, who hate cooking, may fight this expectation, or feel lucky/happy when her husband cooks, there is still a societal and cultural push for women to be the primary cookers for and feeders of the family.

MOTIVATIONS FOR DOING FOODWORK AT HOME

The women that I interviewed mention two specific reasons for doing foodwork at home for their family: food preferences between family members, and their responsibility to feed their family. Food preferences are a motivation for women to do foodwork because the preferences reflect what her family will eat and how this informs her choices for meals and food items. Different family members may have different food preferences, and the mother must satisfy them by providing options for her family that they will enjoy. This attention to preferences is a part of the invisible labor that women are doing in foodwork.

Food Preferences

Several women discuss how food preferences affect the meals that they cook for their family. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) says that food preferences matter a lot in her home. It is hard for her to cook healthy meals when her boyfriend was raised eating certain foods like steak, ground beef, and pork each morning for breakfast. This kind of food does not sit well with her. When she does cook healthy meals, she has to limit the amount of food she cooks so that it is just enough for her, or else she will be wasting food because no one else will eat it. Her 12-year-old son will not eat what he does not like, and will not try what he does not know. Her one-year-old daughter will try new things because Michelle says that she does not know any better, but
she feels her family’s diet is not as healthy as it should be because her son and boyfriend are not healthy eaters.

Gean (28, white, Mississippi) discloses that her son’s eating habits and the cost of food influence the food preferences in her home. Her son goes through phases where he only wants to eat certain things. At one point, he only wanted to eat yogurt, and she was jokingly concerned he would turn into a probiotic. He would only eat yogurt for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. After that, he would only eat strawberries and nothing else. She was concerned about these patterns, but now he eats whatever she gives him. In terms of what she is able to feed her family, she chooses whatever items are cheapest because her family is on a budget. She and her son live together with her mom. She buys the cheapest products because she has to make sure she can also pay her bills on time. She does make it a habit to have at least one vegetable at every dinner. Other than that, she lets him eat whatever he wants to buffer the hunger. She says this is how she ate when she was growing up.

Aly (white, 41, Arkansas), mother of 10, shares that food preferences are a big deal in her house. One of her children is a very picky eater. Meals are a fight with him because he does not like very many foods. He is a sight and texture eater so they have been trying to work on making meals more appealing to him. By sight and texture, he mostly eats foods that look appealing, such as spaghetti or a fruit dish, and foods that do not have a strange texture like that of onions. Her other kids would eat almost anything she cooked, but this son has different preferences. Sometimes, she has to cook a completely different meal just for him, which was not uncommon for other women that I interviewed. Most of the time, she will have two to three side items and a meat, hoping that most of her children will at least eat the meat and one vegetable. This is how she negotiates food items, preferences, and meals with her kids.
Cate (39, white, Arkansas) also discusses this idea of having to cook more than one meal because of food preferences. Her son is a very picky eater, so depending on what she is planning to cook, she normally will fix him something different. Her husband, on the other hand, will eat whatever she cooks whether he likes it or not. Cate thinks this is a good thing. Lastly, Anna (37, white, Mississippi) also sometimes has to prepare different meals because while she and her husband are vegetarians, her two daughters still eat meat. An example she gave is that if they make spaghetti for dinner, they will have a meat sauce and a plant-based substitute meat ball. Even though they tend to have two different meal plans, they have been experimenting with different recipes that they all enjoy that do not have meat. Anna’s family also experiences a childhood pickiness that must be navigated. “The meat eaters and the vegetarians are just constantly negotiating how we’re gonna put meals together and that kind of thing is the big food preferential situation.” Even though they have this negotiation, she says they are not too tricky with specific demands because they all just like to eat.

Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) is concerned about her three sons’ love for spicy foods. They all enjoy hot chips. Her oldest son always prefers to eat hot sauce and ketchup. If he does not have hot sauce, he is not eating the food. They do not like to eat healthy, and it is a struggle encouraging them to. “I have to shove them up they nose, they ears to make them eat.” Her oldest son will eat some vegetables and fruits, but her two youngest sons will not. Marie (25, white, Arkansas) can also relate to this because she says that her son is six, and no six-year-old eats anything. While these mothers have a concern of what their children eat, they still attempt to buffer the hunger (Elliot and Bowen 2018) so that they will at least eat something.

Health of Food
There is an added pressure of mothers to provide healthy meals (Elliot and Bowen 2018). Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) discusses this at length. She shares with me that no one in her family has ever eaten healthy. She thinks she is the first person to even attempt to improve their eating habits. She started buying farm raised, local eggs, milk, vegetables, and fruit. This way she knows where they come from and that nothing is added. They also eat beef and other meats that have no antibiotics added. This way, for the foods that they eat together, she is able to make these meals as healthy as possible. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) does not give her daughter sugar, including sodas. She does not feed her anything that could harm her, but she feels hypocritical because she was not as healthy when she was pregnant, and she breast feeds. She feels like she is doing the right thing, but she is not sure. She is worried that the foods she eats might have a negative impact on her daughter because of the quality of nutrients that are being passed on through her breast milk.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) shares that her family just recently began discussing healthy eating. They were eating a lot of junk until recently. She has been trying to make more vegetables, cook healthier options, and exercise more. She says she has pre-existing health conditions, so this change in diet has not only helped her family but it has helped her own health as well. Her family’s been enjoying a lot of good fruit lately. Meanwhile, Anna (37, white, Mississippi) has no health concerns in her house, but she tries to promote health consciousness to try to eat the freshest food they can afford.

But I would say all of us, my girls dad included, are pretty health conscious and pretty conscientious about the role that food plays in our life so, and my girls’ dad worked in the restaurant industry for years too so I guess food is just kind of essential for all of us in that way.

Anna’s responses about health were the most confident in feeding ability and with having healthy food around the house.
Mothers in my sample take on the primary responsibility of feeding which is evident in Beagan et al. (2008)’s piece on rationalizing the family division of foodwork. Because they are the most concerned in their family about what they eat in terms of health and having a balanced, sit-down meal, they take on this role of feeding in the home.

HELP AT HOME

The dynamics within each home in this study contributed to how much help the mother receives in the home. Six women have husbands, two have boyfriends who live with them, two are single living with their moms, one is single living with her sister, and one is single with no other family in town. Three of the six married mothers expressed that they can share responsibilities, specifically cooking, with their husbands, two expressed that their husbands help them some of the time, and one expressed that her husband does not help her at home, especially with cooking. One mother whose boyfriend lives with her says that her boyfriend helps her a lot around the house, with cooking, and with her child, while the other mother with a boyfriend living with her expressed that her boyfriend does not help her. Both mothers who live with their mom shared that their mothers help them out tremendously, while the mother who shares a home with her sister says that her sister helps out sometimes at home. The mother with no family in town must take care of everything at home by herself.

*Shared Responsibilities with Husbands and Boyfriends*

Some mothers have husbands or boyfriends with whom they can share feeding and household responsibilities. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) lives with her boyfriend who is a chef. He helps her cook, and also helps by holding their daughter who is only 10 months old. She says her
baby is extremely needy and likes to be held 24/7, so they switch off who holds her all day. She says that they help each other out as much as possible with cleaning, laundry, cooking, and taking the dogs out. She admits that she is very blessed to have a husband who helps and supports her so much.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) also has a husband that helps her. They both have jobs and school work that are equally demanding so they “collaborate” on making food, cleaning, and helping her daughters. There is not much conflict between them about household responsibilities. Every now and then there may be a small argument about who will sweep, or something equally small, but they mostly are able to collaborate and work together well. She also feels lucky to have a helping husband.

This idea of being “blessed” or “lucky” is expressed in Arlie Hochschild’s (2012) *The Second Shift*. Since men helping in the kitchen is so rare, some women in her study considered themselves lucky to have help. Women who feel lucky to have help are doing gender because women are expected to perform most of the household tasks, especially cooking. This feeling of luck is challenging to the ingrained social construct of gender in social interactions in the home. Because Mo has a husband that helps her in the home, she considers herself an outlier in this study. She compared herself explicitly to other women in the study by assuming what other working moms would share with me. This insinuates that she does not expect many other working mothers to have as much help as she does in the home.

*Moms with Helping Moms*

Some mothers had their own mothers who would help them with feeding and household responsibilities. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) informs me that she does not cook at
“Okay, well I do not cook, at all. I know that sounds weird I’m 25, got a daughter, but I don’t
cook. I let my momma cook. Cause I stay with her, so that’s kinda a perk for me.” She says this is
a great help to her that she appreciates. She also only has to clean her room and any messes that
her daughter may make. Other than that, her mother cleans the rest of her house. She emphasized
throughout our interview that she was blessed to have her mom.

Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) also receives help from her mom who is her
neighbor. She comes over and feeds her son sometimes when she is at work. Michelle comes home,
and he tells her that he has already been fed, and this is such a relief to her. Sometimes she is so
happy she could cry because she is so exhausted after getting off work, especially on nights when
she has to stay longer at the restaurant to close the store. Gean (28, white, Mississippi) also has a
mom that helps her. She shares a house with her mom, and because of this, her mom can keep the
house clean, do the cooking, and take care of her and her son.

She’s like what a husband needs to be. She is my stay-at-home partner. At the end
of the day, his biological father is not around at all. So, she is his second parent.

She does not take her mom’s help for granted, and understands that she has more help than
most people. She is able to do her job and still get plenty of sleep because her mother is there to
help take care of her son. Marie (25, white, Arkansas) also has a mom who helps her. Most of the
time, her son is with her mom because both she and her husband work late hours, so her son
actually spends days with his grandma.

While these mothers have their mother’s help, this is an example of the invisible labor that
is being done for the mothers I interviewed, instead of by the mothers I interviewed. However, the
fact that these mothers’ mothers are willing to help them shows the work that mothers do, and will
continue to do.
While some mothers that I interviewed had a partner, mother, or child to help them with cooking and household duties, some do not have this additional help. When asked what help she has at home when it comes to cooking, childcare, and cleaning, Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) responded, “None. It’s just me.” When asked what she would change about foodwork at home, Cate (39, white, Arkansas) said that she would want her husband to help with cooking sometimes. If he has to cook, then they are eating out. This reinforces the idea that women hold the most responsibility around feeding in the home (Devault 1992, West and Zimmerman 1987).

Meanwhile, Aly (41, white, Arkansas), mother of 10, wishes her kids would pitch in more around the house and learn how to cook some basic meals so that she can have a night off from cooking every once and a while. Not once in her interview did she mention her husband, other than she has a husband, which leads me to think that he does not help with cooking or housework, causing him to not be mentioned. Brit (24, white, Arkansas) shared with me that she is the only one who cooks in her house because her partner does not know how to cook and her children are still too young. Her husband does grill sometimes, but it is usually burnt or undercooked, so she usually just does all of the cooking. Occasionally, they will go to her grandparents’ house where her stepmom does most of the cooking, but when they do not do that, Brit is the primary cooker in the house. She is also the only one to clean her house. No one helps her with that.

While there are different family dynamics in the home—help from husbands, boyfriends, mom, kids, or no help at all—gender dynamics remain intact. Women still hold the brunt of the responsibility, whether it is the mom or the grandmother. Women are held hostage (West and Zimmerman 1987: 126) to these responsibilities and have trouble escaping these gendered roles. Even though in a few cases, women have husbands who help them in the kitchen, as mothers, they...
are still expected to cook for their children. They are held accountable for their gender and these societal expectations attached to them. There appears to be a pattern of the younger mothers to young children receiving help from their moms, while mothers with older children (ten and up) do not have help from a parent, at least in this sample.

TIME AT HOME

The mothers I interviewed discuss their need for more time at home with their children. This connects with the social desirability of mothers to spend most of their time at home. The ideal mother would stay at home and take care of her kids all day, but no one is questioning why the husband does not stay home, or why the mother may have to work in the first place. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) describes it as: “I think in the ideal world, I would just get paid to be a mom, but that’s not the reality at all. Sometimes I need a break from being a mom so that I can just gather myself.” While she feels that her hours at work are flexible enough for her to spend time at home with her daughter, she could always use more. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) feels that the time that she spends at home could be more. She does not feel like she is unable to bond with her daughter, but she does feel like she is unable to bond at home as much. “I feel like [the time at home] should be more, but I don’t feel like I’m less bonding with my daughter, I just feel like I try to do our bonding in a free and open space instead of just being at home all the time. It could be more.” She spends most of her time with her daughter elsewhere such as in the car between childcare and her house or at someone else’s house.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) shares that her son could be staying with her mom for three or four days at a time, and she does not see him. She works long hours and usually does not get off until after bedtime. While she says this situation is rough, she tries to make the most of her days
off with him by spending as much time as she can with him by taking him to do fun things. She also tries to make it fun at home while the COVID-19 pandemic carries on. For Marie, there is just not enough time in the day, and she feels as though she does not spend enough time at home. She does not see her husband much because by the time he gets off work, she leaves for work. It is similar with her son—by the time he gets out of daycare, she has to go to work. Marie would be content with more time at home. Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) wishes that she did not have to work so much and that she could be able to provide for her child with only one job. She wants to be home with her daughter more so they are able to do the things that she and her daughter enjoy doing.

While some mothers discussed how they wish they could have more time at home, Brit (24, white, Arkansas) was very positive with her response saying she loves the time that she spends at home even if her kids drive her crazy sometimes. She loves being home with them and being able to listen to them ramble on about random stuff. She enjoys watching them have fun at home, but at the same time, she misses going to work and making money. At the time of this interview, she shared with me that her franchised pizza restaurant was shut down due to COVID-19, but this shutdown soon became permanent because of the franchise going bankrupt. So, with this, she lost her job, but has much more time at home with her children. While she enjoys this time at home, but misses going to work to make money, she is wrestling with this social desirability of being the “ideal mom.” She feels the need to work because she enjoys it and can better provide for her family with the money she makes. Brit’s experience is different from other participants’ experiences because while other mothers go to work and miss out of time spent with their children, because of Brit’s restaurant closing, she has more time to spend at home with her kids, but misses going to work.
While some mothers wish they had more time at home, and some mothers enjoy their time at home, they are doing gender by spending their time at home taking care of their children. From my sample, the mothers express that they spend their free time at home with their children, so they are the dominant figures in the home to play with, take care of, and feed their kids.

CONCLUSION

While some of the women I interviewed have help from their husband, partner, or mom when it comes to cooking, foodwork, or other domestic duties, they are still responsible for most of the household chores. And an interesting finding here is even if it is not them performing these duties, it is still, most of the time, a mom (their mom). For the married women, some share responsibilities with their husbands, but some have to do most of the work even if they do not want to, specifically in Elizabeth’s case when her husband leaves for work and she hates to cook. However, this leads me to pose the question: if the mother does not provide, then who will? In Elizabeth’s case, her husband loves to cook, so he is able to cook when he is home. This is her husband providing Elizabeth help with cooking nutritious meals for their family. However, while Elizabeth does have a husband who helps her when he is home, some women in this study are not able to rely on their partners or anyone else for help.

Food preferences played a role for most mothers with younger children because they are still picky and not very adventurous with trying new foods. Meanwhile, older children were either less picky, or more able to make something for themselves. Interestingly, the moms with younger children (such as twelve or younger) are younger moms, and the moms with older children are more experienced and have had their job in foodwork for a few more years than the younger moms. This makes me curious if the more experienced moms are able to establish a more routinized
schedule for their children because they work more hours, and the children have learned how to cook and clean because they know that mom won’t be home for lunch. This ensures that the older children can make themselves something that they like, also ensuring that food preferences would not make that big of an impact in the home because these older children can feed themselves. Meanwhile, the younger children have to rely on their mothers to feed them, which reiterates the pickiness of foods that they do not get to choose for the meals that their moms make. However, it was very clear that the moms were paying attention to the food preferences and pickiness of their houses.

When mothers spend more time cooking meals that are preferred by their children, they are missing this “convenience” of cooking foods that could be thrown together, easily accessible, and enjoyed by the whole family together. This expresses the gendered nature of foodwork because women hold the burden of recognizing and acknowledging their preferences. Often times, the mothers are the ones to consciously shop for these brands, flavors, and items to try to plan nutritious meals. This is the invisible labor that women do when they do foodwork.

Most mothers that I interviewed wished they had more time at home. The ones who were married had husbands or boyfriends who also worked, and they experienced a limited time from their partners as well. They all loved the time that they have with their children at home and wish for more time. These women have a responsibility to work and provide for their children, and some of them do not have much help with cooking and taking care of their children. The ultimate finding of this chapter is that these mothers wish they had more time with their children, and also, overall, wish that they had more help at home. If the perception of how much time they have is shaped by the institutions—such as work or family—shaping their lives, this finding about time tells us that the social forces shaping these mothers’ foodwork are causing mothers to spend their little time at
home participating in foodwork, but also, they are sometimes able to spend this time with their children and enjoy it.

Cooking and foodwork are extremely gendered. While some of the women in this study have help at home with cooking and foodwork, others do not. However, most women said that while they have help cooking, all but one said that they were the primary person to keep the house clean. Most women also enjoy cooking, despite this being a societal expectation put on women and not men.

The overarching theme of this chapter is that women are still expected to hold the most responsibility for cooking and foodwork (Elliot and Bowen 2018), whether it be the mother I interviewed, or the mother of the mother. However, there is a lack of responsibility put on the male partners when one exists. Women feel lucky or blessed when receiving help, but if society can progress to a more equal exchange of responsibilities (Collins 2020), we would start to see real change. There is a social desirability for women to be the ideal mother who stays at home to take care of their children. As we see from my sample, that is not always an option. These women must participate in paid foodwork in order to provide for their family and perform foodwork in the home to provide sustainable meals, or even snacks to buffer their children’s hunger. At the end of the day, these women have a concern for their children’s overall wellbeing, and performing foodwork in the home is essential to being a “good mother” (Beagan et al. 2008; Elliot and Bowen 2018) and providing for her family. The current societal expectation is that women will go to work and take care of their kids. However, Christopher (2012) found that mothers feel the need to justify employment, and they do this in several ways—one being the emphasis on benefits of employment for themselves, and rejecting the long hours imposed by an “ideal work model.”
In chapters three and four, I have discussed experiences with foodwork and cooking at home and at work. Next, in chapter five, I will discuss challenges with foodwork in the context of COVID-19. This will provide the context of the uncharted territory of the pandemic that drastically impacted mothers’ lives.
V. FOODWORK IN THE CONTEXT OF COVID-19

COVID-19 has tremendously impacted women workers. Madgaykar, White, Krishnan, Mahajan, and Azcue (2020) found that women’s jobs are 1.8 times more vulnerable to this pandemic than their male counterparts. “Women make up 39 percent of global employment but account for 54 percent of overall job losses.” They also found that jobs in accommodation and food service are the job sectors that are one of the worst affected by the pandemic. One reason for the greater effect on women is the pandemic’s role in significantly increasing unpaid work in the home, mostly performed by women. This causes women’s employment to drastically drop during the pandemic.

Ronaldo and Whalen (2020) interviewed working mothers and found that they were overwhelmed with remote schooling for their children and the lack of available childcare. They voiced opinions of frustration, anger, stress, and sadness, and many voiced concerns about their careers and marriages. Most married mothers in this sample said that their husbands helped with childcare and house work, but all mothers experienced an added stress of schools closing and activities being cancelled. Because of this, mothers were holding most of the responsibility.

Pirtle and Wright (2021) found that, “Since the beginning of the pandemic, women, especially women of color have reported higher levels of stress, anxiety and depression due to an overburden of labor in the home.” This labor includes cooking, cleaning, and childcare. These
additional burdens, on top of a social isolation brought on by the shelter in place mandate, can
cause for an “unhealthy living experience” that disproportionately affects women of color.

COVID-19 has caused an extra burden for the women of this study. This chapter’s findings
will answer the question: how has COVID-19 impacted foodwork at work and at home? Their
work lives has been compromised due to hours being cut, food discounts at work being changed
or taken away, and customers not adhering to the mask mandate or CDC guidelines. COVID-19
has changed their home setting as well, causing them to cook and eat in more, despite the food
shortage. Some indicate that this time at home caused them to focus on their family more and to
be more conscious of what they are putting in their bodies. However, the increased need to cook
at home also adds more work in “feeding the family” for these women. While there are additional
stress and burdens at work and at home, some women expressed gratitude towards the COVID-19
pandemic because they are able to spend more time at home with their families.

AT WORK

The women in my study experienced several struggles that they had at work, such as hours
being cut, causing positions to change, and new COVID-19 protocols being instated such as the
mask mandate.

*Hours Cut*

Many of my participants discuss the struggles that they have at work since the COVID-19
pandemic. One in particular is their hours being cut. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) shared that she is
working part-time, partially because she just had a baby a few months ago, but also because of the
pandemic. “A lot of the hours have been cut for servers just because there’s not a need for a lot of
people to be at the job, so hours are being cut.” Brit’s (24, white, Arkansas) franchised pizza restaurant actually announced that they were closing due to the financial impact from COVID-19, and they do not think that they can recover. This close is permanent.

Cate (39, white, Arkansas) had a similar experience. Cate started as a server in her twenties, moved up to a bartending position, and eventually advanced to a manager position. However, since COVID-19 started, their staff is smaller, and she had to start waiting tables again, which she says she has not done in almost 20 years. Waiting tables is not something that she wanted to do because she prefers to be on the managerial side. Serving has caused her a lot of stress because her family has been very cautious with COVID-19, and now she is serving in a restaurant with people eating without wearing masks. She shares with me that she feels on edge at work just trying to finish each shift. When COVID-19 first hit, they had to cut their business hours. She works in a tourist town, so when the pandemic started, the horse races stopped which in turn almost stopped all businesses from thriving. Also, all of the conventions at the convention center across the street from her restaurant were canceled, so that stopped business as well. COVID-19 impacted her work in more ways than she could have ever imagined. This slowed business adds to the burdens that she experiences everyday being a working mom, because she is not able to provide for her family the same way when making less money. This burden is the emotional labor that women and servers must endure when adapting to hours being cut, and the new COVID-19 procedures and habits that are discussed in the next section.

New Procedures

There are a few new COVID-19 procedures that the mothers in this study discuss. Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) discusses a few of these new procedures in her restaurant due to COVID-
19: she cannot use silverware, she must give the customers plasticware, and it has to be thrown away even if not used. She must give the customers individual condiments, which also must be thrown away even if they were not used. She lastly says that since she can only allow so many people into the restaurant, that cuts into how much she makes each shift. This stress about not making enough money adds to the burden of being a working mom.

During COVID-19, restaurants are also expected to be socially distanced, keeping customers six feet apart. This reduces the number of people that can be inside of the restaurant at any given time. Ultimately, this impacts the number of tables that a server can have, also limiting her possible tips. There was also an option in several restaurants called “curbside.” While working curbside, employees (mostly servers) are expected to meet cars outside upon arrival, take their name and form of payment—cash or card—return to the store to process payment, and then bring the food back to the car. Some customers tip, and some do not, but in most instances servers could either keep the tip they received or they would have to split the tips equally between employees at the end of the shift. Ultimately, the curbside experience made the uncertainty of tips much greater, because some customers might not have tipped before COVID, and some may not know to tip for curbside. Also, with the uncertainty of income, some customers may not have been able to tip, but they still had to pick up food because of the grocery shortage.

There was also a change in the discount policy on food for employees for some. Anna (37, white, Mississippi) shares:

Anyway, since the pandemic our owner has really tried to get more serious about conserving food and conserving funds because we are basically trying to make it. So, the deal is now we get 50% off on the clock anything we want but we can no longer help ourselves. That’s a pretty big change.

She says it used to be nice to just grab a snack and not have to worry about it, but now there is more ceremony to ordering a plate and sitting down to eat it, which she considers nice. However,
she says that it is somewhat annoying to pay five dollars for food every time she goes to work, but she explains it may be simply because she is not used to it.

Cate (39, white, Arkansas) shares that now that her restaurant has closed, the employees must change their habits of taking food home from work. “But now because we were closed for so long, we lost a lot of money where we can’t do that anymore. The business has to save every penny it can get right now.” However, she says that the employees are still offered an employee discount. Sometimes, she might pack a lunch just to save money. This way she can use the food that she already has at home for lunch instead of spending money on a meal at work, even if it is discounted. She says as long as the employees pay for the food that they order, they can bring their whole family dinner if they want and use their employee discount, but they do not do that too often because it can be expensive.

Customer Dynamics Since COVID-19 Mask Mandate

Several women share their stories about having difficult experiences since the mask mandate due to COVID-19. Marie (25, white, Arkansas) shares:

Of course, we have to wear a mask and we have to require customers to wear a mask when they come in until they get their drink. That’s just been a headache, now a lot of regulars kind of understand, cause we, you know, if they’re regulars we explain to them, like, “Look. We don’t wanna do this either, but we don’t wanna get shut down either.”

Marie says that when she explains the chance of them shutting down, her regulars seem to understand and adhere to the CDC guidelines more because they would hate to see their favorite restaurant close down. However, sometimes the service staff gets blamed, or her tips suffer because they have to enforce masks and social distancing. She has to reiterate that she does not make the rules, but she does have to follow them.
Anna (37, white, Mississippi) also discusses these changes in customer dynamics since the mask mandate. She shares while she has not had too many extremely angry customers, from time to time, someone does “get fussy” and walks out. She says masks have changed the dynamics with customers because they do have to police their customers, even though she does not like using that word. She prefers to consider herself in a supervisory role of the customers’ behavior. This is a perfect example of “doing gender” because Anna is expected to basically mother her customers. She says it could be very upsetting for customers to experience their waitress telling them to comply with the rules of the town and restaurant. This is because servers are expected to “serve,” not enforce rules. Managers, who are mostly men in my sample, are expected to enforce rules. However, servers are the ones who are interacting with the customers, so servers—women, who are expected to be submissive and creatures of service to customers—are the ones having to enforce these rules. Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) shares that while before masks, she could usually expect at least one difficult customer in a shift, but now more so with the mask mandate because customers do not want to even wear a mask from the front door to the table. She has had multiple customers walk out for being asked to wear a mask. Sarah also shares her own struggles with wearing masks as a server. She wears glasses, so when it gets hot, it is hard for her to see because her glasses fog up, and she cannot see without her glasses.

While women servers like Sarah are the ones who have the most interactions with customers, they experience the most anger from customers. The anger is unleashed onto these women because they are expected to be of service, to resolve any problem the customer may have while trying to enjoy the restaurant experience. However, the servers cannot allow their customers to go against the new COVID-19 guidelines of the restaurant, and this causes a disturbance between server and customer. Women must do this “policing” in the restaurant because they are
the faces and hands of the food being served. They have the most interactions with the customers, and in turn, experience the most anger from the customers.

While there was no evidence of this found in my study, women in the restaurant industry are experiencing a new form of sexual harassment, what the New York Times is calling “maskual harassment” (Goldberg 2021) which is the unfair demand that servers remove their mask if they want to receive a tip:

“As she [the server, Shelly Ortiz] was about to hand over their check, he asked if she could remove her masks so he could see ‘if the bottom half of my face was as cute as the top.’ She refused. He declared, angrily, that he’d have to determine the tip by looking at her breasts, instead.”

Women servers are experiencing a decline in tips due to this maskual harassment. While women are dealing with the burden of needing to work to pay her bills, but also working around countless unmasked customers that are potentially exposing them to the virus, they must also suffer this new form of sexual harassment from customers.

Some women discuss the stress and worry that they experience at work during COVID-19. Cate (39, white, Arkansas), while discussing the mask mandate, also discusses the stress that she has at work due to this mask mandate and CDC guidelines. In her town, even though there is a mask mandate, she says that people do not follow these suggestions. Because she has to enforce the mask mandate or the restaurant will lose their business license, customers are required to wear the mask before entering the restaurant. However, people constantly take them off too soon, or do not put them back on when getting up to go to the bathroom. Her customers are challenging it or fighting it the whole time, which puts everyone in the restaurant in danger. This thought weighs heavy on her because she says that she is constantly on guard while at work trying to encourage people to follow guidelines, wear masks, and stay six feet apart. She shares that some customers
do not think that these guidelines apply to them, or they are not worried about COVID, so every
day there is someone who is putting everyone else in jeopardy because they “just don’t get it.”

Aly (41, white, Arkansas) says as a working mom, she has a thought that she thinks most
working moms have: “Am I home enough? When I am home, am I present enough, or do I have
work on the mind?” With COVID happening, she constantly has work on her mind, trying to think
of new ways to keep the restaurant open because it is the livelihood of so many employees. It is
also a historical landmark in her town. She says because of this, it is important that she keeps it
open. Her biggest concern, while worrying about work, is if she is home enough and if she is
actually present while she is home. Women are expected to be the caregivers of society, so when
a woman is away from her children at work, she has worries about her children at home and cannot
be “fully present” at work. Also, when a mother is home, she still has this worry of if she is home
enough. This double burden impacts all aspects of a woman’s life and causes immense stress.

Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi) says that the COVID protocols at work are physically
and mentally draining. “You just have to remind yourself that customer just sign the credit card
receipt with that pen, so I can’t reuse that pen. I have to go sanitize it before another customer can
touch it.” She says that these steps that she has to take between sanitization and the interactions
with customers are challenging. While she already has to work a job and participate in the second
shift (Hochschild 1989), this work performed during times of COVID-19 adds to this woman’s
burden.

The servers in restaurants are expected to perform this “protocol work” because they are
the ones closest to the customers, interacting with them the most. Interestingly enough, while they
are performing this protocol work, they are also most likely to be exposed to the coronavirus.
Cooks, on the other hand, must perform other protocol work, including washing hands more often,
changing gloves in between preparing meals, and wearing a mask at all times (usually by a hot oven). But the servers’ experiences reflect yet another example of emotional labor because their protocol work requires them to navigate new interactions with customers related to the work of requesting people to wear masks and respect social distancing. This adds to the burden that these restaurant workers must already endure.

CHANGES AT HOME

These women also discussed changes at home, such as eating at home more which causes them to spend more money on groceries and cook more. However, because of this, they were able to use their time to learn how to cook healthier meals. They also experienced stress and worry around the safety of themselves and their families because of potential exposure to the coronavirus.

*Eating in More*

Some mothers share that they were eating at home significantly more. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) shares that COVID-19 has caused them to eat in more, but considers this a good thing. “For one, you know what you’re putting in your food, and for two, you can minimize salt, you know stuff like that that you know is not good. So, I think that’s helping people. By eating at home, you’re paying attention more to what you put in your body.” Mo (24, white, Mississippi) also feels like she is able to cook and eat in more. She shares that because of having more time at home, she and her boyfriend can actually appreciate what they are cooking. Since her boyfriend can stay home from work during COVID, they are now able to focus more on being a family. “Since my boyfriend gets to stay at home right now because he’s out—he’s a chef at a sorority house, so he gets to spend more time and we focus more on being a family.” Lastly, Sarah (42,
white, Arkansas) is able to cook more since COVID began because her day job—at a bank—sent everyone home in March to work from home. She feels like she gets more done now because of her time at home. “I actually cook more now being home all the time because, day job, we got sent home back in March so I can do that from home. So, I’m here. I do laundry. I feel like I get more done now than I was before being home.” While being sent home from work may have impacted her pay, she is able to have a greater handle on her house work.

Aly (41, white, Arkansas), mother of 10, shares that because of COVID-19, she has more mouths to feed at home. While five of her children do not live at home, the other five children are home for the summer, and during COVID, they do not have any clubs, recreational, or extracurricular activities. This means there are more people in the house eating meals prepared by her. She has to learn how to be more conscious about how much money she spends on groceries, finding deals, and finding large amounts of things in order to feed her whole family a “good, healthy meal.” Because of COVID, she has learned how to find better deals when it comes to meat or finding large amounts of food, and then breaking it down for meals. Cooking more meals at home, finding deals, and seeking out healthy food is an example of the invisible labor that the women in my sample perform.

Learned to Make Healthier Meals

COVID-19 also helped some mothers learn how to make healthy meals. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) says that now, more than ever, she is being more conscious of what she is putting in her body. “I feel like COVID has us eating healthier because we are eating at home more.” With this realization, she eats less fast food and more home-cooked meals prepared by her mom. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) says that she is grateful that COVID happened
because she has access to healthy foods to bring home to feed her family. At the start of COVID, she had to gain employment at an organic grocery store, and while she no longer works there, the knowledge she gained has influenced her eating habits. She thanks God for her jobs because she can change the way her family eats and not fear that she is “sending them to their graves with whatever it is I’m feeding them.” Before, she did not think that the foods she was feeding her family were necessarily healthy, such as chicken strips and nachos, but with the new knowledge she has learned from the grocery store, she tries to incorporate more healthy options such as vegetables and farm raised eggs.

Stress and Worry at Home

Some women discuss the increased stress and worry while at home during COVID-19. Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi) shares her stress during COVID with groceries:

I remember right at the beginning of the pandemic I stocked up on canned vegetables and canned soup and I didn’t know what was gonna happen, you know. No one knew what was about to happen. We were spraying down our groceries outside before we brought them in. We don’t do that anymore now that we know we don’t have to.

Elizabeth expressed deep concern and worry with COVID-19, saying that even though she works in a restaurant, she refuses to take her family to eat at one. These worries about bringing the virus home, whether it be from germs on groceries or germs acquired by sitting in a restaurant, created a certain stress in these mothers’ lives, especially Elizabeth. At this time, most of America had fears of serious illness or death from COVID-19, and some aspects of life, such as obtaining food or groceries, could not be avoided. The fear of bringing this virus into a home was alive, and still is, but people thought if they could spray and sanitize their groceries, they could keep the virus
out of their homes. Now, we know that the virus is not as easily spread by touching surface areas as once thought, so spraying groceries is not necessary.

CONCLUSION

These mothers have experienced many changes and struggles due to COVID-19 in their workplace and in their home. At work, they must deal with hours being cut, difficulties with customers, changes in discount policies, and the new mask mandate. At home, they are eating in more, have more mouths to feed, and some have difficulties preparing healthy meals with the food shortage. However, through all of this uncharted territory, most were still able to perform their mom-tasks and provide for their families the best that they can. By performing these tasks while having stress and worries about COVID-19, they were doing gender by performing “womanly” duties—specifically cooking—for their families. During this crisis, doing gender seemed to be a response in this uncharted territory. This leads to the greater gendered divisions in the home, and the assumptions of these gendered expectations to be strengthened and reinforced. Women embraced them because they had no option to; they were the ones who were home for the most of the time.

The COVID-19 pandemic actually seemed to hinder society’s achievement of work-family justice because it caused a greater disparity in who participates in both paid and unpaid work. For married or partnered couples, the man seemed to be participating in the paid work more, while the women were experiencing shift cuts or temporarily closed restaurants, except in the case of Mo, whose boyfriend’s chef position at a sorority house was also temporarily terminated. This is an excellent point where work-family justice and doing gender collide. Men are “expected” to earn the income and provide for their families, while women are “expected” to care for their families.
The hours for both paid and unpaid work for women in this study, and their male counterparts, were in most instances far from equal. From descriptions of husbands and partners by the women I interviewed, I was led to believe that the women in my study work less hours than their male counterparts both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic. For the single mothers that were interviewed, they experienced an increased double burden of having to participate in the lesser paid work hours she was given and in the increased unpaid work hours at home. While most women in this study accepted that they were expected to do this unpaid labor, and while most women enjoyed the extra time with their children in their own home, these women still had to hold most of the responsibilities (cooking, cleaning, taking care of children) in the home.
VI. WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE

This chapter uses Collins’ (2020) concept of work-family justice to highlight three specific themes that emerged in the interviews: the cultural assumptions about motherhood that cause work-family justice to be difficult to achieve, the structural barriers that working moms face at work, and the individual-level strategies that women employ to navigate barriers or injustice in their lives. Throughout this chapter, I will explain these assumptions, barriers, and strategies that these working mothers face and conclude with a discussion of what this means for work-family justice. The findings in this chapter will answer the question: What do these experiences tell us about the gender dynamics of this work and the conditions under which work-family justice might be achieved in these women’s lives?

WORK-FAMILY BALANCE VS. WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE

While some may push for work-family balance on the individual level, Collins (2020) is pushing for work-family justice on a societal scale. Work-family balance is the idea that one can attempt to balance their work life with their family life through individual scheduling, adjustments to time management, and deciding who stays home more and who works more. However, work-family justice is a societal solution to the gendered inequality that allows every member of society to have the opportunity to fully participate in both paid and unpaid work. In order to achieve work-family justice, there must be changes made to our cultural norms and workplace policies. In this
chapter, I argue that one must examine the assumptions of mothers, barriers faced, and strategies employed in order to begin to understand how work-family justice can be achieved in our society.

GOOD MOMS and GOOD WORKING MOMS: COMPETING CULTURAL ASSUMPTIONS

There are several strong cultural assumptions about being a mom that put pressure on women to live up to a certain kind of motherhood. In this section, we will look at this idea of “mom aesthetics” versus providing moms. Mom aesthetics will discuss the societal pressures that mothers experience, and providing moms will discuss what they actually do for to provide for their children, such as bringing food home from work and not asking the fathers for help with expenses.

Mom Aesthetics

There are a few instances of “mom aesthetics,” or cultural assumptions of the perfect mom, discussed by the mothers in this study. Anna (37, white, Mississippi) discusses societal pressures from social media to live up to what she calls “mom aesthetics”:

I mean there’s so much pressure on mothers, and then we have this weird added pressure of all these Instagram moms that look perfect and have perfect mom-aesthetics and all this crap, and I think you don’t suddenly like become, even though being a mother completely changes you in some ways, you’re also still the same person you’ve always been. Just be authentic and real with your kids and that’s all you need.

“Mom-aesthetics” are shown by moms who appear to have the perfect life and perfect family. They have everything that they need and make providing for their families look effortless. While she says that becoming a mother changes a woman in some ways, a woman is still the same person she’s always been. She advises moms to be authentic and real with their kids. As a mom, one will still need money and time, but authenticity is key. She says to not worry about what other
people think. She also says it is nice to surround yourself with some good friends that you can be honest with you about how hard it can be working and being a mom.

Today, women are capable of and expected to work to provide for their children (e.g., Collins 2020). “In 2019, there were 76,852,000 women aged 16 and over in the labor force, representing close to half (47.0%) of the total labor force. 57.4% of women participated in the labor force, compared to 69.2% of men” (Catalyst 2020). Women work at similar rates as men. Many women in this study countered “mom aesthetics” by defining a good mom as a “providing mom”.

Providing Mom

Several mothers discuss the importance of being the provider for their children. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) shares that she uses food from work to provide meals for her children. She says that often times she does not have a lot of food in the refrigerator, so she has to eat at work. When she goes to work and gets off late, she will bring home meals from work because it is so late, all she has time to do is go to sleep. By bringing food home for herself and her children, she does not have to worry about how they are going to eat. Michelle’s experience is similar to that of Devault’s (1992) discussion around the human necessity of food. While society relies on only women to feed, Michelle uses her resources to feed her children by bringing food home from work. This is also an example of invisible labor, because the act of bringing food home mostly goes unacknowledged.

Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) says that she does not ask her sons’ fathers for help. She gets up and goes to work for her kids. She says that there is not much that she needs for herself so she goes to work to provide for her children. “I go to work for y’all, and go to work for
y’all, and go to work for y’all, and I barely get to buy myself anything back, but really there’s nothing I need. It’s my boys.” Being a single mom with three boys, she often worried if what she is doing is enough. She is afraid they will resort to other methods such as stealing from stores or robbing people. She says they are just boys, and a lot of parents have to worry about this with boys. While they are still young, she tries to teach them good value and morals. She says that if one of her sons asks for something, she might not be able to get it that day, but she will try her hardest to get it eventually. She reminisces about times when her mom and dad did not buy her what she wanted, but what she needed, and often times that was just food. She works hard to give her sons a little more than what she had growing up.

Lastly, Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) wants to work to provide for herself and her daughter, but when she realizes how long she will be working for that reason, she considers her lack of freedom a “bummer.” She finds it stressful thinking about working just to provide for herself, but also someone else (her daughter).

While providing for their families and being a “good, working mom” were both rewarding and stressful to the women I interviewed, the act of providing for their families is both emotional and invisible labor. It is emotional labor because they often must do things that may be hard for them in order to provide for their families, such as working longer hours, not asking for help from others, teaching their children morals, and giving up time and money to their children that they could use for themselves. It is invisible labor because while the mother is at work, the act of providing by earning wages is often unseen by children or other family members, so the actual work that brings in the money often goes unacknowledged.

*How Women View Themselves as Mothers*
Many women discussed how they view themselves as mothers by sharing how they define a good, working mom, and by sharing what advice they would give a new working mom. Most of the advice that they give, they wish someone would have given to them.

Definition of a Good, Working Mom

While women are discussing how they view themselves as mothers, several shared with me how they would define a good, working mom. These definitions given by the participants provide insight into how they are empowering themselves and other moms. Mo (24, white, Mississippi) says:

I feel like any mom that is working and is doing their best to put food on the table to take care of their children is a good mom…. people are so easy to shame moms, but if they are doing their best to take care of their children in whatever means, I feel like that is the definition of a good mom.

Many other mothers had similar feelings. Gean (28, white, Mississippi) shared that her opinion of a good working mom is someone who can be there for her kids when it matters. Aly (41, white, Arkansas) defines a good working mom as someone who tries her best every day to be there for her kids. She considers herself a good working mom, but thinks this might be because her children are older and are able to come and work with her at the restaurant so she can see them at work as well as at home.

Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) disclosed that she does not hold anyone to a standard because she understands how hard being a working mom is, and she does not want to judge anyone. But she considers a good working mom anyone who is “basically just working and being a mom and handling your business and looking good while doing it.” Here she is asserting her confidence in her appearance. She also comments that she does not go to work for herself, she goes to work for her two children who depend on her. She still gets tired, but says there is no point
in moping about it. She is just tired while she is doing what she has to. She is committing a sacrifice for her children by doing this paid work in a self-less way. Each day she expects to be tired, but cannot complain because she is working for her children, but also there is no time to express a complaint.

Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) shared a personal story of her journey to becoming what she considers a good working mom. She feels good about getting up each morning and going to a “legit job”. She is not out in the streets selling her body to feed her children and herself. She defines herself as a good working mom because she is able to provide for herself and her family.

I feel good about getting up, going to a legit job, and I’m not out in the street selling myself, selling my body to feed my kids, feed myself. My define is being able to provide for me and my family because I understand the world now. Nobody’s gonna give you anything, the only thing they ever give you is advice and that I don’t need and don’t want so I’m proud.

She highlights the legitimacy of her restaurant work by comparing it favorably to sex work. Her mom and her friends attempt to persuade her to find a male partner that can help her with her children because they are not convinced that she can raise three boys on her own. However, she feels she is able to do this on her own, because she has been able to do it for this long—her oldest son is 17, and she has not had any support from the fathers. There are several stereotypes about black women in particular needing a man to help make their family complete. Hill Collins (2019: 87) says, “The inordinate attention paid to Black…parenting in scholarly research and the kinds of public policy initiatives that target Black girls illustrate the significance of government support for controlling images.” There are routine assumptions of sexual hedonism applied to Black women, and this perpetuates the idea that black women need a man, or outside help, in order to take care of their children. These stereotypes help with perpetuating inequality for African American women. They are expected to be the “mammies,” sexualized objects, jezebels, welfare
queens, and matriarchs. However, these stereotypes are controlling the stories being told about African American women, allowing other stories to not be told—stories like Ro’s. She does not want to depend on anyone else for money or support. She wants to work to be the sole provider for her three sons, and this goes against the odds that society creates for her.

Similar to Ro, Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) thinks a good working mom is someone who provides for her children so that they do not have to worry about being taken care of, where their next meal will come from, if they will have clothes, or if their lights will be kept on or turned off. She thinks these are not things that children should have to worry about. Children should be able to be young, and someone who steps up and takes responsibility and provides for her family the best she knows how is what she considers a good working mom.

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) defines a good working mom as someone who tries their best to budget their time, make schedules, and plan so that her time is fairly spent. This mom will do her best to make sure that her son has everything he needs, and that is her top priority. A good working mom, to Marie, is not necessarily a mom that puts her kids before her job, but at times that does seem to happen. She uses the example of if her son is sick while she is in the middle of a shift, she will leave work to go home and take care of him. But she also notes that she does have to go to work in order to provide for her son. While she is at work, she can miss out on important milestones in her son’s life, such as his first steps and his first words, but she misses these moments so that her son can have a good life. She has to keep that thought in the back of her mind, or else she fears the sadness and time missed will consume her. Similar to Marie, Brit (24, white Arkansas) thinks any mom who works and takes care of her kids is a good working mom. She shares that it is really hard to work at a restaurant when the managers do not consider her schedule so she works whatever hours they have available while she still has to come home and be a mom. So, to Brit,
being able to work and be a mom is the definition of a good working mom. Many of the mothers I interviewed seem to give a very minimal definition of “good.” In these instances, good means just doing the work. When considering the contexts and structures that they have to negotiate, this shows that mothers may feel that in order to be a “good” mother, they perform much emotional labor that may or may not have been discussed.

Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi) describes a good working mom as someone who can be at work all day, and then go to their second job, being a mom. Elizabeth has patience even though it is hard at times. She says when she gets off work she wants to lay on the sofa and not move because she’s been running on her feet all day across a restaurant floor, and often asks herself how is she able to play barbies with her daughter and finish out this day strong when she is so exhausted. But she says a good working mom will “just do it.” She would not question it because it is a part of being a mom, so she just does it. This is consistent with Hochschild’s (1989) discussion of the second shift—work at home done by women. Hochschild found that most women felt that the second shift is their responsibility, and Elizabeth is expressing here how hard it is to keep up with the second shift after working all day.

While most of these mothers discuss the mother’s role in her child’s life, Anna (37, white, Mississippi) focuses on the mother’s happiness. When asked how she would define a good working mom, she responds with:

Who is to say, man? I think the truest thing in terms of a good working mom is just someone that, it’s just about that mother being able to find joy in all the things that she has to do and being able to be present as much as possible. I think a good working mom is about that mother’s happiness.

For Anna, as long as the mother is present for her children and can find her own happiness, she is a good working mom.
STRUCTURAL BARRIERS TO WORK-FAMILY JUSTICE

Looking at the lack of benefits at work is important when considering work-family justice because if mothers do not have benefits at work, it makes their home life harder for various reasons including time away from home, medical bills/finances, and access to affordable healthcare for herself and her children. The benefits discussed here include sick leave, maternity leave, insurance, and retirement. Collins (2020) encourages workplaces to have more gender equal work-family policies so that all employees can find solutions to gender inequality at work and at home.

*Sick Leave*

One structural barrier discussed is the absence of knowledge about sick leave. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) shared that at her franchised pizza restaurant, she, as a server, does not receive any form of payment for time off, but she can request time off if she is sick or has to travel. This is the only part of being a server that she does not like. At her restaurant, she can get sick leave, but it has to be something serious with a doctor’s note. So, for example, if she had a cold for three days, she would simply have to miss work for three days. It would not be considered a sick leave; it would just be three days off. Yes, she can take time off, but on her dime. Marie (25, white, Arkansas) does not get paid sick leave, and she finds this to be expected in her small, family-owned restaurant. Elizabeth (43, white, Mississippi) discloses that at her southern-style New Orleans restaurant, they do not get paid an hourly wage, so if she is not working because she is sick, she is not receiving any money at all.

Aly (41, white, Arkansas) insinuated that if an employee were to get sick, the restaurant could suffer, and the employee would have to hope that someone can take their shift.

There’s only two of us that are full-time servers, and we do the entire restaurant that seats up to 160 people, so if you wake up and you’re just sick to the point where
you can’t work you have to hope that somebody, that third waitress can pick up your shift for you. But there’s been many times that I’ve gone in, I wasn’t there 100%, but I went in and did what I could, ya know to get through the main rush, then I would go home.

However, she says the restaurant would not fire anyone for becoming sick and missing work. If she were to miss work and it was serious enough to go to the emergency room or a doctor, she is asked to bring a doctor’s note to make sure that the restaurant is staying within the guidelines of her being able to work.

Lastly, Sarah (42, white, Arkansas) does not have sick leave or vacation at her American burger restaurant. She has worked at this restaurant for a year and a half and has learned that if someone is sick, they do not get paid, and they also do not get paid vacation time. She shared that she had to be put in the hospital once and received no pay for her time away.

Since servers are predominantly women, they are at a greater disadvantage to not receive this sick leave, or any leave. If these women could have paid sick leave, they would not be tempted (or encouraged) to work while sick, or be stressed about where the money will come from when she has to stay home from work. I am also curious if, when these women are home, are they actually able to rest, or do they have to also use this time to continue their unpaid work while the husband, partner, or other family members work to cover the bills while they are at home. This would perpetuate the woman doing gender by constantly performing carework for her children, even when she is supposed to be resting.

Maternity Leave

Another structural barrier that is discussed by the participants is the absence of maternity leave. Michelle (24, white, Mississippi) shared that at her fine dining restaurant, many of them, according to her, have “wobbled around” the restaurant pregnant. They do not get paid maternity
leave. Gean (28, white, Mississippi) does not think that any woman gets paid maternity leave these days as she does not receive it at her family-owned pizza restaurant. However, her boss is very understanding when it comes to family matters. If she were to need time off work, she would get it, but it would not be paid.

At Brit’s (24, white, Arkansas) franchised pizza restaurant, she thinks that they do not have a policy on maternity leave. However, according to the Family and Medical Leave Act, “You get up to 12 work weeks of leave — unpaid leave — in any 12-month period to care for a newborn; an adopted child or foster-care child; or a child, parent or spouse who is seriously ill” (2019). While she may not know that this policy is in place, it does apply to her. During the pregnancy of her first two children, she quit her job all together. For her third pregnancy, she left for eight weeks, but when she came back, she was not offered the same position she had as a manager, so she had to take a team position because that was all that they had available. As a team member, she performed the duties of both a server and a cook, sometimes at the same time. She said this was completely understandable and she accepted the position that she was offered. However, during each of these instances where she left the pizza restaurant, she had no compensation for that time.

While she was not offered the same position she had as a manager, and was offered a lesser paid position, according to the Family and Medical Leave Act, this is not standard, legal procedure. “When you return from leave, your employer must return you to your same job or a nearly identical one. Your employer also must cover your health insurance while on leave” (FMLA 2019). While the position she held was a manager position, but not a general manager or area manager position, I can only see a “nearly identical” job to be another manager position. Now, if she were a driver or server, I could potentially see her being placed as another team member position—server, driver, customer service representative, or in some stores a cook—but this was not the case. Here, we can
see that this franchised restaurant violated the Family and Medical Leave Act. If employees, as we see even managers, were better informed of their rights as an employee, this would not happen as often. While the FMLA does not guarantee a paid leave, employees must be given the same or a similar job and have continued health insurance coverage. If women could be better informed about their rights as a restaurant employee, it is possible that they would not have to worry as much about work-family balance. They would know that they are guaranteed the same position, and not have to worry about pay after the maternity leave is used. By providing routine education on employees’ rights, work-family justice could be more easily achieved in society, specifically the restaurant industry.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) has no maternity leave at her southern-style New Orleans restaurant. She could choose to not work for six weeks and have her job back after that time is up, but there is no funding or compensation for her during that time. Since she is currently pregnant, she feels very fortunate that she is a graduate student and instructor, and is eligible for paid maternity leave through her university because other mothers that she works with at the restaurant do not receive any funding. They simply took their six weeks off and came back when the time was up. The funding section of the Parental Leave Policy for Graduate Students for her particular university reads as follows:

In addition to being eligible for academic accommodation, those graduate students supported by fellowships, TAs, and/or research assistantships (RAs) will be excused from their regular TA or RA duties for a period of six weeks during which they will continue to receive financial support. Most graduate students who receive a Teaching Assistantship as part of the support package should be able to arrange the timing of teaching assignments to accommodate childbirth or adoption. During the six-week leave period, students supported by teaching assistantships may choose to continue in some limited capacity (e.g., grading, preparing course materials, or other non-intensive duties), but cannot be required to do so. With advance planning, most graduate students who receive Research Assistantships as part of the support package can adjust research activities to accommodate childbirth or adoption.
While many women have expressed that they have a kind or understanding boss, this does not provide them with pay or compensation. These employees are relying on the managers in positions of power to allow for pregnancy, or illness. However, “kindness” does not protect these women at work. If there could be a system put in place to allow for paid maternity leave and sick leave for all employees, even if it is only for one week every year, this could allow for a more equitable, stable work-family balance and justice.

Other Benefits

Some mothers discuss the lack of other benefits such as health insurance and retirement. Cate (39, white, Arkansas) is actually trying to leave the service industry because she now wants a job that has benefits such as insurance, retirement, and a 401k. What she dislikes most about restaurant work is that she does not have health insurance through work. Her job does not provide any group insurance so that makes it hard for her because she has to pay for a more expensive insurance through the marketplace. She also wishes she could have retirement from serving. Most servers work until they cannot work anymore, and then they do not have any retirement. Retirement is important now that she is close to 40, so she actually got a second job at a bank just so she can invest in something that has retirement. If she could change something about restaurant work, it would be to have retirement. She also said before COVID hit, the employees at her restaurant got paid vacation time after they have worked there for 2 years. They would get one week of paid vacation a year, but ever since COVID, that program is suspended. The employees can still take a week off for vacation, but it is not paid.

CONSEQUENCES FOR WOMEN’S LIVES
While these mothers navigate motherhood with their career, they discuss a range of personal struggles and consequences. In the section below, I will discuss four main issues that women highlighted: choosing between being a mom and having “a life”, not being fully present in their child’s life, having trouble with childcare, and paying the bills.

**Choosing Between Being a Mom and Having a Life**

Some mothers discuss conflicts that they experience that make them choose between being a mom and “having a life.” Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) discusses how hard it is to have a child and have a life.

‘Cause I mean when you’re looked at young and looked at as a mom, not as just somebody that works, or just a lady, I feel like women need to try to like separate. That’s what I try to do, that’s what my mom is helping me do. She doesn’t know that but her giving me that space, and I know it’s kinda bad to say it like that but just ‘cause you’re a mom doesn’t mean that that has to be your life so I feel like you’ll know as you go what to do more of.

She shares that if she has to work a night shift, it is very hard for her to be both a woman and a mom because before she goes to work, her daughter is at daycare, so she did not have a chance to bond with her that day. Also, as a woman, while she can do whatever she wants in the morning, most of the people that she would hang out with are already at work and would get off work by the time that she has to go into work.

Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) shares her personal path to being a server. She had just found out that she was accepted into the last round of the flight attendant selection process. They were offering to fly her to Atlanta, Georgia. But she found out she was pregnant about a week after she was hired at the restaurant, so she declined the offer to become a flight attendant. She kept working at the restaurant, and she decided to keep her baby. This is another example of doing gender, because she decided to have a child instead of continue her career.
Being Present in Her Child’s Life

Many moms discuss the importance of being present in their children’s lives, and how hard it can be when working in food service. Gean (28, white, Mississippi) shares her worry with me. “My biggest stress is that I’m gonna wake up, and he’s graduating high school, and I’ve missed so much of his life. Unfortunately, when you work in the food industry there is no 9-5 food industry job. So, that’s my biggest fear, and I’ve missed so much already.” Her son is only four, and she already feels the guilt of missing out on so much. However, she works so many hours because she has to pay the bills.

And you know you have to pay the bills, and it’s not like the ‘50s where the women sat at home and the men made the money. It’s not like that anymore. Now you have to have 2-3 income homes just to survive. Especially when you work a minimum wage job it has been statistically proven not just in Mississippi but in most states, actually in every state, that you cannot live off of minimum wage and in Mississippi you need 2 and a half incomes of minimum wage just to live in a home.

While Gean did not provide a source or how she knew this information, or why she thought it, the median household income for Mississippi is $45,081 (census.gov), which would not be easy to obtain with one tipped minimum wage job, such as what Gean has as a delivery driver.

Anna (37, white, Mississippi) shared her challenge of feeling like she is not as good of a graduate student as she could be because she is a mom, and vice versa. She feels split and pulled between her worlds of being a mother, being a graduate student, and being a server. She is “feeling like you’re never able to be fully intellectually, creatively, emotionally present to all of these different things that you’re doing.”

Marie (25, white, Arkansas) wants to remind mothers to not be so hard on themselves. “Don’t put yourself down, just because you’re working and not getting to see your kid as much. Because at the end of the day you know that you’re working to provide for your kid and to give
them the best life you possibly can.” Marie, like every mother interviewed, discusses this idea of providing for her children. Each mother discussed her importance of working so that she can provide for her family. This is where work and family collide. In order to live comfortably with children, these mothers must work, whether they have a husband, support from other family members, or are single and must take care of their children on their own. And they could not maintain a family without work. However, work—or specifically the time at work—can interfere with the time that a mother spends at home, whether it be doing housework, preparing meals, or spending time with her children. With this interaction between work and family, mothers are expected to split their time between home duties and work duties, but as Marie advises, these mothers should not put themselves down because they have no choice but perform emotional labor in the home and to compartmentalize their lives.

Childcare

Some mothers discuss the importance of having childcare, and how it is sometimes hard to obtain. Ro (40, African American, Mississippi) shared that when she first started working at the franchised pizza restaurant, she came to the realization that she had to get out of the house and help herself by stop depending on other people. But also, she tells me that her children are expensive. She wanted to get a job to make more money and find something to do while her sons are at school. She went eight years without working. Once she started working there, she ended up loving her job as a cook, and she has no plans to leave or change jobs. Working as a cook gives her the stability that she did not have before. She is able to make her own money and depend on herself to provide for her children. However, she has a personal struggle. “8 years ago was perfect. Like when I needed to work his father would be here but his father’s deceased now so that put a
big burden on me.” Since then, she has had two more children. She struggles with childcare. She says her oldest son’s grandmother on his father’s side used to help her some, but she is close to eighty years old. Now, her oldest son will not go see her anymore, but he sometimes calls her on the phone. She says that eight years ago were simpler times only having to work and worry about one child. If women, and all employees, could have easier access to affordable childcare, work-family justice could be more attainable.

Paying the Bills

Some mothers discuss how hard it can be to pay the bills to provide for their families. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) discusses at length what she must do to navigate motherhood with her career.

I just have no other option. There is nobody there to figure things out for me but me. I don’t have anybody to pick up my slack if I say I’m not doing this today or if I just say…nobody will go pick up my daughter, if it’s not her daddy and it’s not me, she’ll just be sitting there.

No one will be the mom except for her. She reminds herself of her responsibilities. This is what moms have to do, and as the children get older, she says it will get easier. She has to constantly remind and reassure herself of this. Being able to make money every day and walk home with it feels better than being paid biweekly to Michelle. She enjoys making enough money every day to be able to provide for her family. She explains this with an example. She says if her light bill is $200, and she makes $100 today, she knows that she needs to make at least $100 tomorrow to pay the light bill. So, she will attempt to pick up another shift, or she will explain to the other servers her situation and someone will likely offer up her shift. This is how she maneuvers around working and being a mom. She does not think she would be able to provide for her family the way she does without being a server because this is how she makes meals for her family and puts gas in her car.
This, again, is an example of the hard work and emotional labor that mothers perform because while they are working to pay bills, they are burdened by the need for more hours and more money to pay these bills.

INDIVIDUAL LEVEL STRATEGIES TO NAVIGATE WORK/FAMILY INJUSTICE

The women in this study are employing individual-level strategies that help them navigate barriers and injustice they experience as workers and mothers in foodwork. These strategies were apparent during the interviews as they discussed how they were coping with challenges and conflict of foodwork at work and at home and in the “advice” they gave for new moms. There were three strategies that these women employed. The first strategy women employed was to take the advice that someone may give them. The second strategy women employed was to use work as an outlet. The third strategy women employed was to be happy with their lives, such as finding her “Zen” place or make work their happiness.

Take the Advice Given

One piece of advice given to new, working moms is to take the advice that is given to them. Cece (25, African American, Mississippi) advises a working mom to take the help she can get. “Don’t bite the hand that feeds you.” She shares that she used to get an attitude with her mom, but she would feel bad about it because she is the one that is helping and supporting her. Sometimes her mom tries to give her advice on being a mom, and she feels like she does not have to listen because it is her baby. But then she realizes that her mom also had kids and might know what she is talking about. She would tell a new, working mom to take the advice that someone gives you.
Use Work as an Outlet

Another piece of advice the women in this sample mention is to use women’s time at work as an outlet from their stress at home. Michelle (26, African American, Mississippi) advises new working moms to not give up, and to use work as an outlet. “Don’t allow the stress from work to mix with the stress from home because I feel like that’d just make it a more stressful situation. Use work as that outlet.” She says by using work as an outlet, she can find something fun about work that helps her take her mind away from the stresses of being a mom. This use of work as an outlet refers to Hochschild’s (2005) “third shift.” She says that “constant busyness is the most potent ‘opiate of the masses’—a way of suppressing feelings and ideas that might challenge the status quo” (351). By using work as an outlet, they are able to use that time to reflect on themselves and have fun without being around her kids or family. Michelle can escape her responsibilities at home that are required to navigate her work-family demands. The status quo that Hochschild is speaking of, in this instance, is keeping her work and home life separate. By using work as an outlet, she is able to achieve this.

Find Happiness in Your Life

The last piece of advice discussed is to find an individual way to make each woman’s life happy. Aly’s (41, white, Arkansas) advice is to find your “Zen place”. She says to find at least thirty minutes a day, maybe at the end of the day, after you put your children to bed, or even when they are up and snuggling with you, she says a mom should find something in her day that brings her peace. It will give her a chance to remember what she is doing all of this for, and why she is working so hard—to provide for her family. She says that each mom needs to find what works for
herself and her family. She should not be so concerned about what the family next door is doing. This will only add to the pressure that is already put onto a mother by society.

Ro’s (40, African American, Mississippi) advice was simple—“Make it your happiness.” When she became a mom, she lost a lot of friends, but she eventually did not mind because she realized that those friends were not bringing her happiness. However, her kids bring her happiness. She recommends that new working moms make their life enjoyable because there are a lot of people who cannot have children, or do not want to have children, and there are people who give their children up for adoption. She says to make motherhood enjoyable, but make it like a job. If you can love your job, then you will love taking care of your kids.

CONCLUSION

This chapter on work-family justice highlights three main themes. The first is the cultural assumptions—the individual-level expectations about doing gender—about motherhood that women endure that make work-family justice difficult to achieve. The cultural assumptions address the pressure that women are facing. They perform care work by providing for their family. These women shared what it means to be a good, working mom and the advice that they would give to a new, working mom. The second theme that emerged is the structural barriers—the collective-level structures of work-family justice—that working moms face at work. This includes a lack of benefits at work such as paid sick leave, paid maternity leave, and retirement savings. If women could have access to paid leave, society would come closer to achieving work-family justice. The last theme is that there are certain strategies that women must employ as individuals to navigate barriers or injustices in their lives as a way of managing and coping.
In this chapter, we clearly see Collins (2020) work-family justice and Hochschild’s (2012) second shift. Women in this study discussed conflicts between their work and home lives. Collins (2020) reminds us that we should value the care received and the woman giving the care. Through a focus on actions, practices, and the policies regulating practices for employment could be the relation between work-family justice and the second shift. Women need a societal change, and I propose that this change comes from more benefits for all employees including paid maternity leave, paid sick leave with the existence of a doctor or hospital note, and health insurance available to all employees after a certain amount of time of employment, but less than a year. I also think that adding a retirement plan for all restaurant workers would possibly decrease job turnover rates, and employees would want to stay longer to ensure they receive their benefits.

While there are still several issues that must be addressed before we, as a society, can achieve work-family justice, we also see the problem of the second shift in this chapter. These mothers experienced this double burden whether they were married, single, or had support from other family members. In agreement with Hochschild (2012), these mothers have conflict in their work and home lives. These women feel responsible to do this “woman’s work” at home, but have additional stress because they often do not have enough time to participate in this women’s work because of all the time that they spend at work, which in turn causes them to spend more time away from their children than they would desire. While women and men go to work, the duties of the home must still be completed after work, mostly accomplished by women, and this causes strain on time that could be spent together as a family because someone must always be cooking, cleaning, or performing other housework. This is how the second shift connects to work-family justice—by contributing to the unequal division of labor within the home.
VII. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

For this final chapter, I will begin by restating my research questions and theoretical frameworks. Then, I will provide a summary of each chapter’s findings. Following this, I will discuss the implications of the study. This will highlight what this study tells us about the theoretical questions related to doing gender and work-family justice. Finally, I will discuss future research possibilities.

RESTATING RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

This thesis focuses on how women feed the family as both paid and unpaid work. I am interested in how women experience work in both settings—at work and at home. My research questions include: How do working mothers in low paid food service jobs talk about and manage foodwork at home and at work (and how has COVID-19 impacted foodwork in both places)? What do these experiences tell us about the gender dynamics of this work and the conditions under which work-family justice might be achieved in these women’s lives?

My main theoretical frameworks include: Doing Gender (West and Zimmerman 1987) and Work-family Justice (Collins 2020). Doing gender occurs when masculine and feminine expectations are expressed during interactions. When gender is accomplished, one’s actions become policed by society, holding them to a standard of masculine or feminine expression. Work-family justice politicizes mother’s stress and socializes the responsibility for solving work-family
conflict. Work-family justice could lead to a society where each individual can fully participate in both paid and unpaid work. With this, we can see doing gender as more than just individually, but also collectively, because by adding in work-family justice, the hope is that there can be policy change at work that leads to a solution for work-family conflict.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The pandemic has impacted women workers tremendously, and has caused an extra burden for the women of this study. In Chapter 3, I discuss how their work lives were compromised because of hours being cut, employee discounts changing or being taken away, and new difficulties with customers arising from the mask mandate and the CDC guidelines. Their home lives were changed because, despite the food shortage, my participants cooked and ate at home more. Some women expressed gratitude towards the extra time they receive due to COVID-19 because they were able to spend more time at home with their families. The main finding for this chapter is that during this crisis of COVID-19, doing gender seemed to be a response to this uncharted territory, which led to a greater division in the home, strengthening and reinforcing assumptions about gendered expectations.

Chapter 4 examines paid foodwork at work. This chapter explores the participants’ motivations for doing foodwork at work—including enjoying time at work, being able to work together, providing a service for others, and the fast-paced nature of the restaurant—a “like a family” system at work, and dislikes about working in food—such as the negative stigma around foodwork causing a class dynamic, issues with customers, being bullied at work, and tips and pay. The main finding of this chapter was that while some of these women described negative stigmas about their position, being devalued by customers, or being bullied at work, some did have positive
experiences such as making enough money to provide for their family or enjoying the fast-paced lifestyle of their work. Some see their co-workers as a family allowing them to ask for help, or give help, as needed.

Chapter 5 looks at the foodwork and experiences at home. The women I interviewed discussed their life experiences in cooking, foodwork, and other domestic responsibilities. I addressed the women’s cooking satisfaction and motivation for foodwork. Following this, I discussed what help these women say they received at home and how they view this time that they spent at home. In this chapter, we see that the responsibility for feeding and foodwork falls primarily on the mother, and some women feel lucky or blessed when they receive help from others. There is a social desirability for women to stay home and take care of their children.

Chapter 6 focuses on the work-family justice framework from Collins (2020). This chapter highlights three specific themes. The first is the cultural assumptions about motherhood that cause work-family justice to be difficult to achieve in society. The second theme involves the structural barriers that working moms face at work, such as lack of benefits. The third theme focuses on the individual level strategies that women employ to navigate barriers or injustice in their lives and the consequences of doing so. Here we see that if women were given benefits at work, then work-family justice would become more attainable.

IMPLICATIONS OF THIS STUDY

One implication of this study is the need for policy reform in the restaurant industry to achieve work/family justice at both the individual and collective level. I suggest that after working at the same restaurant or franchise for six months, each employee would be given at least seven days of paid sick leave that could be used for the next 365 days. After this year is complete, they
will be given another seven days of paid sick leave. The pay would consist of either the state’s minimum wage or their highest paid position. For example, in Mississippi, a server would receive $7.25. However, if she is a server and a manager, she would receive her manager pay for this time. This paid sick leave can only be affirmed with a doctor’s note or medical release form. In the instance that a family member is sick, a similar protocol would be put in place. With proof of relations and proof of sickness, the employee would be given an additional paid seven days a year for taking care of their children, parents, siblings, or any other immediate family.

For maternity leave, employees are already given 12 weeks of unpaid leave under the Family and Medical Leave Act. I propose that for six weeks of leave, each employee will receive pay for half-time (at least fifteen hours a week) of the state’s minimum wage, or highest earning position. For example, In Arkansas, a woman could take off up to 12 weeks for maternity leave under FMLA, receive six weeks of at least $11 (minimum wage) an hour for fifteen hours a week for the first six weeks, and the next 1-6 weeks would be unpaid. In Mississippi, a woman could take off up to 12 weeks for maternity leave, receive six weeks of at least $7.25 (minimum wage) an hour for fifteen hours a week for the first six weeks, followed by 1-6 weeks of unpaid leave. If one works as a server paid minimum wage, and a manager paid $12 an hour, she will be paid the higher amount of $12 for this six-week period.

For retirement, each employee should be given the option of submitting funds from their paycheck to a retirement fund upon being hired. This would be a dollar amount pulled from each paycheck over $50. This way, if the employee was unable to work many hours that week, they would not have to worry about the majority of their paycheck going to the retirement fund. If an employee quits or is terminated, they will receive their retirement funds in their final paycheck.
Lastly, for childcare, I propose that each employee could have the option to donate between one and ten dollars from each paycheck that would go into a “family fund” that can be used specifically for childcare for employees with children. The employer would donate a portion of funding as well. Some restaurants, such as Pizza Hut and Olive Garden, have similar systems where their employees can choose to donate money from their paycheck for an emergency care fund for employees. However, I do not know what percentage of employees actually donates to these funds. The money collected for the childcare fund I am proposing will be given to parent employees every two weeks, and they could give this funding to the childcare of their choice. This would at least lower the costs of childcare, but may not make it free. However, this would be a great start in making food service workers’ lives less stressful.

Each of these new propositions would apply to full-time and part-time employees. While these propositions may seem like the bare minimum, they would provide relief for many restaurant employees. This compensation could contribute to work-family justice in society, and more specifically in the restaurant industry. By allowing women and mothers to spend necessary time at home, and by alleviating the stress that these mothers must endure both at work and at home, society would come one step closer in achieving work-family justice. This would weaken the societal assumptions of doing gender, at least in the home, creating a more equitable overall wellbeing for working moms. This would also allow for not only women, but men as well to have the opportunity to stay at home if needed in order to take care of a child or family member, or themselves.
Doing Gender Implications

Gender is being done in foodwork at work and in foodwork at home. At work, women are performing invisible labor, as well as emotional labor while taking care of their customers by smiling or engaging in light conversation, which reinforces the narrative of femininity in restaurant work, specifically in serving. In the home, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic, these women spent more time at home due to hours being cut and restaurants temporarily closing. With this more time at home, these women were expected to prepare meals for their children who were also home because of schools implementing virtual learning. The moms I interviewed performed these tasks as a way of providing for and nurturing their children.

There was a benefit to exploring foodwork at work and at home as a way of better understanding gender. Structural factors help to reproduce a split between home and work because workers are expected to be focused on work—and not family—while on the clock. While there was not much explicit overlap between the discussions of experiences at work and at home, exploring foodwork in both settings shows how heteronormative, patriarchal, and oppressive society is toward women in the greater context of COVID-19. Although these women are participating in foodwork at work, there are still tasks that must be accomplished in the home, and there are societal expectations that women are to serve us at work and at home. Conducting this study in a pandemic helps us to understand the gender inequality in foodwork because the cultural norm of women cooking and preparing meals was reinforced by the hours cut from work and the increased time spent in the home.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY
This study is important work because it can shed light on mothers’ experiences in the home and at work, two categories of their lives that involve paid and unpaid foodwork. One unexpected difficulty from the time that I initially planned this study is the use of Zoom and the technical difficulties it has caused. I was hopeful for a vaccine, or even for the spread of COVID-19 to slow, but this did not occur, causing me to conduct all of my interviews via zoom. During my first interview, there was a lot of frustration from both sides because of a poor WiFi connection which caused me to repeat questions, and caused her to repeat answers. Also, during three of the interviews, there was a lag, causing their speech to slow and then rapidly speed up. These frustrations while interviewing also caused problems during transcribing as I had to replay sections multiple times to make sure I understood my participants correctly.

Another issue with Zoom is that I was unable to have a personal connection with a screen. As the interviews progressed and we got to know each other, things seemed to run more smoothly, but there still was not that connection you can have with someone when meeting them for the first time. There was no way to read each other’s body language or physically see a shift in moods. We just had to trust each other from the shoulders up. Archibald, Ambagtsheer, Casey and Lawless (2019: 4) found that while many of their participants preferred Zoom to other methods of social distance such as email or phone call, several commented that they would prefer to meet in-person if it were an option to be more “old school” and have face-to-face conversations.

Another limitation was that the sample was predominantly white. While three of my participants identify as African American, nine identify as white. Having more participants of color that could be a point of comparison for white participants could have given a more fruitful intersectional analysis for race, gender, and class. However, due to the snowball sample, it limited my exposure to a diverse sample. My small sample size is also a limitation. When I designed this
study, I did not realistically predict how few people I know in Mississippi, so in the beginning, I had a hard time finding women to participate in my study. I reached out to co-workers, members of my cohort, and members of my committee, and I had very little luck in finding participants. However, once I extended my location to Arkansas, and I made a Facebook post, I received more inquiries about participation, which is how I reached twelve participants. Potentially, if I would have extended the study to more positions, such as managers, I could have interviewed more mothers. Generalizations about restaurant work or food work at home cannot be made due to the small sample size.

Another limitation is that I only interviewed mothers. Interviewing other members of the household, such as the father, the grandmother, or the mother’s sister could have opened up a new avenue for analysis of work-family balance and justice. However, one cause for this limitation of the number of people and the scope of demographics is due to the lack of funding. While I did receive a grant of $2500 from the Summer Research Internship provided by the Graduate School, I had to use the grant for bills as well, so I was only able to compensate up to fifteen potential participants within this time frame.

The last limitation is my sample was unanimously heterosexual. Those who were married were married to men, and those who were in relationships were dating men. This again limits the scope of analysis possible because if there were other non-heterosexual relationships, then we could analyze how gender is undone or redone in the context of same-sex couple homes.

FUTURE RESEARCH POSSIBILITIES

I will describe three potential future research possibilities. While I am outlining only three, there could be other potential studies that could come from this research. However, the three
possibilities I want to highlight include a mixed-methods, longitudinal study; adding an emphasis on an intersectional perspective; and finally, adding symbolic boundaries as a theoretical perspective.

**Mixed Methods**

There are several methods that could add to this study and the discourse around working mothers. A potential future longitudinal study could consist of a mix between quantitative and qualitative methods. One could administer surveys asking about measurable variables such as pay, tips, raises, how often they may attend work meetings or are asked to speak with the manager. One could also survey approximate hours a week they spend at work, at home, at the store, etc. as well as perceptions of experiences at work and at home. Surveying about hours would provide an idea of if they are working full-time, part-time, or overtime to see how much they are working, and potentially how much time they are spending at home. These could be administered over a course of years to measure how these variables change overtime. While one limitation of this would be the uncertainty and high turnover rates of restaurant work, one could choose a select number of restaurants and administer these surveys to employees over time. While lower paid employees may change through the years, the management staff may remain constant.

The qualitative method could be oral histories to hear participants’ history in restaurant work, if they have received raises, promotions, extra training, cross training, location changes, etc. One could also ask about their history in restaurants before their current restaurant, or even other jobs that they may have held. In terms of their home life, one could ask about their history of being a restaurant worker before and after having kids and how this has affected their home lives, hours available to work, or need for certain accommodations after having children. Hearing their history
of how their home life has changed before and after having children could enhance the findings of this potential study to learn about how motherhood changes everyday moments in one’s life. This would extend the current study by providing more background information about their lives before restaurant work, and potentially their hopes for after restaurant work, to analyze how they plan to achieve their work (and family) goals.

Intersectional Analysis

While one limitation of this study is the small sample size, if this study could have had a broader range, such as thirty participants, and accounting for women of different races, there could have been more room for an intersectional analysis. For example, if the researcher sets the goal of having ten white participants, and twenty participants of color with a range of different races, this could provide a better intersectional analysis because the researcher could see how the different intersections of race could potentially interact with each other. One could also interview men/dads to compare the gendered perspective. While my study did have a range of ages, a future study could continue this, and even possibly include grandmothers or grandparents’ experiences if they are mentioned and play a prominent role in the mother’s life—such as grandmothers cooking all of the meals for the mother and the child. Also, analyzing different job categories—servers, cooks, managers, hosts—more equally could provide a greater analysis on foodwork and positionality within a restaurant. One last intersection of sexuality could analyze the positionality of an LGBTQ+ worker within the restaurant and how these interactions with other workers may occur.

Symbolic Boundaries
“Symbolic Boundaries are the lines that include and define some people, groups, and things while excluding others” (Epstein 1992: 232 cited in Lamont, Pendergrass, and Pachucki 2015: 850). These boundaries are expressed through taboos, attitudes and practices, and likes and dislikes. These expressions play an important role in how inequalities and exercises of power are created. With this, a study using symbolic boundaries as a theoretical framework could be fruitful when looking at mothers doing foodwork or restaurant work. Some symbolic boundaries that I considered from my study include class ranking, value, and family structures. The symbolic boundary of class ranking can be analyzed at the work and home setting. At work, in my study, there was definitely a class ranking between workers and managers, but especially between servers and customers. A further analysis, and a section of an interview guide dedicated to this dynamic would be a very interesting layer to a potential study. In the home, seeing rankings that may or may not be related to class between people in the home. For example, in heterosexual relationships, what rankings exist between husband and wife? Do these same rankings exist in non-heterosexual relationships? In households where the mother is living with the grandmother or other family members? In single parent households? While ranking can be a symbolic boundary, it also contributes to the idea of doing gender because women are expected to be submissive beings, whether in the presence of a man or not.

This leads to another symbolic boundary of value that can tie to work-family justice. Mothers’ work is valued because it provides care, nutrients, and nurturing environments. However, mothers are not valued as much as their work. If society could value mothers as much as the work that they do, then the work-family justice could be better achieved. Comparing restaurants, or workplaces, where mothers are given paid maternity leave, sick leave, and retirement to those where they are not could provide an interesting layer to a study around work-family justice and
symbolic boundaries and analyze how they can manage their work-family balance and overall wellbeing.

Lastly, the symbolic boundary of family structures within the workplace would be an interesting study. A few of my respondents discussed how their restaurant setting is “like a family.” While this may present a sense of comfort and pride, it can also establish dominant patriarchal, hierarchical dynamics in the restaurant similar to how the father is the “head” of the family. While none of my participants described it as this, an interesting future study could be to use the theoretical framework of symbolic boundaries to analyze how restaurant dynamics are “like a family” and if this may contribute to this hierarchical domination of women or not, and how motherhood may play a role here while being a mother at home and possibly a “mother” figure at work.

WRAP-UP

Conducting this thesis during the COVID-19 pandemic helped to see the struggles that working mothers go through at a time when their children are home more due to schools being closed or transitioned to virtual learning. While at work, these women were expected to perform in ways that pleased the customers by performing an emotional labor. They did this so that they could financially provide for their families. At home, these women were doing gender by accomplishing gendered tasks that were expected of them, such as cooking, cleaning, and grocery shopping. While some mothers had help from partners or family members, they all described these gendered tasks that they must accomplish in the home for their family.

Work-family justice can only be achieved if society as a whole can work towards more equitable policies at work that allow both women and men the ability to perform tasks in the home.
such as cooking, foodwork, and cleaning. These policies could include paid sick leave and maternity leave. This would allow for both an individual balance of work and family, but also a societal level of justice because it would contribute to a more equitable, holistic wellbeing. Another approach could be to think more specifically at the meso-level about social movements, non-profit organizations, and other collectivities that are working on these issues. One thing to consider when looking at this would be what successes or failures they have had in changing policies or structures, and where the movements or organizations might go next.

With this project, I hope to bring awareness of the stress and gendered experiences that working mothers endure at work and in the home. My hope is we can move away from encouraging women to find work-family balance, and we can better support them with work-family justice.
List of References

*Gender & Society* 4(2): 139-158.

Acker, Joan. 2006. “Inequality Regimes: Gender, Class, and Race in Organizations.”


Laurijssen, Ilse, and Ignace Glorieux. 2013. “Career Trajectories for Women After


in the US.” Electronic Gender & Society. Retrieved April 1, 2021
List of Appendices
APPENDIX A

Interview Questions

**Background/Demographic questions:**

How many children do you have living with you?

How old are they?

Do you have any other children not living at home?

Do you have a husband or partner that lives with you?

Do any other adults live with you?

If so, who?

How old are you?

How do you identify your race or ethnicity?

**Feeding People at Work:**

Tell me about the restaurant you work at.

What are the hours like there?

Tell me about when you started working at this restaurant. What was happening in your life at the time?

What does a typical work day look like for you in terms of workplace interactions?

The most rewarding things about the work interactions?

The most challenging part of these interactions?

Continued to next page.
Feeding People at work continued:

Is there anything that stands out to you as unusual or noteworthy that has happened at work in the last few weeks or months?

What is it like working to serve/cook food for people at work?

What do you like most about that kind of work?

What do you like least about it?

What is the company policy for bringing food home from work and eating at work?

How has COVID-19 affected your work?

Feeding People at Home:

What is your cooking routine or everyday reality?

How do you feel about cooking?

If you order takeout or delivery, how and when you make that choice?

What support do you have at home in terms of cooking, childcare, cleaning?

Who helps you?

How do food preferences matter in your home?

How do health issues come up in the way you think about the food you feed your family?

How has COVID-19 affected how you take care of, cook for, and feed your family?

Justice:

How do you navigate motherhood with your career?

How do you feel about the time that you spend at work?

Continued on next page
Justice Continued:

How do you feel about the time that you spend at home?

What kind of stress do you experience being a working mom?

Tell me about work-family policies that you know of at your workplace.

If you could change anything about foodwork at work to make your life better what would they be?

If you could change anything about foodwork at home to make your life better what would they be?

How would you define a good working mom?

What advise might you have for new working moms?
APPENDIX B

Consent Form

Serving Motherhood: Analyzing Balance and Justice of Foodwork in the Lives of Working Moms

You are invited to participate in a study designed to examine the day-to-day lives of working mothers in the food industry and their relationship to food and feeding at work and at home. The purpose is to investigate how women balance work involving food and feeding at work and at home. I am a graduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at the University of Mississippi. This study is being conducted as a part of my Master’s Thesis project. There are no known risks if you decide to participate in this research study. There is no cost to you for participation in this study. The information you provide will be used for a qualitative data analysis. The interview will be approximately an hour to an hour and a half long. The information collected may not benefit you directly, but the information learned in this study should provide more general benefits in relation to knowledge about women and work. You will be compensated a $15 gift card upon completion of the interview.

The interview will be audio recorded for transcription at a later date. During transcription, you will be assigned a pseudonym that will represent your identity to ensure that your responses remain confidential and your identity anonymous. Should the data be published, no individual information will be disclosed.

You must be 18 years or older and a mother who works as a server or cook at a dine-in restaurant who has at least one child under the age of 18 living with you. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You are free to decline to answer any particular questions you do not wish to answer.
for any reason and you can stop the interview at any time. Completion of this interview is implied consent to participate in the study. If you have any questions about the study, please contact Kaitlyn P. Hall.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Investigator</th>
<th>Faculty Sponsor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kaitlyn P. Hall</td>
<td>Kirsten Dellinger, Ph.D.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department of Sociology</td>
<td>Associate Dean for Diversity &amp; Inclusion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lamar Hall 542</td>
<td>Professor of Sociology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>615 Grove Loop</td>
<td>College of Liberal Arts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University of Mississippi</td>
<td>University of Mississippi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University, MS 38655</td>
<td>University, MS 38655</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(870) 692-4173</td>
<td>(662) 915-7178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><a href="mailto:khall2@go.olemiss.edu">khall2@go.olemiss.edu</a></td>
<td><a href="mailto:kdelling@olemiss.edu">kdelling@olemiss.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study, has been approved by the University of Mississippi Institutional Review Board.
## APPENDIX C

### Demographic Chart for Interview Participants 2020

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Number of Children</th>
<th>Age of Children living with them (years)</th>
<th>Relationship Status</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>State</th>
<th>Job Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Anna</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10, 12</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aly</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9, 12, 12, 17, 19, 20</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brit</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4, 3, 1</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Server, Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cate</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Server, Bartender</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cece</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Single; Lives with mom</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Server, Cook, Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elizabeth</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gean</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Single; Lives with mom</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Driver</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marie</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Husband</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michelle</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11, 1</td>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mo</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>10 months</td>
<td>Boyfriend</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Server, Busser</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ro</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7, 10, 17</td>
<td>Single; Lives with sister</td>
<td>African American</td>
<td>MS</td>
<td>Cook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sarah</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>White</td>
<td>AR</td>
<td>Server</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
VITA

Kaitlyn Paige Hall

Master’s Student
Department of Sociology and Anthropology
Gender Studies Certificate
University of Mississippi

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Women’s and Gender Studies, Labor, Workplace Inequalities, Gender Pay Gap, Motherhood Penalty, Restaurant Work, Systemic Racism, Intersectionality, Doing Gender, Feminist Studies, Sociology of the Body, Sexualization

EDUCATION

University of Mississippi, Oxford, MS
M.A. in Sociology, defended May 2021
Master’s Thesis Title: “Serving Motherhood: Analyzing the Balance and Justice of Foodwork in the Lives of Working Moms in the Restaurant Industry”

Committee: Dr. Kirsten Dellinger (Chair), Dr. John Sonnett, Dr. Kirk Johnson

Henderson State University, Arkadelphia, AR
BA, Summa Cum Laude, May 2019
Major: Sociology
Minor: Criminal Justice
Senior Thesis: “Perceptions of the Effects of a Female’s Attractiveness in the Workplace”

CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION

Student Paper Presentation
Qualifying Paper: “Existing Racial Variations in the Motherhood Penalty in Mississippi”
Presented at the Southern Rural Sociological Association Conference
Virtual Oxford, Mississippi February 2021
CONFERENCE PARTICIPATION (CONTINUED)

Qualifying Paper: “Orange is the New Everything: Does the Public Think That Rehabilitation Can Decrease Overcrowding?”
Presented at the Arkansas Undergraduate Research Conference
Arkadelphia, Arkansas       April 2019

Moderator
“Spirituality as Radical Imaginary”
Presented at the National Women’s Studies Association Conference
Atlanta, Georgia        November 2018

FELLOWSHIPS AND GRANTS

University of Mississippi
Recruiting Fellowship Program
   Excellence in Diversity     ($1000 per semester)     Fall 2019-Spring 2021

Summer Graduate Research Assistantship Program Grant ($2500) Summer 2020

Henderson State University
Robert E. McNair Post-baccalaureate Achievement Grant Spring 2017-2019
($2500)

ASSISTANTSHIPS AND SCHOLARSHIPS

University of Mississippi
Graduate Assistantship (Department of Sociology and Anthropology) Fall 2019-Spring 2021
Research Assistantship Fall 2019
I conducted a word search for roughly 5,400 specific climate-related terms (such as global warming, danger, or protection) using the search engine, Mojeek.com. This functioned as a content analysis for Dr. Sonnett’s study on how environmental issues are discussed by the media.

Teaching Assistant
Classes:
   Introduction to Sociology Fall 2019
   Race and Ethnicity Spring 2020
   Truth, Lies, and Power Spring 2020
   Research Methods Fall 2020
   Women and Genocide Fall 2020

Work assignments:
   Read and grade papers, tests, and homework assignments
Hold office hours
Class presentation and discussion
Correspond with students to assist with writing papers and homework assignments
Take attendance
Attend all class meetings
Read and take notes on assigned readings
Take class notes to distribute to absent students upon request

**Henderson State University**
Foundation Scholarships
- Gene Lawrence Scholarship
  Fall 2018-Spring 2019
- Pleasant and Millie Sturgis Scholarship
  Fall 2016-Spring 2017
- Olin Carr Chambers Scholarship
  Fall 2015
Red and Grey Leadership Scholarship
  2015-2019
Arkansas Academic Challenge
  2015-2019

**AWARDS**
**Henderson State University**
Outstanding Academic Achievement Award for Sociology
  2016-2018
Student Activities Board Student of the Month
  March 2019
Extraordinary Future Leader Award
  Spring 2019

**University of Mississippi**
Larry W. DeBord Award for Sociology
  Spring 2021

**MEMBERSHIPS**
**Henderson State University**
- Alpha Chi National College Honor Society
  Spring 2018-2019
  President
- Alpha Kappa Delta International Sociology Honor Society
  Fall 2017-Spring 2019
- Women’s History Organization
  Fall 2017-Spring 2019
- Alpha Mu Gamma National Foreign Language Honor Society
  Spring 2017-2019
  President and Communications Officer
- Gamma Beta Phi National Honor Society
  Fall 2015-Spring 2019