Extant research suggests that supportive work–family policies promote gender equality in the workplace and in the household. Yet, evidence indicates that these policies generally have stronger effects on women’s preferences and behaviors than men’s. In this article, we draw on survey-experimental data to examine how young, unmarried men’s gender ideologies and perceptions of normative masculinity may moderate the effect of supportive work–family policy interventions on their preferences for structuring their future work and family life. Specifically, we examine whether men’s prescriptive beliefs about what work–family arrangements most people ought to prefer and whether men’s descriptive beliefs about what work–family arrangements most of their male peers actually do prefer influence their responses to supportive policies. Our analysis shows that men’s responses to supportive work–family policy interventions are highly dependent upon their beliefs about what their male peers actually want, rather than on their beliefs about what others should want. Specifically, men who believe that their male peers ideally want gender-egalitarian

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or counternormative relationships are themselves more likely to prefer a progressive relationship structure when supportive work–family policies are in place. These findings provide novel support for sociological theories of masculinity and hold important implications for designing policies that promote gender equality in the workplace and at home.

**Keywords:** gender inequality; work–family policies; masculinity; gender ideology; preference formation

In recent years, scholars have repeatedly documented that progress toward gender equality has stalled in both the workplace and the home. Women’s labor force participation has leveled off (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2012), occupational integration has slowed (England 2010), the gender gap in wages has stagnated (Cha and Weeden 2014), and women still do the lion’s share of housework and caregiving (Bianchi 2011). At the same time, men’s pace of change has been sluggish. Men have demonstrated relatively low rates of entry into traditionally female-dominated occupations, modest increases in household work and child care, and more limited propensities to endorse progressive gender ideologies than their female counterparts (Bianchi 2011; Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011; England 2010). One leading explanation for these trends is that work and family institutions remain based on outdated notions of workers and families, which impose constraints on an individual’s ability to equally share earning and caregiving with a spouse or partner (Cha 2010; Gerson 2010; Stone 2007). For instance, in recent decades, employers have increasingly demanded longer and/or more unpredictable hours, an arrangement premised on an “ideal worker” who has few responsibilities outside of the workplace (Acker 1990; Williams 2001). At the same time, there has been an increasing cultural trend toward time-intensive parenting practices (Blair-Loy 2003; Hays 1998; Milkie et al. 2010), which limits one’s ability to put in long hours at work or to be constantly available to an employer.

In light of these conflicting pressures, young American men and women often doubt that it will be feasible to share work and caregiving responsibilities equally with their future spouse, despite the fact that this egalitarian arrangement is what the majority of them now say they would ideally prefer (Gerson 2010; Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). For instance, in in-depth interviews, Gerson (2010) found that young, unmarried men cited the intense social and economic demands of workplaces for their time and energy as a reason for such doubts. Believing that an egalitarian relationship was out of reach, these young men gravitated toward a fallback plan.
that was neotraditional in nature—an arrangement where they would be the primary breadwinner and their spouse would be primarily (though not solely) responsible for housework and caregiving.

In previous work, we built on Gerson’s insights by implementing a survey experiment that examined whether supportive workplace policies—specifically, subsidized child care, flexible scheduling, and paid family leave—may remove some of the institutional constraints young men and women face, thereby fostering preferences for more egalitarian relationship structures (Pedulla and Thébaud 2015). In one of that study’s experimental conditions, respondents simply were asked to select their ideal relationship structure preference. In another experimental condition, young men and women were primed to imagine that supportive work–family policies were in place and then asked to state what their ideal relationship structure preference would be under those circumstances. The findings showed that whereas women were significantly more likely to prefer an egalitarian relationship when supportive policies were made available, men’s relationship structure preferences were, on average, unaffected by such policies.

Thus, it appears that even if young men were to have access to supportive work–family policies, they would be no more or less likely to prefer an egalitarian arrangement with their partner. Why might this be the case? A piece of the answer lies in men’s relatively advantaged structural position in labor markets and in families. Because men typically earn more money and/or have a more privileged career status than their partners, they often have something substantial to lose in terms of income and career prospects were they to take time off from work or to modify their schedule for the purpose of caregiving (see Coltrane et al. 2013). Furthermore, men are more likely than women to find the requisite spousal support needed to fulfill “ideal worker” expectations, making it less likely that it would be necessary for them to take time off or modify their hours at all (Cha 2010).

However, several studies show that men’s lack of responsiveness to supportive work–family policies is not simply rooted in material considerations, but also in the potential threat of these interventions to their personal beliefs, masculinity, and/or social status. For instance, more men than women still endorse the prescriptive belief that women ought to be primarily responsible for caregiving (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman 2011); thus, even when policies are in place that otherwise mitigate financial risks, men may be unlikely to change their behavior on ideological grounds and/or to view such policies as solving “women’s
problem” of balancing work and care (Duvander 2014; Padavic, Ely, and Reid 2013). Additionally, even if a man does not personally endorse a traditional gender ideology, he may still hold the descriptive belief that most other people, especially other men, prefer a more gender-traditional relationship and, by implication, would hold him accountable to that model. Indeed, men are still often expected to be primarily focused on paid work and breadwinning rather than caregiving (Potuchek 1997). Accordingly, studies find that men often face negative social stigma when they take advantage of leave policies or flexible work arrangements, and that such stigma is rooted in their violation of this normative vision of masculinity (Berdahl and Moon 2013; Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013). Thus, men’s nominal response to work–family policies can be understood as a form of “doing gender” (West and Zimmerman 1987) that is geared toward maintaining an appropriately masculine social identity and status via the approval of other men (Kimmel 2008; Pascoe 2007). Taken together, the null effect of supportive work–family policy interventions on young men’s relationship preferences is likely rooted not only in their relatively advantaged structural position in the workplace and in families but also in gender ideologies and norms. However, previous studies have found it empirically challenging to distinguish the possible relevance of these cultural factors on men’s preferences or behaviors from those that are more structural or material in nature.

The goal of this study is to disentangle these processes in the U.S. context by employing a novel survey-experimental design. Specifically, we investigate the extent to which the causal effect of supportive work–family policies on young, unmarried men’s preferred work–family arrangements is conditioned by their ideological and normative beliefs about gender. In particular, we focus on (1) men’s personal endorsement of a gender-egalitarian ideology (i.e., their prescriptive beliefs about how most men and women should organize work and family responsibilities) and (2) men’s perceptions of normative masculinity as it pertains to work and family life (i.e., their descriptive beliefs about how most of their male peers actually prefer to organize their future work and family responsibilities). Our findings demonstrate that beliefs about what other men actually want, not beliefs about what they should want, shape men’s responses to supportive work–family policies. Specifically, when supportive work–family policies are thought to be in place, men who believe that the majority of their male peers want gender-progressive relationships are significantly more likely to prefer a progressive relationship.
WORK–FAMILY POLICIES, MEN’S BEHAVIOR, AND MEN’S IDEALS

Scholars have long argued that work–family policies, when designed effectively, can help ameliorate the gendered structural constraints that characterize workplaces and families. By providing workers with the time and resources needed to simultaneously manage employment and caregiving responsibilities, policy interventions can make it more feasible for partners to pursue an egalitarian, “dual-earner, dual-caregiver” arrangement if that is what they prefer (Gornick and Meyers 2009). Indeed, paid leaves (of a moderate length), publicly subsidized child care, and flexible work arrangements have been found to be associated with higher labor force participation rates for women and a more egalitarian division of labor in the home (Hegewisch and Gornick 2011; Noonan 2013). As noted above, these types of policies tend to have greater bearing on women’s work and family decisions than men’s. Yet, there is evidence that some men’s behaviors are affected by supportive work–family policy interventions. For instance, there is evidence that “use it or lose it” paternity leaves at the national level increase men’s use of leave (Ekberg, Eriksson, and Friebel 2013; Patnaik 2015), and that taking leave or “career breaks” promotes their involvement in child care and housework (Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011; Patnaik 2015; Schober 2014; Smith and Williams 2007; Vandeweyer and Glorieux 2008). Although fewer studies examine the effects of organizational-level policies, they show that men who take advantage of employer-sponsored leave tend to engage more in female-typed household tasks (Estes, Noonan, and Maume 2007) and child care activities (Lundquist, Misra, and O’Meara 2012).

Notwithstanding these positive consequences of supportive policies, scholars note that the size of such effects is often modest, and the gender division of labor in countries even with the most progressive policies remains far from equal (Kotsadam and Finseraas 2011). One recent study also suggests that despite their increased propensity to take leave after the introduction of the “use it or lose it daddy month,” Swedish men’s propensity to use sick leave to care for children later on was unaffected by the introduction of the policy (Ekberg, Eriksson, and Friebel 2013). Thus, it is possible that progressive paternity leave policies mitigate men’s fears of a career penalty in the short term, without fundamentally undermining the “ideal worker” norm that makes the adoption of a flexible work routine risky over the longer term. Furthermore, critics of supportive work–family policies have argued that they could unintentionally promote a
traditional division of labor, given that women disproportionately take advantage of them (Bergmann 2009). For instance, if a man subscribes to the commonly held view that work–family policies are meant to address “women’s problem” of balancing work with caregiving responsibilities, then supportive work–family policies may unintentionally make him feel more comfortable leaving the housework and caregiving to his spouse, even if she is employed.

One limitation of this literature, however, is that most studies have been based on a relatively small number of cases (e.g., comparing a few countries) with key variables measured at one point in time. In addition, they are often fraught with selection processes that prevent them from establishing causal effects. For instance, although men’s takeup of parental leave is higher in countries like Sweden with policies aimed at alleviating material constraints on men, the men in these contexts are also more likely to express gender-progressive ideologies in the first place (Sjöberg 2004). Similarly, men’s use of progressive work–family policies implemented at the organizational level may be affected both by the material incentives provided by the policies as well as the extent to which men with egalitarian attitudes self-select into “family-friendly” organizations and jobs. Therefore, the extent to which men’s responses to supportive work–family policies are directly contingent upon key cultural forces, such as an individual’s gender ideology or the masculinity norms to which he feels he is held accountable, remains an open question.

THE ROLE OF MEN’S GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND MASCULINITY NORMS

Although men are, on average, less likely to endorse egalitarian gender ideologies than their female counterparts, when they do, they are more likely to take an active role in housework (Grunow and Baur 2014; Kroska 2004) and child care (Evertsson 2014). That is, men who hold the prescriptive belief that men ought to be primarily breadwinners and women ought to be primarily homemakers are, not surprisingly, less likely to share household and family responsibilities with their spouse. There is also evidence from Sweden that men who hold a progressive gender ideology are more likely to take advantage of parental leave than their more traditional counterparts (Duvander 2014). Thus, men’s relatively modest responses to supportive work–family policies may be rooted in their tendency to be less likely to subscribe to an egalitarian gender ideology.
However, masculinity scholars have also demonstrated that regardless of their personal ideological beliefs about gender, men’s preferences and behaviors (especially those of young men) can be best understood by their sense of social expectations and approval from other men (Connell 1995; Kimmel 2008; Pascoe 2007). Indeed, there is evidence that masculinity norms may play a part in men’s behavioral responses to work–family policies. For instance, research based on U.S. samples suggests that men are likely to be seen as less masculine (Rudman and Mescher 2013; Vandello et al. 2013) and to experience more gendered workplace harassment (Berdahl and Moon 2013) when they take advantage of policies like family leave or flexible work options. This is not surprising given that a strong commitment to work is a core dimension of masculine identity for both professional and nonprofessional men (Connell 1995; Cooper 2000; Williams 2010).

The expectations to which men may feel they are held accountable, as well as the culturally “masculine” aspects of identity and practice that they adopt, are also known to vary widely between social groups (e.g., class, race, sexual orientation), over time, and across cultural and institutional settings (Connell 1995; Kimmel 1996; Bridges and Pascoe 2014). Thus, the extent to which men believe that they will be stigmatized by other men for taking on substantial responsibility for housework and caregiving likely varies substantially across individuals. Yet, regardless of its social or demographic determinants, simply believing that such stigma exists has been shown to be powerful enough to prevent men from taking or wanting to take advantage of supportive policies, even when they report being just as dissatisfied with long and inflexible work hours as their female counterparts (Kelly et al. 2010; Munsch, Ridgeway, and Williams 2014). It is possible, however, that the relevance of such norms wanes as more and more men take leave. For instance, a recent study suggests that men in Norway are much more likely to take advantage of paternity leave if their male coworkers or brothers have taken it (Dahl, Løken, and Mogstad 2014).

Taken together, research suggests that a young man’s prescriptive gender ideology, as well as his descriptive beliefs about what kind of work–family arrangement his male peers ideally prefer, each may play a role in his likelihood of responding to supportive work–family policy interventions. On the one hand, a man may be prone to take advantage of supportive policies and to engage in domestic responsibilities if it enables him to live out his progressive personal convictions and/or if he believes that doing so is unlikely to pose a threat to his masculine status among his
peers. On the other hand, a man may be unlikely to take advantage of supportive policies if he subscribes to traditional values and/or if he fears normative penalties from other men in his workplace or social circles. In fact, it is possible that men with more conservative outlooks may view supportive work–family policies as a mechanism that allows them to live up to neotraditional values and/or norms more fully, given that such policies better enable women to combine caregiving with some form of employment. We examine this set of issues, empirically, below.

**EMPIRICAL PREDICTIONS**

Building on the aforementioned theoretical insights, we develop empirical predictions about how the relationship structure preferences of young, unmarried men without children will be affected by the presence of supportive work–family policies. We evaluate whether the effect of supportive work–family policies on young men’s preferences for organizing their future work and family life are dependent upon (1) their gender ideology and (2) their perception of masculinity norms regarding work and family life. Gender ideology captures men’s *prescriptive* beliefs about which division of labor is most appropriate or acceptable. In contrast, perceptions of masculinity norms capture men’s *descriptive* beliefs about which division of labor other young men *actually* prefer. Specifically, this construct measures whether a man believes that the majority of his male peers ideally want to have progressive, dual-earner, dual-caregiver relationships, or whether they would prefer to structure their work and family life with a more traditional gender boundary between earning and housework and/or caregiving. Importantly, these two types of beliefs are analytically distinct, given that beliefs about what others want may not necessarily align with beliefs about what others *should* want.

Extant theory suggests that both men’s gender ideologies and their perceptions of masculinity norms could play an important role in moderating the effect of supportive work–family policies on men’s work–family preferences. First, men who endorse progressive gender ideologies may be more likely to identify and value the benefits of supportive work–family policies because they are more likely to be interested in engaging in household and caregiving work, as well as in supporting the career aspirations of their (usually female) partners. Therefore, we posit:

_Hypothesis 1:_ Supportive work–family policies will have a stronger and more positive effect on the odds of preferring an egalitarian or counternormative
work–family arrangement among men who endorse progressive gender ideologies than among those who do not.

Second, it is likely that men who believe that most of their male peers prefer egalitarian relationships will be more responsive to supportive work–family policies than those who believe that their male peers prefer more traditional arrangements. These men are unlikely to fear strong social sanctions for engaging in a dual-earner, dual-caregiver relationship—a relationship structure made easier by supportive work–family policies. Thus, we expect:

Hypothesis 2: Supportive work–family policies will have a stronger and more positive effect on the odds of preferring an egalitarian or counternormative work–family arrangement among men who believe that the majority of their male peers prefer progressive relationship structures than among those who do not.

Examining this set of issues with empirical data is challenging. First, it requires measuring men’s preferences about how they would ideally like to structure their future work–family relationships while systematically exposing some, but not others, to supportive work–family policy conditions. Second, it requires measuring men’s gender ideologies as well as men’s perceptions of other men’s relationship structure preferences. Whereas the second task can be easily executed with standard survey research methods, the first requires exogenous variation in exposure to work–family policies. Given that the selection into environments with supportive work–family policies is likely correlated with a set of other sociodemographic and attitudinal dispositions—including the type of relationship structure that an individual desires—we use a survey-experimental research design.

METHODS

Our empirical analysis draws on novel survey-experimental data. The data collection process was conducted by a survey research company, GfK (formerly “Knowledge Networks”), that maintains a national probability-based online panel of respondents that is representative of the U.S. population. The panel was built using random-digit dialing and address-based sampling methods. Households selected for the panel who need computers or access to the Internet are provided with those resources. Thus, the
sample was *not* limited to computer and Internet users. Additionally, the Gfk panel is *not* an opt-in panel and, thus, does not suffer from the same concerns as opt-in panels about respondents being a highly selected group of individuals. Given that our hypotheses center on the future relationship structure preferences of young men, our analytic sample is limited to respondents between 18 and 32 years old. We also only included unmarried men without any children. Because men who are married or have children are likely to have negotiated balancing work and family pressures with their spouse already, their preferences about relationship structures may be influenced heavily by their current experiences and represent a different set of issues than we explore here. This sample closely parallels the demographics of the individuals that Gerson (2010) interviewed in her study of young people’s work–family ideals. Although our sample includes respondents of all sexual orientations, we do not have information about whether our respondents identify as gay, bisexual, or transgender (GBT). Importantly, though, the random assignment of respondents across experimental conditions prevents any systematic differences between GBT and non-GBT individuals from biasing our findings. We also suspect that, given the relatively small size of the GBT population, variation by sexual orientation does not play an important role in shaping our findings. Addressing this possibility would be an important task for future research.

The survey was fielded between August 3, 2012, and August 9, 2012. The completion rate was 44.6 percent, which is generally consistent with Gfk surveys and significantly higher than nonprobability, opt-in, web-based panels (Knowledge Networks 2012). Importantly, because individuals who were contacted to participate in the survey but did not complete it are part of Gfk’s ongoing panel, detailed demographic and background information is available on the non-responders. This information is incorporated into a weight created by Gfk to adjust the sample for nonresponse and representativeness of the US population. We use these weights in all of our analyses (for more information on weights, see Knowledge Networks 2012). Importantly, our findings are consistent when the weights are not used for the analysis.

**Experimental Design**

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of two experimental conditions, summarized in Figure 1. In the first condition (Condition 1: No Supportive Work–Family Policies), respondents were asked to report their
relationship structure preference (i.e., how they would like to share work and household responsibilities with their future spouse or partner) and were provided with four options. The response options closely parallel the types of relationships that Gerson (2010) uncovered. The first option reflects a “self-reliant” preference. Specifically, respondents indicate that they would prefer to maintain personal independence and focus on a career, even if that would mean forgoing marriage or a lifelong partner. As Gerson (2010) notes, for men, maintaining self-reliance means absolving oneself from the responsibility of caring and/or providing for a family. The second and third options reflect neotraditional and counternormative arrangements by asking whether one would prefer to be primarily responsible for either (a) breadwinning or (b) managing the household (which may include housework and/or caregiving). In the “primary breadwinner” option (which would be considered a neotraditional arrangement for men), the respondent would be primarily responsible for financially supporting the family, whereas his spouse would be primarily responsible for managing the household. In the “primary homemaker/caregiver” option (which would be considered a counternormative arrangement), the respondent would be primarily responsible for managing the household, whereas his spouse would be primarily responsible for financially supporting the family. Importantly, these options

**FIGURE 1: Experimental design**

NOTE: The complete experimental survey items, which include the details provided about each relationship structure option, are presented in the Online Appendix.
do not preclude dual-earner arrangements. For instance, the “primary breadwinner” category reflects a respondent’s preferred level of responsibility for earning relative to his spouse. Thus, a respondent who selects the primary homemaker/caregiver option could also plan to work outside the home. The final response option was an egalitarian relationship structure in which paid employment, housework, and child care would be shared equally by both partners.

In the second experimental condition (Condition 2: Supportive Work–Family Policies), respondents were presented with the same question and response options as Condition 1 but also received information about supportive work–family policies in the framing of the question. Specifically, they were told to imagine that there were supportive policies in place that ease the challenges associated with work–family balance. Following Gornick and Meyers’ (2009) earner-carer policy model, they were told to imagine that all workers had access to paid family leave, subsidized child care, and flexible work options (such as the opportunity to work from home one day per week). To ensure that our results are not confounded by the possible influence of attitudes toward government spending, or by heterogeneous prior or current exposure to employer-based policies, the prompt does not specify whether these policies are made available by governments or employers. Rather, the goal of Condition 2 is to provide a context in which respondents state what their future relationship preferences would be under conditions where they would have access to supportive work–family policies. (See the supplementary Online Appendix for the full experimental survey items.)

**Key Variables**

The primary dependent variable in our analysis is built from the relationship structure preference selected by respondents (i.e., egalitarian, self-reliant, primary breadwinner, or primary homemaker). We are particularly interested in men’s odds of preferring gender-progressive relationship structures. Thus, we code a respondent’s relationship structure preference as progressive (equal to “1”) if he selects the “egalitarian” or “primary homemaker” option and nonprogressive (equal to “0”) if he selects the “self-reliant” or “primary breadwinner” option, given that both of these arrangements allow a man to maintain a central focus on paid work while absolving him from substantially engaging in household work or caregiving. The primary independent variable for our analysis is whether or not the respondent was randomly assigned to the “Supportive Work–Family Policies” condition.
Theoretically, we are interested in understanding how men’s gender ideologies and their perceptions of masculinity norms moderate the effects of supportive work–family policies. To measure respondents’ gender ideologies, we generated a scale from five standard survey items. On a five-point scale ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree,” respondents were asked to respond to the following statements: (1) A man’s job is to earn the money; a woman’s job is to look after the home and family. (2) A job is alright, but what most women want is a home and children. (3) All in all, family life suffers when the wife has a full-time job. (4) A preschool child is likely to suffer if his or her mother works. (5) Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay (α = .81). We then calculated respondents’ mean value across the five items to generate a continuous gender ideology measure. Next, we dichotomized this measure, coding individuals above the mean as 1 and below the mean as 0. While our results are substantively very similar when utilizing the original gender ideology scale measure, the binary measure of gender ideology enables us to present a more straightforward comparison with our other moderating variable of interest—masculinity norms—and eases the presentation of results.

To measure perceptions of masculinity norms regarding relationship structures, we asked respondents: “In your opinion, which of the following options best describes the way that most men your age would ideally like to structure their future work and family life?” They could then select one of the four response choices that were available in the main experimental item: self-reliant, primary homemaker, primary breadwinner, or egalitarian. We generated a variable equal to 1 if the respondent indicated that he thought other men would want to have an egalitarian relationship or that other men would want to be primarily homemakers, and equal to 0 if the respondent indicated that he thought other men would want to be self-reliant or primary breadwinners. Thus, this variable is equal to 1 if the respondent believes that most other men actually want progressive rather than nonprogressive relationship structures.

To ensure that our measures of gender ideology and perceived masculinity norms were empirically distinct, we examined the proportion of respondents with progressive gender ideologies in the two masculinity norms categories. The weighted proportions are nearly identical: 45.1 percent in the nonprogressive norms category and 45.3 percent in the progressive norms category. Additionally, a chi-square test indicates that there is no evidence of an association between these two variables (p = 0.99).
Control Variables

Since respondents are randomly assigned to one of the two experimental conditions, our research design enables us to estimate the direct effect of the “supportive policies” treatment without including control variables in our statistical models. However, men’s gender ideologies and their perceptions of masculinity norms are not randomly assigned to respondents. Therefore, in our regression analyses, we adjust for a set of key covariates that might be both correlated with these moderating variables as well as respondents’ relationship structure preferences. Specifically, we control for respondents’ education level (at least some college or not), household income (logged), age (in years), political ideology (a seven-point scale), race/ethnicity, region (lives in the south or not), and employment status (working or not).

Manipulation Check

At the end of the survey, respondents were asked to recall whether or not they were told anything about supportive work–family policies. While the majority of respondents accurately answered the manipulation check, there were some respondents in each condition who did not. It is unclear how to interpret the findings for these respondents because if they did not notice the “supportive policies” prime, it could not have meaningfully affected their responses. Therefore, we follow the common practice among experimentalists of limiting our analysis to respondents who accurately recalled the manipulation. We discuss the robustness of the results to this analytic decision below. Our final analytic sample includes 104 respondents (47 respondents were in the “Supportive Policies” condition and 57 respondents were in the “No Supportive Policies” condition). Table 1 shows weighted descriptive statistics for the key characteristics of our sample.
(egalitarian or primary homemaker) relationship structure. The top row in Table 2, for example, presents the proportion of men selecting a progressive relationship structure for the whole sample, by experimental condition. While the vast majority of respondents (more than 70 percent) chose a progressive relationship, on average men’s relationship structure preferences do not appear to substantially differ depending on whether or not they are exposed to the supportive policy prime.

In the next two rows of Table 2, we separately examine the consequences of supportive policies among men with conservative and progressive gender ideologies. Not surprisingly, men with progressive gender ideologies appear to be more likely, on average, to select a progressive relationship structure than men with conservative gender ideologies. Although a slightly larger percentage of conservative men (67.8 percent) opt for a progressive relationship when they are exposed to the supportive policy prime compared to when they are not (57.0 percent), it does not appear as if the presence of supportive work–family policies has a systematically larger or smaller

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 1: Weighted Descriptive Statistics of Respondent Characteristics</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mean/Proportion</td>
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<td>------------------</td>
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<tr>
<td>Supportive work–family policies condition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progressive gender ideology</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progressive masculinity norms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion with some college</td>
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<tr>
<td>Household income (median)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion currently working</td>
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<tr>
<td>Age (years)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Race/ethnicity</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion white, non-Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion black, non-Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion other, non-Hispanic</td>
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<td>Proportion Hispanic</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion two or more races</td>
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<tr>
<td>Proportion southern resident</td>
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<tr>
<td>Political ideology (7 = extremely conservative)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sample size</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Weights used to produce descriptive statistics. Listwise deletion used to deal with missing data.
The bottom two rows of Table 2 present the relationship structure preferences for men with different perceptions of masculinity norms. Here, important differences emerge. Among male respondents who do not think that other men want gender-progressive relationships (e.g., those who perceive a more restrictive set of masculinity norms), supportive work–family policies seem to lower the chances of selecting a progressive relationship structure (78.6 percent versus 54.5 percent). However, men who perceive that most other young men want progressive relationships respond quite differently to supportive policies. Among this subgroup, supportive work–family policies appear to increase the chances of selecting a progressive relationship structure (61.3 percent vs. 87.1 percent).11

Although the descriptive evidence in Table 2 provides some initial insights into the heterogeneity of men’s responses to supportive work–family policies, it does not test for the statistical significance of the differences between these groups. In Table 3, we use logistic regression models to test for the statistical relationships of interest, controlling for race, age, education, income (logged), political views, region, and employment status. Model 1 examines the direct effect of supportive policies on men’s

### Table 2: Proportion of Respondents Selecting a Progressive Relationship Structure, by Supportive Policy Prime, Gender Ideology, and Masculinity Norms

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>No Supportive Workplace Policies</th>
<th>Supportive Workplace Policies</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Average effect of</td>
<td>70.8%</td>
<td>73.6%</td>
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<tr>
<td>supportive policy prime</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gender ideology</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Conservative gender ideology</td>
<td>57.0%</td>
<td>67.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive gender ideology</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
<td>84.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masculinity norms</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nonprogressive masculinity norms</td>
<td>78.6%</td>
<td>54.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive masculinity norms</td>
<td>61.3%</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Weights used to produce proportions.
progressive relationship structure preferences. Confirming the descriptive evidence from Table 2, there is no statistically significant average effect of supportive policies on men’s relationship structure preferences. In Model 2, we test hypothesis 1 by including an interaction between receiving the supportive work–family policies prime and having a progressive gender ideology. As expected, the “progressive gender ideology” coefficient is positive and marginally significant ($p < .10$), indicating that, among men who did not receive the supportive policy prime, men with progressive gender ideologies are somewhat more likely to select a progressive relationship structure. However, the interaction term between supportive policies and progressive ideology is not statistically significant. This finding indicates that the consequences of supportive work–family policies for men’s relationship preferences do not vary systematically with men’s gender ideologies. Thus, our data do not provide support for hypothesis 1. Next, in order to test hypothesis 2, model 3 includes an interaction between men’s perceptions of masculinity norms and supportive work–family policies. The interaction term is positive and statistically significant, providing evidence that perceptions of masculinity norms moderate men’s responses to supportive work–family policies. Hypothesis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>No Interactions (1)</th>
<th>Gender Ideology Interaction (2)</th>
<th>Masculinity Norms Interaction (3)</th>
<th>Both Interactions (4)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive work–family policies</td>
<td>0.103 (0.584)</td>
<td>0.620 (0.734)</td>
<td>–1.725 (1.103)</td>
<td>–1.082 (1.227)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive gender ideology</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.446 (0.924)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive masculinity norms</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–0.956 (0.802)</td>
<td>–0.747 (0.859)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive policies × progressive ideology</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–1.243 (1.362)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–1.305 (1.511)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive policies × progressive norms</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>3.480* (1.336)</td>
<td>3.281* (1.353)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$n$</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Log-odds presented. Standard errors in parentheses. All models control for respondent race, age, education, income (logged), political views, region, and employment status. Statistical significance (two-tailed tests): †$p < .10$; *$p < .05$
is therefore supported by our data. Finally, in Model 4, we include both interaction terms and the aforementioned result holds: progressive masculinity norms, but not progressive gender ideologies, moderate the consequences of supportive work–family policies among men.

To ease interpretation of these results, Figure 2 presents predicted probabilities of selecting a progressive relationship structure, broken down by whether the respondent received the supportive work–family policy prime, the gender ideology of the respondent, and the respondent’s perceptions of masculinity norms. The first four bars suggest that the gender ideology (conservative vs. progressive) of the respondent does not substantially influence the probability that a respondent will select a progressive relationship. In contrast, the four bars on the right side of the figure indicate that the effect of the supportive policy prime differs substantially depending on a young man’s perceptions of masculinity norms. Whereas the presence of the policy prime decreases the probability of selecting a progressive relationship among men who perceive nonprogressive masculinity norms (78.5 percent vs. 47.3 percent), it increases the probability of doing so among men who perceive progressive masculinity norms (62.6 percent vs. 87.8 percent).12

In sum, our findings show that, on average, supportive work–family policies do not significantly affect men’s work–family ideals. Additionally,
while there is a generally positive association between holding a progressive gender ideology and a preference for progressive relationships (among those in the “no supportive policies” condition), having a progressive gender ideology does not make men any more or less likely to alter their ideal relationship preferences in response to work–family policy interventions. However, perceptions of normative masculinity do appear to condition men’s responses to work–family policies: supportive policies have a strong, positive effect on men’s propensity to prefer progressive relationships, but only if they believe that the majority of their male peers also prefer progressive relationships. Thus, our analysis points to norms of masculinity, and specifically, individual men’s perceptions of those norms, as a key source of heterogeneity in men’s responses to work–family policy interventions.

Alternative Explanations and Robustness Checks

In this section, we address some additional factors that may influence our findings and address issues regarding the robustness of our results. First, because key aspects of men’s identities—such as their age, race, and class or educational background—intersect to shape their gendered experiences and behaviors (Bridges and Pasco 2014; Connell 1995; Pasco 2007), they may also shape their responses to supportive work–family policies. To address this possibility, we conducted multiple analyses to examine whether men’s responses to supportive policies vary between men with different sociodemographic characteristics. First, we explored directly whether men’s responses to supportive work–family policies were moderated by their race, education, or age. Second, using three-way interactions, we examined whether race, education, or age further moderated the interactions between progressive masculinity norms and the supportive work–family policy prime. We do not find any moderating effects of these respondent characteristics (results available upon request). Next, we examine whether progressive norms about masculinity per se, rather than progressive norms in general, moderate the effects of the supportive work–family policies for men. To explore this issue, we utilize an additional measure from our survey in which we asked our respondents about the ideal relationship structure that they thought most women their age wanted. The respondents could indicate that they thought most women wanted to be in an egalitarian relationship, to be a primary homemaker, to be a primary breadwinner, or to be self-reliant (the same response categories discussed above). If the key findings from our above analysis can be
explained by generally progressive gender norms, rather than by something specific to masculinity, then we would expect men’s responses about the types of relationships women want to have the same moderating effect on the consequences of supportive work–family policies as their responses about the types of relationships that other men want. However, we find no moderating effect of men’s perceptions of the types of relationships that they think most women prefer (results available on request). In other words, there is something unique about norms of masculinity—not relationship norms more generally—that moderates men’s responses to work–family policies. Finally, we examine the robustness of our findings to the decision to exclude the respondents who did not pass the manipulation check. To do this, we implement our key analyses from above (Models 2 and 3 from Table 3), but include the full sample of respondents. The results, presented in Table 4, indicate that our findings are robust to the inclusion or exclusion of the respondents who did not pass the manipulation check. Specifically, Model 1 indicates that, for the full sample, men’s gender ideology does not moderate the effect of the support work–family policy prime, whereas Model 2 shows a positive and statistically significant interaction between progressive masculinity norms and supportive work–family policies in predicting men’s likelihood of selecting a progressive relationship structure.

### Table 4: Logistic Regression Models of the Effect of Supportive Work–Family Policies on Men’s Preferences for a Progressive Relationship Structure (Full Sample)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Gender Ideology Interaction (1)</th>
<th>Masculinity Norms Interaction (2)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive work–family policies</td>
<td>−0.498 (0.563)</td>
<td>−1.187† (0.681)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive gender ideology</td>
<td>0.476 (0.687)</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progressive masculinity norms</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>0.078 (0.767)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive policies × progressive ideology</td>
<td>1.105 (1.035)</td>
<td>−</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive policies × progressive masculinity norms</td>
<td>−</td>
<td>2.168* (1.018)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>182</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

NOTE: Log-odds presented. Standard errors in parentheses. All models control for respondent race, age, education, income (logged), political views, region, and employment status. The analyses include the full sample of respondents, even those who failed the manipulation check. Statistical significance (two-tailed tests): †p < .10; *p < .05.
CONCLUSION

Among the many reasons that the movement toward gender equality has stalled in recent years is the resistance of men’s attitudes and behaviors to interventions aimed at supporting dual-earning, dual-caregiving couples. While multiple factors likely undergird men’s resistance in these areas, in this article we examine the role of ideological and normative forces in shaping how young men respond to supportive work–family policies. Specifically, we investigate whether men with progressive gender ideologies respond differently than men with conservative gender ideologies to supportive work–family policy interventions. Additionally, we examine whether differences in men’s perceptions of masculinity norms as they pertain to work and family life interact with supportive work–family policies to determine their own ideal relationship structure. Consistent with previous research, we find that the majority of young men express a preference for gender-progressive relationship structures, but that, on average, there is no direct effect of supportive policies on these preferences. Additionally, there is no empirical evidence that the effect of supportive work–family policies on men’s preferences is contingent on their gender ideology (hypothesis 1). However, in support of hypothesis 2, we find compelling evidence that men’s perceptions of masculinity norms play an important role in shaping how they respond to work–family policies. Specifically, the supportive work–family policy prime significantly increases the likelihood of men stating a preference for a progressive relationship structure among those men who believe that the majority of their male peers prefer gender-progressive arrangements. This finding is consistent with previous work indicating that social stigma pertaining to normative masculinity plays a role in men’s responses to policy interventions (e.g., Vandello et al. 2013). When men hold the descriptive belief that gender-egalitarian relationships are consonant with masculinity norms, they are more likely to recognize supportive policies as a mechanism that better enables them to contribute at home.

However, we also find that the policy prime moderately decreases the likelihood of preferring a progressive relationship among men who believe their male peers prefer less progressive relationship arrangements. This finding suggests that, for men in social circles that are focused on men’s traditional role as workers and providers, supportive policies may have unintended consequences. For instance, it is possible that when men perceive gender-egalitarian relationships to be inconsistent with masculinity norms, they may not only fear social stigma for making significant
contributions at home, but they actually may interpret work–family policies as mechanisms that better enable them to live up to neotraditional norms. These men may interpret such policies as reducing the need for them to contribute at home, given that supportive policies better enable women to be employed while also being primarily responsible for the housework and child care. We encourage future research to investigate this possibility.

Overall, our findings offer powerful evidence that masculinity norms play a role in shaping men’s responsiveness to interventions aimed at gender equality. These results have important implications for gender scholarship as well as for policy interventions aimed at promoting gender equality. To begin, men’s resistance, on average, to changing institutions and policies masks important heterogeneity among men. Men’s responses to supportive work–family policies depend largely on their perceptions of what they believe their male peers want, and by extension, what kind of behavior they would hold them accountable to. This finding underscores the fundamentally relational, contextual, and multidimensional nature of masculinity and its role in determining men’s preferences and behaviors. Our findings also point to the importance of perceptions of normative masculinity in shaping individuals’ responses to work–family policies. First, policies that have the power to change norms are likely to have deeper, more fundamental consequences for gender equality than those that leave norms unchanged. This insight should encourage workplace organizations, states, and other social, political, and religious communities to consider their existing norms about gender as they design and implement various types of policies. It also resonates with evidence that “use it or lose it,” and universal work–family policy interventions tend to be most effective in promoting men’s takeup. Second, our findings provide evidence that ideological changes—such as changes in men’s fundamental beliefs about how men and women ought to behave—may not be sufficient to increase men’s receptivity to particular work–family policy interventions. Our data suggest that progressive gender ideologies are positively associated with desiring progressive relationships, but that they do not shift men’s responses to work–family policy interventions. Rather, what appears necessary to increase the impact of supportive policies on men’s work–family preferences is a change in what they believe most other men want—and by implication, a change in the gendered expectations to which they believe others will hold them accountable.

While providing important insights about masculinity, work, and family life, this study is not without limitations. Although the survey-experimental
design enables us to exogenously manipulate respondents’ exposure to different policy interventions, that exposure is hypothetical. The men in our sample do not actually live in two different policy regimes. Additionally, our study measures preferences, not behaviors. While useful in understanding how young men think about structuring their future work and family lives, we do not have evidence about whether preferences will affect behavior. Furthermore, it is likely that older men, as well as young married men and fathers, may express different types of ideal relationship structures, and as such, their ideals may be differentially affected by the presence of a supportive policy prime. Studying these different populations is therefore an important task for future research.

Notwithstanding these limitations, we believe this article contributes new and important insights to the study of work and family life, masculinity, and the determinants of men’s responses to supportive work–family policies. Whereas men’s overall resistance to interventions aimed at supporting dual-earner, dual-caregiver relationships has proven to be a stumbling block to attaining greater gender equality, our findings demonstrate that such resistance is far from ubiquitous and is in fact contingent on a man’s localized perceptions of masculinity norms. Thus, our study identifies one key mechanism that currently contributes to persistent patterns of inequality in the workplace at home, but if leveraged strategically by policy makers, our identification of this mechanism could also help dismantle these patterns. Our findings also suggest that, if gender-egalitarian relationships continue to become a more normative ideal among men in the future—a distinct possibility given that young men today espouse more gender-egalitarian ideals than previous generations—supportive work–family policy interventions do hold promise for changing men’s preferences and behaviors.

APPENDIX

In this appendix, we present the results of our analyses utilizing multinominal logistic regression models. For these analyses, our dependent variable is coded as three distinct categories (rather than two categories, as is done for the main analyses): 1) egalitarian or primary homemaker, 2) primary breadwinner, and 3) self-reliant. We were unable to keep all four categories for the dependent variable in this analysis because only four men selected the primary homemaker option and, thus, we did not have a large enough sample to treat this as a separate category. For the model presented in Table A1, below, the omitted category for the dependent
variable is the “primary breadwinner” relationship structure preference. As can be seen from the results, there is a positive and statistically significant interaction between the supportive policies condition and progressive masculinity norms in the “progressive relationship structure preference” component of the model. This finding supports the main findings presented in the body of the article.

NOTES

1. Our survey was only administered to individuals who were “never married” or “living with a partner.”
2. Data are publically available at www.tessexperiments.org and were collected as part of a larger survey experiment that included both men and women. Median completion time was three minutes.
3. Weights adjust for age, race/ethnicity, education, Census region, household income, home ownership status, living in a metropolitan area, and having Internet access.
4. Pilot testing on Amazon.com’s Mechanical Turk indicated that respondents were able to understand and respond to the items in the survey experiment.
5. We did not use analytic terms—such as “self-reliant”—in the experimental prompt (see the Supplementary Appendix [online] for the exact wording of the survey items).
6. Findings are consistent if the primary dependent variable is coded 1 only for respondents who selected an egalitarian relationship. We also estimated multinomial logistic regressions, which separate the relationship structure variable into
three categories (combining egalitarian and primary homemaker). These models produce similar results (see Table A1 in the Appendix).

7. In the survey, respondents first provided their own relationship structure preference, then indicated what types of relationships they believe other men ideally want. The gender ideology items and manipulation check came at the end of the survey. It is possible that stating a personal preference first may shape responses to subsequent questions. Unfortunately, we are unable to empirically examine that issue with these data.

8. Unweighted proportions are 49.0 percent in the nonprogressive norms category and 51.0 percent in the progressive norms category.

9. There also is no relationship between masculinity norms and gender ideology when the full gender ideology scale is examined.

10. Respondents were unable to go back and change their answers in the survey, removing concerns that respondents may have altered the relationship structure preferences after being presented with the manipulation check.

11. Interestingly, when no supportive policies are primed, a smaller fraction of men who perceive progressive masculinity norms select a progressive relationship structure than men who perceive nonprogressive masculinity norms. However, subsequent analyses show that this difference is not statistically significant, and it therefore should not be interpreted as indicating meaningful variation in men’s relationship structure preferences.

12. Supplementary analyses indicate that the supportive work–family policy prime has a positive and statistically significant effect on the odds of selecting a gender-progressive relationship structure among the subset men who perceive progressive masculinity norms ($p < .05$) and a negative and marginally significant effect on the odds of selecting a gender-progressive relationship structure among the subset of men who do not perceive progressive masculinity norms ($p = .06$).

REFERENCES


Sarah Thébaud is assistant professor of sociology at the University of California, Santa Barbara and a faculty research associate of the Broom Center for Demography. Her work investigates social psychological and macro-institutional sources of gender inequality in the new economy. In addition to studies on the relationship between gendered cultural beliefs and inequality in workplaces and families, her research examines patterns of gender inequality in entrepreneurial activity, investment markets, and academic science and engineering.

David S. Pedulla is assistant professor of sociology and Faculty Research Associate in the Population Research Center at the University of Texas at Austin. Using primarily experimental and quantitative approaches, his research examines the processes underlying racial and gender stratification in the labor market. One ongoing project investigates the gendered and racialized consequences of nonstandard, contingent, and precarious employment on workers’ social and economic outcomes.