

Who gets to choose: a global perspective on gender, work and choice in the post-pandemic workplace

Choice in the
post-pandemic
workplace

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Abstract

Purpose – Compared to the years prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, more workers today seemingly have choice over where, when and how they do their work. However, gender inequalities at work and at home persist, which may impact perceptions of choice. Thus, researchers must investigate the potential impact of gender and domestic responsibilities on perceptions of work-related options, including perceptions of workspace choice.

Design/methodology/approach – Using an original dataset with workers in North America, South America, Europe and Asia ($N = 3,147$), the authors conducted logistic regression analyses to explore whether workers felt they had a choice in where they do their work (workspace choice). In addition to gender, the authors considered the effect of domestic responsibilities (childcare and housework) on worker perceptions of workspace choice.

Findings – In the paper's initial regression, the authors found that men (OR: 1.24; 95%CI 1.04–1.48) as well as workers reporting that a partner was responsible for all or most of the housework (OR: 1.80; 95%CI 1.34–2.40) and childcare (OR 1.51; 95%CI 1.09–2.09) reported feeling a greater sense of workspace choice. Simultaneously, follow-up regression analyses found that women and men whose partners had a greater share of domestic responsibility had amplified perceptions of choice. However, surprisingly, men who claimed primary responsibility for domestic work also reported more choice over workspace.

Originality/value – Using an international sample, the authors explore gender inequities in worker perceptions of workspace choice. The authors' findings suggest that domestic responsibilities interact with gender in interesting ways, leading to differences in perceptions of choice in the post-pandemic workplace.

Keywords Gender, Work, Working parents, Gender inequality, Workspace, Choice

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Since the beginning of the global COVID-19 pandemic, workplace changes (including the rise of remote work) and a record employee shortage have given individuals more power and choice over where, when and how they do their work (Tessema *et al.*, 2022). However, this

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increase in power is not distributed equally among all workers. For instance, research has found that gender inequalities at work have worsened since 2020, and issues such as childcare shortages and school closures have disproportionately impacted working mothers (Collins *et al.*, 2021; Dunatchik *et al.*, 2021; Mooi-Reci and Risman, 2021; Russell and Frachtenberg, 2021). For gender scholars, these findings are not necessarily surprising, as global feminist research has long documented gender inequalities both at work and regarding the “second shift” of housework and childcare that takes place outside of paid work (Baxter and Wright, 2000; Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 2003; Misra *et al.*, 2021). Across the world, gender norms and expectations have consistently impacted women’s career choices and trajectories to the extent that some scholars have pondered whether women even have career “choices” to the same degree as men (Blair-Loy, 2005; Glass, 1988; Kan *et al.*, 2022; Massey *et al.*, 1995). In the post-pandemic economy, do women perceive that they have choice regarding work to the same extent as men? Do domestic responsibilities matter when it comes to perceptions of choice? Lastly, how do gender and domestic responsibilities interact to influence workers’ perceptions of choice?

To investigate these questions, we use data from an original survey with workers worldwide ($N = 3,147$) and a feminist theoretical approach to the concept of “choice” to explore gender differences in one aspect of choice: worker perceptions of choice in *where* they do their work (or, their workspace) in the post-pandemic economy. We also consider how workers’ current domestic (childcare and housework) responsibilities might matter for perceptions of choice. Exploring this issue on a global scale and using logistic regression analyses, we find that gender as well as domestic responsibilities matter (sometimes, in surprising ways) when it comes to workers’ perceptions of workspace choice.

Background

Women’s experiences negotiating paid and “second shift” work pre- and post-pandemic

Both pre- and post-pandemic, scholars have documented gender inequalities in the realm of work on a rolling basis. For example, a predominant issue among heterosexual couples has been working women’s disproportionate responsibility for housework and caregiving—the “second shift”—in addition to paid work (Croft *et al.*, 2014; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 2003). At the same time, independent of the issue of balancing paid and unpaid work, women have faced significant challenges within the workplace related to gender norms and expectations (Gorman, 2005; Meitzen, 1986; Olson and Becker, 1983). Yet despite the increased attention paid by scholars and practitioners over the past 3 decades to this issue, gender inequality at work continues to be a problem (Friedmann and Efrat-Treister, 2023; Rao, 2021; Stojmenovska, 2023).

One body of literature argues that ongoing issues are due, in large part, to the persistence of gender essentialist ideas that construct men and women as fundamentally different kinds of people with different capabilities (Levanon and Grusky, 2016; Ridgeway, 2011; Ronen, 2018). For instance, women in the labor force are sometimes treated differently due to the perception that they may be less committed to their careers and more committed to the domestic sphere when compared to men (Benard and Correll, 2010; Misra *et al.*, 2007). This reasoning relates to the idea that women’s careers in the paid labor market are often secondary to both caregiving duties and men’s careers (Blair-Loy, 2005; Rao, 2020). Even institutional features that outwardly appear to promote or even advocate for women workers—such as policies that exclusively support maternity or caregiver leave for women but not men—can ultimately support hierarchical orders of status inequality (Ridgeway and Correll, 2004). The unintended consequence of these policies can reinforce the idea that women are family caregivers first and workers second (Bobbitt-Zeher, 2011).

Particularly since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and in light of the rise of remote work, gender inequalities between women and men when it comes to managing family and paid work have come into stark relief. For instance, gendered caregiving expectations placed on mothers (but not fathers) have impacted women's paid work experiences as the boundaries of workspaces and domestic spaces have broken down (Collins *et al.*, 2021; Mooi-Reci and Risman, 2021; Zanhour and Sumpter, 2022). Research on COVID-related school closures has found that mothers continue to absorb much of the responsibility for tending to children when they are not in school regardless of whether or not mothers are in the paid labor force as well (Collins *et al.*, 2021; Dunatchik *et al.*, 2021). In addition, research by Shockley *et al.* (2021) has found that more than a third of surveyed families fell back on traditional gender expectations of managing childcare during the pandemic, meaning that working mothers shoulder the bulk of the responsibility (Shockley *et al.*, 2021). In response to these expectations, many women have reduced their working hours or left the paid labor market altogether, patterns not found among men (Dunatchik *et al.*, 2021; Lyttelton *et al.*, 2020; Zamarro and Prados, 2021). Unfortunately, these trends have negatively impacted the career progress of many working women and have also resulted in poorer mental health outcomes among women (Shockley *et al.*, 2021; Walters *et al.*, 2022; Zamarro and Prados, 2021).

While a vast body of North American literature has documented issues related to women's challenges balancing paid and unpaid work, examples of similar phenomena can also be found in research across the globe (Kooli, 2022; Massey *et al.*, 1995; Sudarshan and Bhattacharya, 2009; Turbine and Riach, 2012; Walters *et al.*, 2022). Working women disproportionately take on the second shift in the global West, East and South, as well as in countries with vastly different forms of government (from socialism to democracy) in addition to the five countries we profiled in this study (the United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, India and Australia) (de Araujo *et al.*, 2015; Desai *et al.*, 2011; Hochschild, 2003; Kan *et al.*, 2022; Massey *et al.*, 1995; McGinnity and McManus, 2007; Sayer *et al.*, 2009; Sinno and Killen, 2011). Research on countries outside the United States continues to find that work-family balance is an ongoing issue that results in worse outcomes for women if balance cannot be reached (de Araujo *et al.*, 2015; Desai *et al.*, 2011; McGinnity and McManus, 2007; Sayer *et al.*, 2009).

At the same time, researchers have found that persistent gender expectations matter for the meanings attached to domestic responsibilities for working fathers. For instance, while working mothers are often penalized for trying to balance home and paid work, working fathers are typically praised for balancing (or even making an attempt at balancing) both (Deutsch and Saxon, 1998; Odenweller *et al.*, 2020). In addition, research suggests that fathers who manage most of the domestic and childcare duties can find empowerment in domestic work, and feminists have stressed that getting even more men involved in the domestic sphere can help dismantle gender stereotypes (Lee and Lee, 2018; Medved, 2016). Scholars have also documented that men want to be more involved with the domestic sphere and have praised men for taking this stance (Solomon, 2014). These perspectives differ from the dilemmas that women often face, and mothers and fathers may see different outcomes based on their involvement in the domestic sphere, such as stress around career progress given their domestic responsibilities (Helford *et al.*, 2012).

In sum, a vast body of work has found that gender expectations continue to matter when it comes to how women and men approach the task of managing paid work and domestic responsibilities. In the face of unfair expectations, women have typically been judged more harshly for trying to balance both, leading to more pessimism around their choices (Gerson, 2009; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 2003). Thus, examining disparities in perceptions of choice can be one way to gauge the state of gender equity between women and men in the global paid labor force today.

Gender, work and choices

Though scholars have used “choice” to assess gender inequalities in particular contexts, using the concept of “choice” to make sense of gender inequality is not without controversy. Perhaps most damaging is the association of “choice” with the idea of “choice feminism”—a standpoint that redefines “feminism” as apolitical by putting the primary emphasis on women’s choices (regardless of whether or not those choices challenge the status quo) (Ferguson, 2010). Scholars have cautioned that choice feminism can be detrimental to the feminist project because it removes or ignores the political connotations of feminist thought and identification, connecting feminist identity to causes or practices not supported by feminist ideology (such as conspicuous consumption, for example) (Thwaites, 2017). Relatedly, scholars have characterized the study of “choice” itself as a neoliberal and postfeminist project, since notions of choice may “substitute” for feminism and obfuscate ongoing inequality (McRobbie, 2008; Rumens, 2017; Sørensen, 2017). Further, research has shown that “choice” rhetoric has the potential not just to reflect, but also to reproduce, gender inequalities when women make sense of choice not in structural terms but as a matter of individual agency (Sørensen, 2017). Following this logic, researchers need to be careful about how they define and measure choice.

However, while researchers should carefully navigate the concept of “choice,” measuring self-reports of choice can be useful. Individuals make choices in light of cultural and institutional constraints (and opportunities) available to them (Collins *et al.*, 2021; Tomlinson, 2006; Turbine and Riach, 2012). Often, perceptions of these opportunities and constraints manifest as perceptions of choice (Turbine and Riach, 2012). For instance, individuals may perceive that there are expanded or limited choices available to them based not only on gender but also on other social categories or identities, such as social class or race (Holvino, 2010). The unequal distribution of remote work options is another area where choices are less available to all workers. For instance, while remote work options are now standard among well-paid knowledge workers, remote work is much less accessible in blue-collar occupations and industries such as manufacturing or service work (Collins *et al.*, 2021). While remote work is not inherently superior to other kinds of work, it is valued by many workers because it often symbolizes greater access to flexibility and choice at work, which workers typically associate with more positive workplace experiences (Russell and Frachtenberg, 2021). Thus, self-perceptions of choice *can* reflect fundamental inequalities since perceptions of choice are rooted in the structural realities that individual workers face (Turbine and Riach, 2012).

At the same time, perceptions of choice at work are important to examine through a gendered lens specifically since a perceived lack of choice when it comes to workspace can relate to broader structures of inequity that constrain women (Dadheech and Sharma, 2023). If there are gender inequities in perceptions of choice, it can be a reflection of larger gender issues. In this paper, we theorize that workers’ perceptions of choice at work reflect the institutional constraints they face due to gendered ideas about managing paid work with domestic and childcare responsibilities (Collins *et al.*, 2021; Hobson, 2018). The aspect of choice that we measure is perceptions of choice over workspace (where individuals carry out their work).

Methods

The survey data used in our analyses were gathered in the fall of 2021 as part of an ongoing project by the authors’ research institute. To qualify for the survey, respondents had to work at organizations with at least 500 employees in one of the following countries: the United States, United Kingdom, Canada, India, or Brazil. We targeted these countries to capture an international sample of respondents representing views in the global East, West and South. We used Alchemer software to build the survey and Lucid marketplace to screen and

administer the survey. Lucid is a sample aggregator that enables direct-to-respondent sampling through its marketplace platform, reaching potential respondents via many panel providers (Coppock and McClellan, 2019).

Survey and instrumentation

Respondents received invitations to access the survey instrument. Upon entry to the survey instrument, we asked respondents for their informed consent. Additionally, the survey informed respondents that they could exit anytime. Opting out of the survey did not hurt respondents' quality scores with panel providers. We did not collect any identifiable information from the surveys that could be traced back to individual respondents (such as names or telephone numbers, for example).

After obtaining consent, the survey presented respondents with a series of questions related to various personal experiences in the workplace. For example, the survey asked respondents about their experiences with diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives. Other questions included in the survey (but not used in this analysis) covered topics such as workplace burnout, workers' experiences with leaders, engagement and various other work-related issues. Our survey also asked respondents about their domestic responsibilities (housework and childcare) outside of work, which is included in our analysis here.

We compensated respondents for their time. Payment for this survey ranged from \$1.25 to \$1.85 USD per respondent, depending on the country (adjusted for cost of living and to attract respondent interest). The survey panel providers compensated respondents for their time in the form of cash or reward cards and redeemable points. The entire survey took respondents approximately 17 minutes on average to complete. We sought 3,000 respondents, although the number of respondents from each country varied depending on availability. We ultimately recruited 858 respondents from the United States (27% of the sample), 472 respondents from Canada (15% of the sample), 795 respondents from India (25% of the sample), 605 respondents from the United Kingdom (19% of the sample) and 417 respondents from Brazil (13% of the sample). Our sampling strategy achieved a convenience sample and thus does not represent all workers in the sampled nations. Through the Lucid platform, we monitored each study closely to ensure that approximately equal numbers of self-identified women and men participated in the survey from each country of interest.

Analytic strategy

Based on our background research, we have three hypotheses for this current study. Our first hypothesis (H1) is concerned with the independent effects of variables whereas our second and third hypotheses (H2 and H3) are investigated using regressions with interaction effects. The hypotheses are as follows:

- H1. Men, along with respondents who have fewer domestic responsibilities (childcare and housework), will feel an amplified sense of choice over workspace.
- H2. Responsibilities for housework will correspond to women's and men's perceptions of choice over workspace (with less responsibility corresponding to more choice).
- H3. Among those with children, responsibilities for childcare will correspond to women's and men's perceptions of choice over workspace (with less responsibility corresponding to more choice).

We used StataMP 17 to generate all statistics, including chi-square tests and our logistic regression models. The dependent variable in our analyses captured respondent self-reports regarding whether they felt they had a choice in where they do their work ("In your current workplace, do you have a choice over where you do your work?"). While our measure of choice

concerns workspace, we also acknowledge that other aspects of choice exist and that our measure does not fully encapsulate all aspects of “choice” as it appears in feminist literature. However, workspace choice can be a useful way to measure perceptions of choice because, as we hypothesize, additional constraints (such as perceptions of domestic responsibilities) can impact how freely employees feel they can exercise their choice over workspace. Individuals’ perceptions of choice (including, but not limited to, workspace choice) can be reflective of the concrete constraints and opportunities that individuals face in their lives. Simultaneously, we also recognize that perceptions of workspace choice can be dependent upon profession, and so we controlled for current workspace in our analysis as well.

One of the leading independent variables we investigate is gender. While our survey accounted for cisgender and transgender identities, we ultimately decided to group trans-identified respondents ($n = 21$) with cisgender respondents to be respectful of all respondents’ chosen gender identities. Thus, the category “men” includes trans and cisgender men, while “women” accounts for both cisgender and transgender women. Our survey respondents included a few nonbinary individuals; however, for this analysis, we elected not to include this group since the number of respondents identifying this way was very small (fewer than ten people).

In addition to gender, we explore how housework and childcare responsibilities might be significant since previous and recent work has suggested that they may matter for perceptions of choice (Auginbaugh and Rothstein, 2022; Blair-Loy, 2005; Glass, 1988). Our models also control for workspace, education level, minoritized identity status, sexual identity and country. For workspace, we asked respondents to choose from a list of options best describing their current working conditions: working fulltime in a shared office space (“on-site”), splitting time between a physical office and working remotely (“hybrid”), working remotely since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic (“newly remote”) and working remotely since before the pandemic (“always remote”). We included workspace to control for employees outside the office or physical work sites, which likely matters for perceptions of choice. Via “minoritized identity status,” we captured workers who felt minoritized in some way, whether due to racial/ethnic identity, disability, sexual identity, or in some other way. We kept this definition broad to account for the diverse ways workers worldwide might feel minoritized (our question asked, “Do you identify as a minority?”). Further, we include sexual identity as a control variable to also account for individuals who might not have a heteronormative household set up—the type of household typically represented in the previous gender and work-family balance research (see Croft *et al.*, 2014; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 2003). Lastly, we control for country due to a lack of research using international samples to investigate this issue. While some studies have compared topics such as balancing the second shift across multiple countries (Sayer *et al.*, 2009), this is much less common than studies that draw from a single country or nation. To our knowledge, it is rare for studies to compare at least five nations worldwide (as our research does).

In the first step of our analysis, we examined descriptive statistics for our sample. Second, using chi-square tests of association, we compared our dependent variable against all other variables of choice. Third, an initial regression model explored the independent effects of our variables of interest. In the last step of our analysis, we conducted two additional regression models with interactions: the first examining the interaction between gender and housework responsibilities, and the second examining the interaction between gender and childcare responsibilities for only those caring for children in their households ($n = 2,037$).

Findings

We first ran descriptive statistics on our variables of interest. We present the full results in Table 1. Next, we ran chi-square tests of our variables against the dependent variable of

Characteristics	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative percent	Choice in the post-pandemic workplace
<i>Gender</i>				
Women	1,636	51.99	51.99	
Men	1,511	48.01	100.00	
<i>Housework</i>				
Shared responsibility	1,309	41.60	41.60	
Respondent responsible	1,253	39.82	81.41	
Partner responsible	585	18.59	100.00	
<i>Childcare</i>				
Shared responsibility	941	29.90	29.90	
No children	1,110	35.27	65.17	
Partner responsible	491	15.60	80.78	
Respondent responsible	605	19.22	100.00	
<i>Workspace</i>				
On-site	1,320	41.94	41.94	
Hybrid	665	21.13	63.08	
Always remote	318	10.10	73.18	
Newly remote	844	26.82	100.00	
<i>Minority Status</i>				
No	2,312	73.47	73.47	
Yes	835	26.53	100.00	
<i>Sexual identity</i>				
Heterosexual	2,660	84.52	84.52	
LGBTQ+	487	15.48	100.00	
<i>Education</i>				
College graduate	1,285	40.83	40.83	
Post-graduate degree	944	30.00	70.83	
Some college or trade school	520	16.52	87.35	
High school or less	398	12.65	100.00	
<i>Country</i>				
The USA	858	27.26	27.26	
Canada	472	15.00	42.26	
India	795	25.26	67.52	
The United Kingdom	605	19.22	86.75	
Brazil	417	13.25	100.00	
<i>Perceptions of work choice</i>				
No	1,372	43.60	43.60	
Yes	1,775	56.40	100.00	
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$				
** $p < 0.01$				
*** $p < 0.001$				
Source(s): †Table by authors				

Table 1.
Sample descriptive statistics†

interest (workspace choice). In all cases, the relationships between our independent or control variables and perceptions of workspace choice were highly significant (Table 2). Thus, we deemed all variables appropriate for inclusion in the regression models.

According to our initial logistic regression model, all independent variables of interest demonstrated statistical significance. The complete results of the model are available in Table 3. The pseudo- R^2 of our model was 0.23, which indicates an acceptable fit. Consistent

EDI	Characteristics	Pessimistic about choice n(%)	Optimistic about choice n(%)	Total n(%)	χ^2
Table 2. Chi-square tests comparing demographics and perceptions of workspace choice†	Gender				
	Women	793 (48)	843 (52)	1,636 (100)	(1) = 32.93***
	Men	579 (38)	932 (62)	1,511 (100)	
	Housework				
	Shared responsibility	612 (47)	697 (53)	1,309 (100)	(2) = 97.07***
	Partner responsible	611 (49)	642 (51)	1,253 (100)	
	Respondent responsible	149 (25)	436 (75)	585 (100)	
	Childcare				
	Shared responsibility	357 (38)	584 (62)	941 (100)	(3) = 291.06***
	No children	696 (63)	414 (37)	1,110 (100)	
	Partner responsible	106 (22)	385 (78)	491 (100)	
	Respondent responsible	213 (35)	392 (65)	605 (100)	
	Workspace				
	On-site	862 (65)	458 (35)	1,320 (100)	(2) = 456.21***
	Hybrid	168 (25)	497 (75)	665 (100)	
	Always remote	62 (20)	256 (80)	318 (100)	
	Newly remote	280 (33)	564 (67)	844 (100)	
	Minority status				
	No	1,081 (47)	1,231 (53)	2,312 (100)	(1) = 35.36***
	Yes	291 (35)	544 (65)	835 (100)	
	Sexual identity				
	Heterosexual	1,224 (46)	1,436 (54)	2,660 (100)	(1) = 40.87***
	LGBTQ+	148 (30)	339 (70)	487 (100)	
	Education				
	College graduate	528 (41)	757 (59)	1,285 (100)	(3) = 285.85***
	Post-graduate degree	249 (26)	695 (74)	944 (100)	
Some college or trade school	331 (64)	189 (36)	520 (100)		
High school or less	264 (66)	134 (34)	398 (100)		
Country					
The USA	463 (54)	395 (46)	858 (100)	(4) = 360.82***	
Canada	284 (60)	188 (40)	472 (100)		
India	140 (18)	655 (82)	795 (100)		
The United Kingdom	340 (56)	265 (44)	605 (100)		
Brazil	145 (35)	272 (65)	417 (100)		
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$ Source(s): †Table by authors					

Table 2.
Chi-square tests
comparing
demographics and
perceptions of
workspace choice†

with our expectations and controlling for all other variables, we found that men were more likely to express optimism around workspace choice. Additionally, we found that those who had a partner taking care of housework and childcare had amplified perceptions of choice. Interestingly, childless respondents reported diminished feelings of choice.

Characteristics	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval	Choice in the post-pandemic workplace
<hr/>			
<i>Gender</i>			
<i>Women (ref.)</i>			
Men	1.24*	1.04–1.48	
<i>Housework</i>			
<i>Shared responsibility (ref.)</i>			
Responsible for most	1.24	0.99–1.54	
Partner responsible	1.80***	1.34–2.40	
<i>Childcare</i>			
<i>Shared responsibility (ref.)</i>			
No children	0.57***	0.45–0.72	
Respondent responsible	1.26	0.94–1.69	
Partner responsible	1.51*	1.09–2.09	
<i>Workspace</i>			
<i>On-site (ref.)</i>			
Hybrid	4.97***	3.95–6.24	
Always remote	7.42***	5.39–10.31	
Newly remote	3.97***	3.24–4.87	
<i>Minority status</i>			
<i>No (ref.)</i>			
Yes	1.41**	1.16–1.71	
<i>Sexual identity</i>			
<i>Heterosexual (ref.)</i>			
LGBTQ+	1.48**	1.15–1.90	
<i>Education</i>			
<i>College graduate (ref.)</i>			
Post-graduate degree	1.19	0.96–1.47	
Some college or trade school	0.54***	0.42–0.69	
High school or less	0.49***	0.37–0.64	
<i>Country</i>			
<i>The USA (ref.)</i>			
Canada	0.75*	0.58–0.97	
India	2.50***	1.91–3.28	
The United Kingdom	0.96	0.76–1.23	
Brazil	1.64***	1.25–2.16	
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$ ** $p < 0.01$ *** $p < 0.001$			
Source(s): †Table by authors			

Table 3.
Logistic regression results comparing demographics and perceptions of workplace choice†

Table 3. Logistic regression results comparing demographics and perceptions of workspace choice†

For our next regression model (Table 4), we included an interaction between gender and housework to more fully explore the intersection of these two variables and their impact on choice. We chose women in shared-responsibility households as the reference group, as this is typically considered the standard for achieving gender egalitarianism (Gerson, 2009;

Characteristics	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
<i>Gender and housework interaction</i>		
<i>Women—shared responsibility (ref.)</i>		
Women—responsible for all or most	0.93	0.71–1.22
Women—partner responsibility	2.60***	1.63–4.15
Men—shared responsibility	1.00	0.77–1.29
Men—responsible for all or most	1.90***	1.40–2.58
Men—partner responsibility	1.60**	1.12–2.27
<i>Workspace</i>		
<i>On-site (ref.)</i>		
Hybrid	5.03***	4.00–6.33
Always remote	7.64***	5.48–10.64
Newly remote	4.06***	3.31–4.99
<i>Childcare</i>		
<i>Shared responsibility (ref.)</i>		
No children	0.56***	0.44–0.70
Respondent responsible	1.28	0.95–1.71
Partner responsible	1.56**	1.13–2.17
<i>Minority status</i>		
<i>No (ref.)</i>		
Yes	1.40**	1.15–1.70
<i>Sexual identity</i>		
<i>Heterosexual (ref.)</i>		
Lgbtq+	1.47**	1.14–1.88
<i>Education</i>		
<i>College graduate (ref.)</i>		
Post-graduate degree	1.16	0.93–1.44
Some college or trade school	0.54***	0.42–0.69
High school or less	0.48***	0.36–0.64
<i>Country</i>		
<i>The USA (ref.)</i>		
Canada	0.74*	0.57–0.96
India	2.45***	1.86–3.22
The United Kingdom	0.97	0.76–1.23
Brazil	1.62**	1.23–2.14
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$		
** $p < 0.01$		
*** $p < 0.001$		
Source(s): †Table by authors		

Table 4. Logistic regression results comparing demographics and perceptions of workspace choice with gender and housework interaction†

Hochschild, 2003). The pseudo- R^2 of this model was 0.24. Consistent with our expectations, we found that compared to women in shared responsibility households, both women and men who reported that a partner handles the housework reported heightened perceptions of choice. However, men who reported being responsible for all or more of the housework also reported amplified perceptions of choice. Lastly, we designed one final regression model that

included an interaction between gender and childcare for parents/caregivers only (Table 5). The pseudo- R^2 of this model was 0.20. Interestingly, we found that women (but not men) who had a partner primarily responsible for childcare felt more choice, although the result for men was directionally positive. Lastly, similar to the housework pattern, we found that men reporting primary responsibility for childcare were more confident that they had choice over where they did their paid work.

Choice in the
post-pandemic
workplace

Characteristics	Odds ratio	95% confidence interval
<i>Gender and childcare interaction</i>		
<i>Women—shared responsibility (ref.)</i>		
Women—responsible for all or most	1.08	0.72–1.61
Women—partner responsible	3.18***	1.68–6.01
<i>Men—shared responsibility</i>		
Men—responsible for all or most	2.77***	1.69–4.53
Men—partner responsibility	1.28	0.86–1.91
<i>Workspace</i>		
<i>On-site (ref.)</i>		
Hybrid	4.03***	3.04–5.32
Always remote	6.42***	4.17–9.87
Newly remote	3.25***	2.50–4.23
<i>Housework</i>		
<i>Shared responsibility (ref.)</i>		
Responsible for all or most	1.09	0.77–1.53
Partner responsible	1.93***	1.36–2.74
<i>Minority status</i>		
<i>No (ref.)</i>		
Yes	1.60***	1.26–2.05
<i>Sexual identity</i>		
<i>Heterosexual (ref.)</i>		
Lgbtq+	1.72**	1.23–2.39
<i>Education</i>		
<i>College graduate (ref.)</i>		
Post-graduate degree	1.27	0.98–1.65
Some college or trade school	0.48***	0.35–0.67
High school or less	0.44***	0.31–0.64
<i>Country</i>		
<i>The USA (ref.)</i>		
Canada	0.66*	0.46–0.95
India	2.18***	1.58–3.00
The United kingdom	1.00	0.72–1.38
Brazil	1.68**	1.21–2.34
Note(s): * $p < 0.05$		
** $p < 0.01$		
*** $p < 0.001$		
Source(s): †Table by authors		

Table 5.
Logistic regression
results comparing
demographics and
perceptions of
workspace choice with
gender and childcare
interaction (parents
only) †

Discussion and conclusion

In this paper, given past research into the impact of gender on work experiences and choices (see [Blair-Loy, 2005](#); [Dunatchik et al., 2021](#)), we sought to explore gender differences in worker perceptions of choice in where they work (workspace choice) on a global scale and, thus, contribute to the growing body of literature on gender equity in the workplace since 2020. Our main concern was whether respondents felt they had a *choice* when it comes to their workspace, and whether gender and domestic responsibilities constrain perceptions of choice. In addition to the importance of childcare and housework responsibilities, by including in our research an international sample, we add insight and scope to the issue. Lastly, our research also adds a valuable layer to debates around the use of “choice” in feminist research studies. While the concept of choice is not without its problems ([Sørensen, 2017](#); [Thwaites, 2017](#)), it should not be discounted entirely either, as it is an important measure through which individuals gauge their sense of opportunity and constraint. Thus, choice perceptions can be a valuable metric for researchers to capture respondents’ experiences of inequality.

In our first regression model examining the independent effects of our variables of interest, we found that women’s and caregivers’ perceptions of choice seem to line up with previous work ([Collins et al., 2021](#); [Dunatchik et al., 2021](#); [Mooi-Reci and Risman, 2021](#)). Thus, our findings lend support for our first hypothesis (H1), since men and those reporting that a partner is responsible for domestic duties reported an amplified sense of choice. Concerning gender, we theorize that our findings reflect the gendered institutional constraints facing working mothers, particularly since 67% and 71% of those in our sample reporting that a partner is responsible for all the housework and childcare (respectively) are men. These results also support previous research since the beginning of the pandemic, which has found that domestic responsibilities are disproportionately shouldered by working mothers ([Collins et al., 2021](#); [Dunatchik et al., 2021](#); [Lyttelton et al., 2020](#); [Shockley et al., 2021](#)).

Gendered ideas at the institutional level reflect who does domestic and childcare work in individual family units. These gendered ideas (and the material implications of these ideas, both at work and home) can relate to perceptions of workspace choice. Having less choice when it comes to work matters because unequal perceptions of choice can both signify and perpetuate stalled gender progress ([Gerson, 2009](#)). Further, research has shown that gender expectations, specifically, make a difference for individuals’ choices around how, when and where they work ([Blair-Loy, 2005](#); [Dadheech and Sharma, 2023](#); [Hochschild, 2003](#)). Therefore, if there are gendered differences in choice perceptions, it can both signify and perpetuate gender inequalities when it comes to work (and work-life balance).

At the same time, in our follow-up regression model exploring how gender and housework responsibilities interact, we found that there was no difference in perceptions of choice among women with primary and shared responsibility. It was only when a partner was responsible for the housework did women perceive more choice. This was also the case with childcare: only when a partner was responsible for the childcare did women feel amplified perceptions of choice. Among men, we found that men whose partners had primary responsibility for housework reported more choice. However, men who reported being primarily responsible for housework and for childcare also had amplified perceptions of choice compared to the referent group (women in shared-responsibility households). Thus, our second and third hypotheses (H2 and H3) are partially, but not fully, supported.

There may be several explanations for our findings. First, while the men in this study are working fulltime, it could be that they belong to families in which wives and/or partners are the primary (or higher-paid) earners, leaving them more confidence in their ability to choose workspace. While women tend to be at a disadvantage—and to also believe they are at a disadvantage—in households where men are the primary earners ([Gerson, 2009](#)), recent

research has found that men whose wives are the primary earners can see themselves as living up to a “caring masculinity” ideal, which can be empowering (Lee and Lee, 2018). In contrast, many mothers are held to a standard that they should “do it all” and balance work and family seamlessly; not doing so can result in a sense of failure (Hays, 1996). At the same time, it’s important that we note that among those reporting primary responsibility for housework and/or childcare, men were in the minority—36% and 34%, respectively. We cannot discern from our data whether these men come from households where their partners are the primary breadwinners, so this is an avenue for future research.

It could also be possible that some of men reporting amplified choice aren’t happy to be primarily responsible for domestic duties and are asserting their masculinity in other ways, such as reaffirming that they are in control by asserting that they have choice in the work realm despite their domestic responsibilities (see also Hochschild, 2003). It is also important to keep in mind that this sample of men is comprised of fulltime workers who typically don’t face judgment at work for being involved in domestic responsibilities in the same ways that women do. These men are often praised for trying to be involved, which may contribute to more empowerment and a sense of control and choice in their work (Deutsch and Saxon, 1998; Medved, 2016; Odenweller *et al.*, 2020). Additional qualitative research could help discern whether this is the case.

One more surprising finding from our first regression model was that overall, childless respondents reported lower perceptions of choice compared to respondents with children. These results run counter to our hypothesis (H1). We expected that childless respondents would see themselves as more geographically mobile or flexible when switching jobs and, thus, perceive themselves as having more varied options when it comes to their work (Tharenou, 2008). However, this does not seem to be the case here. Although the experiences of childless workers are arguably under-researched, extant studies find that childless workers may have less positive work experiences than their colleagues with children: childless workers often receive less time off, are expected to work harder and perceive that they are underappreciated and treated worse than their peers who are parents (Goldschmitt, 2022; Lutz, 2017; Shi and Shi, 2022; Wakabayashi and Frenkel, 2020). Thus, there may be a relationship between general feelings around the overall workplace experience and perceptions of choice for childless workers. Lastly, though we cannot cover them here due to the focus of our paper and for space concerns, several of our other control variables (including minority status and sexual identity) demonstrated statistical significance. Future research on perceptions of choice could center these variables more fully.

Though our research raises additional questions that would benefit from further investigation, our current findings have implications for policies meant to advance gender equity at work. For working women, policies that relieve some of the burden of domestic responsibilities (such as universal childcare) could help expand perceptions of choice, thus reducing the risk that women’s progress in the workplace is stalled due to perceptions that they don’t have much choice given the combination of gender expectations and domestic responsibilities (Blair-Loy, 2005; Dadheech and Sharma, 2023). More progressive leave policies could benefit men as well. As our research has shown, men who take on more domestic responsibilities feel they have *more* choice—a surprising finding that warrants more investigation itself. However, due to the history of gender expectations in the domestic sphere (as we discussed above), being involved with domestic responsibilities likely takes on a different meaning for many men in contemporary times. Thus, allowing more men the opportunity to participate in domestic work (such as through “parental”—rather than “maternity”—leave, for example) could relieve women of some of the responsibility of balancing paid work and domestic responsibilities and empower both women and men.

Our research is not without limitations. First, since our sample is one of convenience, we cannot generalize our results to all workers in the countries that we sampled. Our research is also limited because our survey was administered electronically, so potential

respondents would need access to technology and an internet connection to participate. Further, our exploration into perceptions of choice relied on perceptions of workspace choice, which can be somewhat limited by profession or current workspace. Although we controlled for this issue in our model, future studies might explore how perceptions of choice differ by gender across professions. In addition, workspace choice is just one type of choice at work, and additional types of choice disparities should be investigated. For instance, future studies might ask whether women in certain professions feel they have fewer choices around (for example) job roles, leadership opportunities and so on compared to their peers who are men. Lastly, we recognize that by taking a binary approach to gender in our analysis, we are limited in our scope when it comes to capturing potential differences and nuances between cisgender, trans and nonbinary individuals. A logical next step in future research on this topic is to recruit a more gender-diverse sample to explore the nuances of this issue across gender identities beyond the binary. Yet despite our limitations, our research still provides valuable insight into gender differences in perceptions of choice at work on an international scale.

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