According to the gender-deviance neutralization hypothesis, men and women in household circumstances that contradict the normal expectations of gender display their gender accordingly, by either increasing or decreasing their contribution to household tasks. In this article, I review and reassess the large-scale quantitative evidence, concluding that considerable doubt has subsequently been cast on this hypothesis. For women, research shows that the original identification of gender-deviance neutralization behavior was questionable, as it failed to take into account women’s absolute levels of income. For men, both more recent quantitative and indicative qualitative research suggests that such behavior was always limited to a very small group. Subsequent changes in the contributions to housework of men from lower socioeconomic groups suggest that such display may no longer be evident.

In this article, I review and reassess the hypothesis of gender display in relation to housework, as originally discussed in a series of articles based on the analysis of large-scale survey data (Bittman, England, Folbre, Sayer, & Matheson, 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000). According to this hypothesis, heterosexual married men and women in household circumstances that contradict the normal expectations of gender display their gender accordingly, by either increasing or decreasing their contribution to household tasks.1 So, for example, a woman who earns more than her husband might compensate for this reversal of gender expectations by doing most of the housework. In this case, the effect of gender can be said to override that of the marital bargaining power that her higher income brings her, a bargaining power that can (according to household economic exchange theory and the economic dependency and relative resources perspectives) be used to negotiate a lesser contribution to housework. In other words, in such cases, the effect of gender overrides the power of money—a forceful argument against explanations based on economic exchange theory. According to the same logic, men’s gender display in relation to housework may be indicated in situations where the man of a couple cannot be classified as the main breadwinner of the family. In this situation of

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1The articles based on large-scale quantitative data that originally identified a gender display effect in the context of housework excluded same-sex couples from the analyses. Therefore, the interesting issue of gender display in same-sex households has not been addressed to date in this literature.
threat to his gender identity, he may display his gender by minimizing his contribution to housework (which is, of course, feminine defined).

Gender display in these situations therefore refers to the performance of specific behaviors (in this case, housework) designed to emphasize traditional masculinities and femininities. As such, it provides a sort of litmus test: If we can find less evidence over time for gender display in relation to housework or, indeed, evidence contradicting it, this would indicate a change not just in gendered time use but also in the gender ideologies supporting gendered time use.

The above-mentioned series of articles were highly influential in apparently showing that gender can override the power of money. In this article, through a review of the large-scale quantitative research supported with indicative findings from the qualitative literature, I argue that there is now enough evidence to indicate that the original identification of gender display in relation to housework among women may have been the result of a misinterpretation of data. Among men, more recent large-scale quantitative research points to the fact that such behavior was always limited to a very small group. Subsequent changes in the contributions to housework of men from lower socioeconomic groups suggest that such display may no longer be evident. Again, qualitative studies aid in understanding the processes involved.2

**DEVELOPMENT OF THE GENDER DISPLAY PERSPECTIVE IN RELATION TO HOUSEWORK**

The concept of gender display was introduced into the quantitative literature on the domestic division of labor by Brines (1994). It forms part of the theoretical framework of “doing” gender (Berk, 1985; West & Zimmerman, 1987), in which gender is regarded as actively accomplished and negotiated in interaction. Interaction with a partner in a heterosexual relationship can be considered among the most significant locations for this enactment of gender, and the routine performance of housework is regarded as a key indicator of such enactments (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In this sense, doing the housework may be regarded, in the words of Butler (2006), as a performative act. In the early quantitative literature, the identification of gendered behaviors around the performance of routine housework that seemed to be compensating for deviations from the expected gender structure resonated with the ideas of emphasized femininity and emphasized masculinity in the doing gender literature.

Qualitative research conducted in Britain and the United States during the 1980s had already begun to document behaviors among men that would later be identified as gender display. The British studies were conducted among groups of working-class couples, with a specific focus on communities in which the dramatic decline of traditional sources of employment for men (e.g., coal mining, steel working) meant that large numbers of men had lost their jobs, along with their normative role of family breadwinner (Morris, 1985, 1987; Wheelock, 1990). Morris’s conclusions indicated that male redundancy did not, in general, lead to any renegotiation of the domestic division of labor. Any renegotiation that did take place was conducted in the strong shadow of traditional normative expectations of gender. Crucial to the (re)negotiation of gender roles in these situations, the choice for women was to remain at home with no employment or, where full-time employment was available, to become the sole provider of income to the family.3 Morris (1987) found that women in the first situation were likely to withdraw into the domestic role, notably motherhood, as “providing the most secure basis for identity” (p. 202). Men in this situation, having been deprived through unemployment both of their identity in the public sphere and of their normative position in the domestic sphere, emphasized their normative role at home by not contributing much to the household chores. Although younger men tended to participate in particular domestic tasks on a regular basis, this was not the case among families with children, in which a strong emphasis on a traditional model of motherhood encouraged the husband to withdraw from the domestic sphere, even when their wives were employed outside the home.

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2The review of literature is based on electronic searches for gender display and gender deviance neutralization in both EBSCO and Sociological Abstracts. Tables listing the large-scale quantitative studies are found in Gupta (2007) and Gupta and Ash (2008).

3Because of the intricacies of the tax laws, while drawing unemployment benefits it was not financially worthwhile for a woman in this situation to take on part-time work.
At around the same time, Hochschild and Machung (1989) reported similar findings from their qualitative study of 50 dual-earner couples in the United States. They found differences in the sharing of housework between couples in which the husbands earned less than their wives, none of whom shared the housework, and those in which the husbands earned the same as or more than their wives, among whom between one fifth to one third shared housework. Their interpretation from intensive interviews was founded on the threat to male identity from financial dependence in situations where the husband earned less than his wife, and the corresponding reluctance to threaten it further by taking on feminine-associated housework.

Following these earlier qualitative studies, it was Brines’s influential 1994 article and a follow-up by Greenstein (2000) that firmly established the gender-display thesis in the literature on the domestic division of labor. These studies, based on large-scale national data from the United States, provided support for the idea that men and women in situations that deviated from the traditional norms of gender react by emphasizing their normative identities (a) by contributing less to housework (in the case of men who are economically dependent) or (b) through the overaccomplishment of housework (in the case of breadwinner wives). Brines (1994) analyzed Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID) data from 1985 to show that, although the housework hours of wives largely conformed to the assumptions of conventional household economic exchange theory (the more economically dependent, the more housework the wife performed), husbands who were economically dependent (in particular those in low-income households and the long-term jobless) performed less housework than others. Brines (1994) noted: “It appears, then, that lower-income husbands do less housework because they are more likely to depend on their wives for economic support and respond by avoiding housework to reclaim their constitutive masculinity” (p. 667).

The significance of Brines’s (1994) article was that it provided for the first time an indication from large-scale data that, for men in specific structural situations, the importance of doing gender, of emphasizing their normative masculinity, overrides the predictions of economic dependency theory, which would forecast that those with less income contribute to the household economy by doing more housework. It seemed to demonstrate the importance of gender as a mediator of economic dependency theory, and it provided one possible answer to the question of why it appeared that men were failing to take up the slack in the routine performance of housework in a period when women were increasingly entering the primary labor force.

Brines (1994) did not find any statistically significant support in her results for the existence of equivalent gender display behavior by breadwinner wives. The relationship between income and housework hours for women was negative and linear. However, she indicated that there was a modicum of evidence to suggest that there might be some effect, which did not reach statistical significance in analysis. This idea was taken up and developed further by Greenstein (2000), from whom the idea of complementary male and female gender display effects in the performance of housework became established in the literature. Using large-scale nationally representative National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH) data from 1987–1988, Greenstein modeled the relative proportion of total housework contributed by men and women in partnerships instead of the absolute housework hours as his dependent variable, to capture the distributional aspects of the division of housework. He also added a control for the gender ideology of partners. His main conclusion is that both economically dependent men and breadwinner wives tended to neutralize the gender deviance in their economic performance by undertaking less and more housework, respectively. That is, Greenstein (2000) reported a curvilinear relationship between housework participation and economic dependence for both men and women, whereas Brines (1994) had only shown this effect for men.

Because Brines’s (1994) most striking findings related to low-income and long-term jobless men, and because the findings of the British qualitative studies of the 1980s were conducted among traditional working-class communities, Greenstein (2000) had expected to find an association with a gender ideology variable. In fact, he detected no differences between those with traditional and nontraditional gender ideologies. Irrespective of their gender ideology, men and

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4In this literature, the term housework includes routine and nonroutine housework but not child care.
women performed a lesser or greater proportion of housework according to extent to which they fulfilled normatively defined gender expectations—breadwinner wives performed a greater proportion of housework than other wives, and dependent husbands performed a smaller proportion than other husbands. Greenstein therefore chose to refer to his findings as gender-deviance neutralization (Atkinson & Boles, 1984) rather than the more general gender display. In a study of couples organized around the career of the women, Atkinson and Boles (1984) documented behaviors for both partners that they defined (following Goffman) as covering or concealing to neutralize as much as possible the stigma attached to their deviant structural positions. From this point on, the two terms gender display and gender-deviance neutralization have been used more or less interchangeably in the literature on the domestic division of housework to describe the same behaviors. I use gender-deviance neutralization here, even when referring to results originally presented as a gender display effect, as its meaning in the context of the division of housework is more specific. Indeed, gender-deviance neutralization can be regarded as an instance of gender display, and the case of housework as an instance of gender-deviance neutralization.

Further support for a gender-deviance neutralization effect among breadwinner women appeared in Bittman et al. (2003). In an analysis of large-scale quantitative time-use data from the Australian 1992 Time Use Survey, and including information on hours spent in paid employment per week for both spouses to take into account the wider question of time availability (see Presser, 1994), Bittman et al. (2003) found curvilinear relationships between relative earnings and housework hours in the case of married women but not in the case of married men. In other words, only among couples with breadwinner wives was the effect of gender-deviance neutralization evident. They concluded that gender trumps money in Australia in cases where the wife earned more than half the total income of both partners. An additional article providing support for a gender-deviance-neutralization effect comes from Evertsson and Nermo (2004), who compared Swedish and U.S. couples between 1973 and 2000 using PSID and the Swedish Level of Living Survey data. As had Bittman et al. (2003), Evertsson and Nermo (2004) found persistent evidence of doing gender among U.S. married women, though not among Swedish women, where results supported a relative resources (economic dependency) hypothesis, or among men, where results were inconclusive (see below). They suggested that women in the United States depended on their husbands to a greater extent than did Swedish women, which led to a stronger gender-deviance-neutralization effect.

The analyses described thus far suggest quite strong empirical support in large-scale quantitative data for a gender-deviance-neutralization effect in the performance of housework for both men and women. This effect is still frequently referred to in both academic and other media as a winning argument for the significance of gender as measured against more conventional material indicators of power, such as money (see, e.g., Tichenor, 2005).

GENDER DEVIANCE NEUTRALIZATION: A REASSESSMENT OF THE EVIDENCE

Although gender-deviance-neutralization behavior in the division of housework has been widely referred to in the literature on families and households, doubt has subsequently been cast on certain aspects of the original identification of the phenomenon, both in quantitative and in qualitative research. Recent reassessments of the original articles based on large-scale quantitative analysis do not succeed in showing a gender-deviance-neutralization effect. For example, Kan’s (2008a) analysis of pooled British Household Panel Data over the period 1993–2003 found no conclusive evidence that either highly economically dependent men or highly economically independent women do gender by resorting to a traditional-normative division of domestic labor. Kan (2008a) directly compared the effect of a relative income measure with a measure of gender attitudes on the absolute number of hours contributed to housework and found substantive support for a negative, linear effect of relative income on housework hours. Both men’s and women’s housework hours decrease significantly as their relative income increases (net of gender attitudes). There was more limited support, also, for an effect of gender attitudes among women once relative income was controlled for; women with more traditional attitudes did more housework. However, there was no evidence for a gender-deviance-neutralization effect, whereby women with high relative incomes or
men with low relative incomes compensate for their deviant normative situation through the over- or underperformance of housework.

In a series of articles, Gupta (2006, 2007; Gupta & Ash, 2008) has recently reassessed the whole basis of the economic dependency and gender-deviance-neutralization perspectives, arguing that it is crucial to take into account women’s autonomous agency and that previous findings in relation to housework can be explained more simply in terms of women’s absolute rather than relative earnings (which he terms the *autonomy hypothesis*). Focusing on an empirical test of the economic dependence, gender-display, and autonomy hypotheses based on NSFH data from 1992 to 1994, Gupta has questioned the validity of both the dependence and the gender-deviance-neutralization theses by demonstrating that women’s relative earnings contribute little to the explanation of housework hours when the analytic model also includes their absolute hours. He concluded that the finding that women who earn more than their husbands compensate by performing more housework is a statistical artifact and results from the relationship between women’s absolute and relative earnings. Women at the high end of the relative earnings distribution are in fact generally poorer, in terms of their own earnings, than are women in the equality range. This is because pay scales for blue-collar jobs are narrower than for white-collar jobs, so that when the wives of blue-collar men get paid jobs, the ratio of their income to their husbands’ is often better than the wife-to-husband pay ratio among wealthier families (see Blumberg & Coleman, 1989). Therefore, the argument that women with high earnings (the usual misinterpretation of the term *breadwinner wife*) deliberately do more housework is a statistical artifact and results from the relationship between women’s absolute and relative earnings. Women at the high end of the relative earnings distribution are in fact generally poorer, in terms of their own earnings, than are women in the equality range. This is because pay scales for blue-collar jobs are narrower than for white-collar jobs, so that when the wives of blue-collar men get paid jobs, the ratio of their income to their husbands’ is often better than the wife-to-husband pay ratio among wealthier families (see Blumberg & Coleman, 1989).

In summary, if we accept the argument that earlier findings suggesting the existence of a gender-deviance-neutralization effect among women were due to a confusion between women’s relative and absolute earnings, and combine this with both the quantitative (Gupta, 2008) and qualitative (Crompton & Lyonette, 2009) evidence that women with higher earning power do less housework than those with lower earning power (perhaps partly because they are buying domestic services from others), we have quite a powerful argument for rejecting the gender-deviance-neutralization model for high-earning women.

This still leaves outstanding the question of whether men (or some men) do gender deviance neutralization. The earliest qualitative papers and subsequent quantitative studies based on analyses using data primarily from the 1970s and 1980s (Akerlof & Kranton, 2000; Bittman et al., 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000; Morris, 1985, 1987; Wheelock, 1990) suggested...
that working-class men or men with the lowest levels of economic resources display their gender by reasserting their traditional masculine gender identity through the underperformance of housework. However, large-scale quantitative research based on more recent data (from the 1990s and 2000s) has failed to show this association (Kan, 2008b). In addition, Evertsson and Nermo’s (2004) conclusion that the evidence from the United States for men’s gender-deviance-neutralization behavior in relation to housework is inconclusive was based on analyses of PSID data from the period 1973–1999. They found evidence for men’s gender display for the 1973 data but not for the 1999 data. This synopsis raises two questions on the standing of the issue of men’s gender-deviance neutralization: First, what are (or were) the characteristics of the men who were originally identified as displaying gender through nonperformance of housework? Second, could men’s gender-deviance neutralization be a thing of the past?

The answer to the first question appears to come both from a consideration of the earliest qualitative articles and from some recent reassessments of Brines’s (1994) and Greenstein’s (2000) analyses based on large-scale data. The earliest qualitative research that identified gender-deviance neutralization among men was conducted among British traditional working-class communities, focusing particularly on those households in which men had been made redundant or occupied marginal labor market positions—in other words, among groups likely to have the lowest incomes and the most traditional gender attitudes. This identification is supported by Gupta’s (1999) reassessment of Brines’s (1994) original analysis of 1984 PSID data in which he refers to the extreme tail of the distribution of male respondents. He shows that once this tail—the small proportion of long-term jobless men—is removed from the analysis, the relationship between income and housework hours becomes linear and negative, in conformity with economic dependency theory. The idea that this extreme tail was responsible for the identification of the male gender-deviance-neutralization effect is also supported in the work of Bittman et al. (2003), who found that when they deleted the 2–3% of cases in which men contribute no earnings to the household from the 1987–1988 NSFH data, the male gender-deviance-neutralization effect disappeared. They conclude that “the U.S. phenomenon of men’s responding to economic dependence on women by decreasing housework is real but that it comes only from the extreme tail of the men’s earnings distribution” (p. 207).

These recent reassessments of earlier analyses both conclude that the effect found for men in the initial quantitative research was real but confined to a small and specific group of men. However, an alternative explanation, which adds another element of doubt, can be found in the literature on reporting differences in questionnaire-based and time-use-diary survey instruments. These reporting differences could explain why, for example, neither Kan’s (2008a) analysis of British time-use data nor Bittman et al.’s (2003) analysis of Australian time-use data identified any gender-deviance-neutralization effect for men. This literature is generally treated as technical in content, so its implications for assessments of the gender-deviance-neutralization thesis have not been widely recognized. It is paralleled by some indicative findings from the qualitative literature on husband’s performance of housework.

In a comparison of time-use-diary data with questionnaire responses from the same respondents to a nationally representative British survey (Home On-Line, 1999–2001), Kan (2008b) found systematic differences between the two types of responses, which varied by gender. In general, women were more accurate in their reporting of housework hours. In other words, there was greater correspondence between women’s time-use-diary reports and their questionnaire reports than in the case of men, who in general overestimated their housework contributions in questionnaire reports by comparison with their diary reports. It is known that time-use-diary reports of time spent in particular activities are more reliable than retrospective recall questions asked in questionnaires (Bianchi, Robinson, & Milkie, 2006). This is so because time-use diaries are in general both more immediate than responses to such questions (suffering less from the problem of recall bias), and more important, they are less subject to normative response errors (in other words, the perceived pressure to respond to a question in a socially approved way). Tellingly for the current discussion, though, while men with traditional gender attitudes reported more housework time in the questionnaire than in the time-use diary than was the general case for men, those men with traditional gender attitudes who contributed a relatively high number of hours to housework
reported fewer hours in the questionnaire than they recorded in the time-use diary. The finding that men with traditional gender attitudes who also make a relatively large contribution to housework in particular tend to underreport their hours of housework therefore calls into question research based on questionnaire responses (e.g., PSID, NSFH) that suggested that men with the lowest relative incomes do less housework in a process of gender-deviance neutralization. It could simply be that they underreport their time spent in housework, and though such underreporting could also be viewed as a form of gender-deviance neutralization, it is of a quite different type than the literature suggests.

Because men, in general, tend to overreport their housework, it is an interesting question why a particular group of men (those with traditional gender attitudes who also do a lot of housework) should be underreporting, thereby perhaps contributing to a spurious finding of a male gender-deviance-neutralization effect in the actual performance of housework. There are hints of this phenomenon in the qualitative literature on the relationship between gender, family work, and gender attitudes among sharing couples. For instance, various suggestive indications about the underreporting of men’s contributions among working-class couples appear in Deutsch’s (1999) work on equally sharing couples, based on interviews conducted with 150 dual-earning couples. As an example, one working-class couple (Paul and Mary) appeared embarrassed by their equality, especially Mary, who reported that she doesn’t always tell people what her husband does at home. They are portrayed in contrast to Janet and Daniel, college professors, who are proud of their degree of equality and eager to report it. Deutsch confirmed (by personal correspondence) that, in the initial telephone screening questions she used to determine equality of sharing, men from blue-collar couples tended to report less housework than they actually contributed according to the subsequent depth interviews with them and their wives. In other words, their responses to the initial, more superficial questions conform more to traditional gender expectations than does their subsequent discourse in the intensive interviews. The implication is that the reporting issue, too, may represent a form of gender display. What could be happening is that particular groups of working-class men are only reporting fewer hours of housework, which also suggests a kind of gender-deviance-neutralization response but of a different kind than the literature has suggested to date.

**AN END TO GENDER DEVIANCE NEUTRALIZATION THROUGH HOUSEWORK?**

The second question that I raised above in connection to men’s gender-deviance neutralization through housework was, has there been any change over time? The coincidence of the findings of the earliest quantitative studies and the early qualitative findings identifying men’s gender-deviance neutralization through housework among low-income, working-class households in the 1970s and 1980s suggest that some real phenomenon was recognized. If we accept that this is so but that it does not appear in later data (see, e.g., Evertsson & Nermo, 2004), what additional evidence is there that might support the idea of change among this particular group of men? Here again, a mix of sources can contribute to our understanding. I present a range of indicative evidence, dating from the 1980s to the first decade of the 21st century, which suggests that there was always at least some degree of flexibility in men’s performance of family work according to employment and sociodemographic characteristics of the couple, even (or indeed, perhaps, especially) among those with traditional gender ideologies and low-income occupations.

Few studies have attempted large-scale longitudinal analyses of what happens to the domestic division of labor in couples in which the woman enters paid employment. The most comprehensive study used data from three longitudinal national household panel surveys—the British Household Panel Survey, the German Socioeconomic Panel, and the U.S. Panel Study of Income Dynamics (Gershuny, Bittman, & Brice, 2005) to show direct longitudinal evidence of change in the balance of domestic labor in couples during the 1980s and 1990s. Women entering full-time paid work made immediate large downward adjustments in their domestic work time, but men also made changes—their contribution to domestic work increased successively in the years following their partner’s entry into full-time employment (a process that Gershuny et al., 2005, referred to as lagged adaptation). Similar results appear in the work of Cunningham (2007), who analyzed a 30-year panel data sample of parents and children in
Detroit from the 1960s to the 1990s, showing that women’s previous employment history had significant positive effects on husbands’ contributions to routine housework, an effect mediated by wives’ attitudes to gender egalitarianism.

These findings demonstrating flexibility in male partners’ responses to the woman’s employment status, however, still leave open the question of whether there has been large-scale change observed among men belonging to those socioeconomic groups with low-income employment (commonly associated with the most traditional gender ideologies). In fact, there is some strong evidence for this. Data from the United States suggest that, whereas managerial and professional couples were the most likely to share family work in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s and 2000s, the most change (and sometimes the most sharing) had occurred in couples in blue- and pink-collar professions (Coltrane, 2000, 2004). In an analysis of dual-earner households using British and U.S. time-use data from the 1970s to the turn of the 21st century (Sullivan, 2006, forthcoming) demonstrated some similar results. Over the period, men in dual-earner couples with the lowest levels of educational attainment from both Britain and the United States had increased the time they spent on housework to a far greater extent than equivalent men with higher levels of educational attainment. Starting from a lower base in the 1970s, by the year 2000–2001, men in dual-earner couples who did not complete secondary education had assumed as much responsibility for household tasks as men who had some higher education. So whereas in the earlier periods there was a clear gradient in such men’s housework time according to educational attainment (with those attaining higher levels of education contributing more time), by the later surveys, this gradient had disappeared. For example, in the United States, although the most highly educated group (college educated) increased the time they spent in housework by 33% over the period 1965–2003, those who graduated from high school increased theirs by 52%, and those with the lowest level of educational attainment (0–11th grade only) doubled theirs with a 100% increase in contributions. So over the 25-year period between the surveys, men in dual-earner couples with the lowest levels of educational attainment had at least caught up with the contributions of men with higher levels. With respect to country differences, the percentage increases over the period 1975–2000 for the groups with lower levels of educational attainment (incomplete secondary and secondary) from Britain were greater than those over the period 1975–2003 in the United States, from a lower base in 1975. However, by 2000, British men’s contributions equaled or even exceeded those of American men in 2003. For both countries, then, these findings demonstrate a clear catch-up effect, whereby men in dual-earner couples with lower levels of educational attainment, from a lower starting point 25–35 years ago, equaled or even exceeded the contributions to domestic work of the most highly educated group of men by the start of the 21st century.

In support of these recent quantitative findings, there are several indicative suggestions from the qualitative literature to suggest that some men in traditional working-class occupations were in fact helping out around the home even in the 1980s and 1990s. Several authors at that time pointed out that working-class men, the least likely to endorse gender equality, frequently engaged in behavior that was more egalitarian than the traditional gender ideologies they espoused (Deutsch, 1999; Hochschild, 1989; Pyke, 1996). I examine this first in the early qualitative studies referred to above, based on research conducted in the 1980s. Morris (1987), for example, found that among her sample of couples from the old industrial northeastern England, the young and childless where both partners were employed full-time or where the male partner was unemployed had a remarkably more flexible domestic division of labor: “Although the traditional ideas about male and female responsibility remain, there is also a fairly high level of male participation in household tasks, notably washing dishes, cooking and cleaning through the house on a fairly regular basis” (p. 203).

In such cases, the notion of justice is often used to explain male participation in domestic tasks. For most cases in Wheelock’s (1990) study of low-income couples from in the Northeast, she, too, concluded that traditional values on gender roles presented no barriers to the negotiation and adjustment of the division of labor where practical circumstances suggested it. Flexibility in the face of practical circumstances and the appeal to notions of fairness (Thompson, 1991) are also themes that run through a body of research on the division of household tasks among couples working unsocial shift hours.
An End to Gender Display Through Housework?

who are more likely to be working class than middle class). In a comprehensive review of the findings of research on the domestic division of labor, Coltrane (2000) argued that wives’ and husbands’ employment schedules are perhaps the most consistent and important predictors of domestic sharing that researchers had documented to date. In an analysis of 1980s NSFH data, Presser (1994), for example, found that spouses’ employment schedules were among the most important factors influencing husbands’ performance of tasks traditionally done by women. The more hours husbands were not doing paid work during times when their wives were, the more likely they were to do feminine-associated housework, thereby breaking traditional gender expectations.

Although the central quantitative literature and the discussion so far has addressed the performance of housework without reference to contributions to child care, further background on motivations and justifications may perhaps be gleaned from some qualitative reports on differences in child care between working-class and middle-class families. For example, Deutsch and Saxon (1998) were interested in a group of U.S. dual-earner couples defying traditional gender stereotypes while maintaining traditional gender ideologies. In an article titled “Traditional Ideologies, Non-Traditional Lives,” they interviewed couples employed on alternating shifts who had dependent children and who were therefore, by necessity, alternating child care. The outcome of this employment pattern was that fathers spent more time with their children than did other fathers and frequently performed the feminine-defined tasks associated with the physical care of children. They point out that the occupations relying heavily on shift work are traditional working-class occupations and that the expressed stances of the fathers of their sample were generally conservative in relation to gender. However, in intensive interviews, it became clear that one of the primary motivations for these couples was the idea of fairness (see Thompson, 1991).

A decade later, Gerstel, Clawson, and Huyser (2007) compared physicians (high-earning professionals) and emergency medical technicians (EMTs, low-income employment frequently involving shift work). They found that the doctors do what they call public fatherhood but don’t put in the time. They were much more likely to emphasize their involvement in the special events in their children’s lives (sports and performances) over the tasks of daily care. However, for the working-class EMT fathers, there was a very different pattern and motivation. They put the emphasis on private fathering, talking about their involvement in the daily routines of their children’s lives—the conventionally feminized tasks of picking them up from day care or school, feeding them dinner, or staying at home with them when they got sick. Many reported that they were happy with their often-antisocial working schedules because it allowed them to participate fully in child care and to spend a long time at home with their children. Gerstel et al. (2007) wrote, “These working class men exhibit a model of masculinity—based both at home and on the job—that provides valued involvement in their children’s daily lives” (p. 25).

They locate their findings in an existing body of literature that points to a disjuncture between traditional masculine gender attitudes emphasizing a breadwinner or provider role and the actual practice of fatherhood among working-class men (e.g., Pyke, 1996; Williams, 2000). This is contrasted with studies conducted among highly educated professional men, which suggest that, though they espouse egalitarian ideals, in practice, they often do not live up to those ideals given constraints of employment that emphasize a culture of long hours and put a status premium on busyness (Coltrane, 2004; Pyke, 1996; Williams, 2000). Although these studies relate to fatherhood (rather than to housework), it is clear that there is a basis for generalization in terms of the notions of fairness and practicality in the division of labor expressed by the interviewees in the face of particular employment conditions. For example, Deutsch and Saxon (1998) wrote, ‘‘They adopt the non-traditional roles they do not because they question the gendered basis of those roles, but because with women’s entry into the paid labor force, the exchange underlying those roles has been undermined’’ (p. 346).

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The idea of gender-deviance neutralization in relation to housework has been so highly influential because it lent support to developing feminist theories concerning the relationships among gender, relative income, and domestic labor. In the case of men’s gender-deviance
neutralization, it contributed to the explanation of why men had not increased their housework commensurately as women moved into paid employment; in the case of women’s gender-deviance neutralization, it provided strong support for the idea that gender could have a more powerful influence on domestic relations than relative income (gender trumps money), thus casting doubt on conventional quasi-economic explanations that tended to ignore gender.

In this article, I have reviewed and reassessed the quantitative studies that firmly established the idea of gender-deviance neutralization in the area of housework through to more recent research that has raised substantial questions about it. I have traced the origins of the idea of men’s gender-deviance neutralization in some early qualitative research from the 1980s and 1990s in both the United States and Britain, and I have deployed indicative findings from the qualitative literature to explore some of the possible motivations of those professional women and working-class men whose performance of housework is notably different from that which the gender-deviance-neutralization hypothesis suggests.

I conclude that considerable doubt is cast on the gender-deviance-neutralization thesis in the sense that it is commonly understood, in relation to both women and men. For women, the common interpretation is that a group of high-earning women married to men earning less than them deliberately do gender by contributing more to housework than those with more equal relative incomes in a kind of compensation for their deviant, more masculine, structural situation. Subsequent large-scale research has shown that the original identification of this effect was the outcome of a misspecification in analysis. In the case of men, subsequent research both calls into question the original identification in large-scale quantitative analysis of gender-deviance neutralization and raises the question of whether subsequent dramatic changes in the contributions to housework of men from lower socioeconomic levels have not put an end to gender-deviance-neutralization behaviors.

For women, Gupta (2006, 2007) and Gupta and Ash (2008) have demonstrated convincingly that the original quantitative studies identifying gender-deviance neutralization as it is commonly understood resulted from the misspecification of the analytic models, which relied on measures of relative income between spouses and did not include absolute income. Indeed, the idea that high-earning women with strong positions in the primary labor market were at the same time compensating by undertaking more housework than those with more equal income distributions is counterintuitive and flies in the face of contrary evidence from the relative resources perspective that documents empowerment deriving from labor market position. The apparent identification of gender-deviance neutralization behavior in analysis can be explained by the simple fact that those women with higher earnings than their husbands are more likely to be in lower income households with more traditional gender ideologies. To postulate a gender-deviance-neutralization effect that is logically equivalent to men’s gender-deviance neutralization (i.e., women in gender-deviant structural locations display a more traditional-normative feminine gender through the overcompensatory performance of housework), high relative income has been perceived as meaning high absolute income, which is not the case. When absolute income is added to the models, the gender-deviance-neutralization effect disappears.

Support for the autonomy model is also found in other types of analysis. For example, according to the research of Crompton and Lyonette (2009), support for the idea “her money, her time” is found in the discourse of professional and managerial women who outearn their husbands. I do not claim that women in this situation do not do gender in various ways in an effort to minimize the effects on their male partners of their gender-deviant structural situation. It is also clear that her money, her time assumes that women still take overall responsibility for the management of household labor if they chose to use their money to employ domestic help. What I do question is whether this doing of gender any longer (if it ever did) takes the form of the overperformance of routine housework. There are many other ways, perhaps more subtle and telling, as described by Tichenor (2005), among others, in which a male partner may be deferred to, placated, or made to feel more in control without resorting to the overperformance of housework. Given the high levels of gender consciousness among such women (Crompton & Lyonette, 2009), it is quite difficult to imagine them hovering under
the furniture nightly in an effort to soothe the feelings of their male partners.

In the case of men’s gender-deviance-neutralization behavior, we need to take three related strands of argument into account. First, although such behavior in the performance of housework was first identified in qualitative research among groups of working-class men with traditional gender ideologies, other evidence suggests that it is possible that there was always more flexibility in practice among these groups. In fact, male gender-deviance-neutralization behavior in the major quantitative studies that first identified it has been found in subsequent reanalyses to be restricted to the most extreme 2–3% of men in terms of income and labor market position. Support for a greater degree of flexibility in such families in the face of practical circumstances comes both from the original studies of Morris (1985, 1987) and Wheelock (1990) and from longitudinal quantitative research showing clear adaptation over time by men to their wives’ changing employment situations. Second, there is recent evidence from the methodological literature comparing time-use and questionnaire reporting, supported by references in some smaller-scale qualitative interview studies, that men with more traditional gender ideologies may disproportionately underreport their contributions to domestic work in responses to survey-type questions. This may have led to a mistaken identification of male gender-deviance-neutralization behavior in quantitative papers, which was in fact due to reporting bias. Bittman et al. (2003), for example, found evidence for male gender-deviance neutralization from questionnaire data from the United States but not in time-use data from the same period in Australia. The methodological literature suggests that this may reflect reporting differences for the different survey instruments rather than national level differences in men’s actual performance of housework. Whether or not such underreporting itself constitutes a kind of gender-deviance neutralization, it is not the same behavioral effect as is frequently quoted and referred to.

Third, there is some strong evidence for change in the performance of housework among men since the period in the 1980s when male gender deviance neutralization in this area was first identified, in particular among those from lower socioeconomic levels, which are generally associated with more traditional gender ideologies (Sullivan, 2006, forthcoming). Men in dual-earner couples with the lowest levels of educational attainment have disproportionately increased their contributions to housework over the past 20 years. The implication is that, if male gender-deviance neutralization in the performance of housework did exist 20–30 years ago, it probably did so among a relatively small group in specific structural locations, and recent changes in both attitudes and practice among men have meant that it is probably no longer a significant phenomenon.

Finally, it should be noted that all the studies referred to in this article are of heterosexual couples. Indeed, same-sex couples are excluded from the large-scale quantitative analyses, and race enters the analyses only as a control variable (so that it is not possible to examine differences in gender-deviance-neutralization behavior between races or between couples of different sexualities). It is true that the main referential theoretical perspectives of the gender-deviance-neutralization hypothesis (economic exchange, economic dependency, and relative resource theories) and even gender display itself have primarily been formulated in relation to heterosexual couples. However, although it is correct not to assume that the same gender display behaviors exist in same-sex couples (the reason for the exclusion of same-sex couples from the large-scale quantitative analyses), the intriguing question of gender deviance neutralization in the performance of housework among same-sex couples remains to be addressed.

NOTE
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