

# Homework As Home Work: Mothers' Unpaid Educational Labour

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## ABSTRACT

Homework involvement represents one form of mothers' educational unpaid work that is absent in considerations of domestic labour. Using National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth survey data, we identify three homework trends that differentiate the homework activities of full-time employed mothers from the work of "at-home" mothers. We argue that these patterns reinforce class and gender divisions.

## RÉSUMÉ

Aider les enfants avec leurs devoirs représente une forme de travail éducatif non -rémunéré des mères, qui est absent lorsqu'on considère le travail domestique. En nous servant des données du Sondage national sur les enfants et les jeunes, nous identifions les trois tendances en ce qui est de l'accompagnement scolaire qui différencient les activités reliées aux devoirs des mères qui travaillent à temps plein du travail des mères qui restent à la maison. Nous discutons que ces modèles renforcent les divisions entre les sexes.

## INTRODUCTION

Most Canadian mothers of school-aged children find themselves engaged in a set of activities that support their children's schooling. Labelled "educational work," this involvement includes both school and home-based activities in which mothers attempt to regulate, monitor, and shape their children's educational careers. In this article, we focus on one type of mothers' educational unpaid work, namely their involvement in homework. Drawing on survey data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), we argue that homework is a persistent and pervasive feature of mothers' educational labour with children from grades one to ten and ought to be considered in measurements of domestic labour. Using descriptive statistics, we show three broad trends: while all mothers are involved in homework activities, at-home mothers spend more time in homework than full-time employed mothers; both employed and at "at-home" mothers spend more time in homework activities with sons than with daughters; mothers with higher education seem to be able to translate their educational work into higher educational outcomes for their children than do mothers with only high school degrees. By pointing out some of the broad trends that characterize mothers' unpaid educational

work, we indicate how this largely unexamined and undocumented form of domestic labour reproduces gender and class social divisions.

## MOTHERS' UNPAID EDUCATIONAL WORK

Most Canadian mothers who are employed, as well as mothers who work "at home," maintain primary responsibility for domestic labour. For employed mothers, balancing the demands of the "double day" has proven to be extremely difficult as both home and work remain "greedy," labour-intensive institutions (Arai 2000; Brush 1999; Mandell 2001). In Canada, domestic labour has been widely acknowledged as a gendered form of labour which reproduces women's subordination by increasing their workload at home and subsequently diminishing their opportunities for advancement in the paid labour force (Luxton and Corman 2001). Previous studies of domestic labour have enumerated its childcare components (Friendly and Lero 2002), its caring components (Kaplan and Davidson 2002), its emotional components (Baines, Evans and Neysmith 1991) and its home maintenance components (Luxton 2001).

Yet, within the sociology of the family and particularly in feminist renderings, parental involvement in children's homework has largely

escaped scrutiny from those interested in questions of unpaid work. Homework is rarely considered in definitions of unpaid work and it makes few appearances in accounts of domestic labour. This omission lies in stark contrast to sociological and psychological studies of education where parental involvement remains a sturdy and frequently examined concept. This lack of attention has two consequences. It conflates parental involvement with mothers' unpaid educational work while simultaneously denying the active work of mothers in support of their children's schooling. The "genderless" parent emerges in the psychology and sociology of education as discursively erasing mothers' unpaid educational work and rendering invisible the enormous amount of time, effort and energy mothers of school-age children expend in homework activities. By bringing together both sets of literature, we hope to make the case that mothers' involvement in homework be included in future investigations of unpaid labour.

**ACCOMPLISHING  
HOMEWORK/PRODUCING THE  
EDUCATIONALLY "SUCCESSFUL"  
CHILD**

Educational work emerged in the early 1900s as a key component of domesticity. The image of the "domestic angel" in the household (Lewis 1986) expanded to include new definitions of mothering as middle-class women were removed from paid labour after both the First and Second World Wars and shunted back into the home. Intensive mothering, associated with women's relegation to the private sphere, placed new educational obligations on mothers to aid in the cognitive as well as the emotional development of their children. Norms of "social adjustment" increasingly incorporated ideas of educational achievement. "Good" children became conflated with notions of socially well-adjusted and scholastically accomplished children.

Intensive mothering makes mothers responsible for children's academic performance. Definitions of mothers' educational work has expanded slowly from narrow ideas of exacting obedience from children to explicit behavioural demands of schools, to more broad definitions in which mothers are expected to anticipate and

address children's perceived educational needs. This shift from mothers-as-domestic-caretakers to mothers-as-social-and-cognitive-developers meant that by the 1950s, mothers not only had to ensure that their children were dressed, fed and arrived on time to school but also that mothers had to take on explicit teaching tasks through the organization and regulation of homework (Kealey 1979; Strong-Boag and Fellman 1986; Trofimenkoff and Prentice 1977).

This historic redefinition of mothering represents an enormous shift in educational expectations accomplished only through a simultaneous expansion of mothers' unpaid domestic labour. Today, mothers' educational work has grown to include a host of unpaid tasks including anticipating, monitoring, scheduling, regulating, arranging, and accomplishing both social and cognitive activities, all in support of children's educational success. Mothers complain that they feel it is not enough to ensure homework is completed. Qualitative studies reveal that mothers, especially those of primary school-aged children, feel they must engage in a range of athletic, musical, community and scholastic adventures to create talented and competitive children (Reay 1989a; Griffith and Smith 1990).

**RISING EDUCATIONAL EXPECTATIONS  
AND CHANGING PATTERNS OF  
EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT**

Expanding definitions of mothers' educational work corresponds with a general rise in educational expectations across the country. Scott Davies has shown us that parents across Canada have high educational expectations for their children as measured by the almost universal desire of parents for children to achieve some type of post-secondary education (Davies, in press). Canadians in general seem to share the view that post-secondary education is important. In recent years, record numbers have enrolled in post-secondary educational institutions. Among younger cohorts, levels of educational attainment are especially high (Bouchard and Zhao 2000; de Broucker and Lavallee 1998).

The trend toward higher educational aspirations and achievement is more dramatic for girls than for boys (Butlin 1999; Trusty 1998).

American data indicate that girls have higher grades, are more involved in high school activities and have higher educational aspirations than boys (Hossler and Stage 1992). Canada stands out as one of the few countries in which more women than men achieve a post-secondary level of education (de Broucker and Underwood 1998). Within Canada, women more likely than men to attend university (46% vs 40%) and college (50% vs 46%) (Knighton and Mirza 2002). Despite gender differences, more Canadian adults than ever obtain post-secondary education. This makes Canadian adults more likely to obtain a post-secondary credential than adults in other countries (de Broucker and Underwood 1998).

Educational accomplishment is not, however, automatic. It must be worked at and what happens in the home is significant in promoting children's academic school performance (Pena 2000). Mothers are held responsible for constructing positive home learning environments in which children are socialized to take on the role of learner. This work takes up considerable time, commitment and energy as modern-day mothers now have to work intensely at supporting their children's schooling (Reay 1989b). It is in and through their reproduction of unpaid educational work that mothers reproduce social class. Just like other forms of domestic labour, mothers' unpaid educational work confers different class experiences and outcomes for different groups of children. Ironically homework, rather than facilitating educational equity, may contribute to the reproduction process in which the structure of educational disadvantage is maintained.

**THREE ANALYTIC QUESTIONS ABOUT  
MOTHERS' UNPAID EDUCATIONAL  
WORK**

To explore mothers' involvement in their children's homework we considered two of the complaints voiced by critics of the homework concept that it adds to an already over-burdened domestic role for mothers and that it disadvantages children whose mothers lack the cultural and social capital to construct a productive home learning environment (Kralovec and Buell 2001). Constraints on mothers' available time and as well as limits to the family's cultural, social and financial capital resources are considered.

The data for this study were drawn from the National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (NLSCY), a survey of Canada's children which is designed to document their growth and development from infancy through age 25. In addition to describing children's growth characteristics, the NLSCY collects information on family and school contexts. The first NLSCY cycle was begun in 1994 and data now are available from Cycle 3, involving children up to 15 years of age. We restricted our analysis of Cycle 3 data to the response of mothers of children enrolled in grades 1 through 10. These years represent the period during which mothers are most involved in facilitating their children's adjustment to school entry and transition from elementary to high school.

In our analysis we pose three questions. The first question connects parental aspirations with time available. Given the rise in parental aspirations for children's educational achievement across all social classes, do mothers operationalize their aspirations by committing time to help their children achieve educationally? Mothers' engagement in homework activities represents one way to operationalize parental commitment of time.

The second question connects time available with mothers' unpaid domestic labour. We wonder if mothers who are employed full time outside the home are constrained in the amount of time they can devote to their children's homework activities compared with at-home mothers, mothers working full time in the home as domestic labourers.

The third question investigates the resources that mothers commit to operationalizing their aspirations for their children's educational achievement. This query has two components concerning issues of gender and class. Assuming that all mothers desire educational success for their children, we wonder if all Canadian mothers are equal in their ability to activate resources in support of their children's schooling? Here we indicate available resources with a measure of family socio-economic status. Further, we wonder if there are gender differences in the ways mothers engage with their children in homework activities? Do mothers treat sons differently than daughters? If so, does this differential treatment spring from different expectations for boys and girls or does differential treatment occur as mothers respond to different

performance needs?

We characterize this initial foray into the NLSCY data as a "problem-finding" or "problem-identification" exercise. Our aim is both descriptive and suggestive. We describe three broad analytic patterns and suggest ways these trends might enlarge our understandings of unpaid work.

#### **HOW ARE MOTHERS INVOLVED IN UNPAID EDUCATIONAL WORK? ISSUES OF HELPING AND MONITORING**

There is an enormous amount of literature in education that investigates links between children's academic achievement and adult support of schooling in the home. It reminds us that the process of socializing children to the role of student is necessarily complex and occupies the efforts of both parents and teachers. Parents play a key role in developing children's ability to become autonomous learners through their monitoring and encouragement of academic effort and the general valuing of school achievement. Promoting academic success in children is usually measured by scales of parental involvement. Parental involvement is defined as a range of activities in which parents engage in support of their children's schooling. It includes both school-based (attending parent-teacher meetings, driving on field trips, volunteering at school, serving on a parent board, holding informal conversations) and home-based involvement (reviewing the child's work, monitoring the child's progress, helping with homework, discussing school events or course issues, providing enrichment activities pertinent to school success, talking by phone with the teacher).

In constructing positive home learning environments, parents engage in helping with homework assignments and in monitoring children's study behaviour. These activities establish clear educational expectations and the accompanying structure within which they can be accomplished. Parental monitoring is considered effective if it leads to self-monitoring and self-management strategies which enable children to become autonomous, self-directed learners. In particular, parental involvement in homework becomes the primary way in which parents construct positive home learning environments that facilitate children's academic success. "Homework

involvement" includes such parental actions as monitoring school performance by establishing explicit or implicit rules regarding homework, establishing study routines, checking that homework is completed, checking on children's performance and behaviour in school, setting limits on TV watching, and setting limits on spending time with friends (Scott-Jones 1995).

While we recognize that fathers and mothers may both be involved with children's homework, in this paper we concentrate only on mothers' unpaid education work. We assume here that it is mostly mothers, rather than "parents," who take up the task of homework. Hence, we searched the NLSCY data for indicators of mothers' commitment to homework activities. One such indicator appears in the NLSCY question "How often do you check [child's name] homework or provide help with homework?" This item combines two of the critical tasks (monitoring and instruction) that comprise mothers' role in facilitating development of their children's homework skills (Sweet and Mandell, *in press*).

We plotted the involvement of Canadian mothers in their children's homework for a sample of children in grades one through ten. We can see from Figure 1 (see Appendix) that, following an initially intense period of involvement in monitoring and helping with their children's homework, mothers gradually disengage from daily homework activities. This trend continues over the intermediate and middle school years.

Figure 1 confirms that the vast majority, some 80%, of Canadian mothers are engaged in homework on a daily basis with their children in Grade 1. This indicates that Canadian mothers recognize their role in academically socializing children and that they commit a great deal of time, especially in the early grades, to this job. Creating academically accomplished students does demand intense and persistent involvement of mothers with their children at the younger grades. We know from other studies that mothers begin the process of homework involvement early in the child's school career. Introducing young children to school apparently involves many complex activities to ensure that children adapt cognitively and emotionally to the demands of the school system. Middle-class mothers especially undertake these tasks because they understand that they are held

responsible for family educational work. Homework involvement becomes a principal vehicle through which they foster in children the self-regulating study behaviours needed for continuing school success (Ho and Willms 1996; Baker and Stevenson 1986). Accounts of "homework" in the primary grades are common (Kralovec and Buehl 2000 & 2001). These often are informal activities in which usually mothers and the young child both engage in the learning task. For example, mothers may listen to the child read or together they may construct a *papier-mâché* character from a story. Clearly, homework involvement is widely recognized as an important part of mothering, especially in the primary grades.

The initially high levels of involvement shown in Figure 1 are maintained throughout the primary grades, from Grades 1 to 3, but over the course of the children's school careers, mothers gradually disengage. As children adapt to school, mothers apparently gradually withdraw while still remaining vigilant throughout the course of elementary school. In Grade One, 80% of mothers say they are involved in daily homework activities while by Grade 8, only about 25% of mothers engage in daily homework. Thus, during the child's school career, mothers' involvement changes in intensity as it diminishes throughout elementary and high school.

While our data reveal a shift in the quantity of mothers' daily involvement, other studies show a corresponding shift in the type of homework involvement that takes place. Mothers' daily involvement in homework changes from direct involvement in the primary grades to more indirect involvement in monitoring activities from grades 4 to the end of high school. This change in quantity and type of mothers' homework involvement begins when children enter the intermediate grades. Teachers note that sometime in the intermediate grades, the nature of homework alters. Parents at this stage may help their children plan a study schedule, and remind them to begin or complete their assignments, or read over or edit their children's homework. The overall intention of parents who are systematically and consistently involved with their children's home study practices seems to be to instill the skill and dispositions toward study that characterize the autonomous and self-regulating learner (Cooper 1994, 2001a). The

gradual decline of parents' direct involvement in monitoring homework as children mature reflects the fact that most adolescents slowly acquire the ability to regulate their own study behaviour and eventually most require relatively little parental guidance (Cooper, Lindsay et al. 1998; Hoover-Dempsey, Bassler and Burow 1995).

The pattern of mothers' engagement shown in Figure 1 raises important questions concerning the amount of homework involvement found during the two critical transitions in children's schooling, namely school entry and the passage from elementary to secondary school. Parents' attempts to monitor their children's homework and accompany regulatory demands with emotional support and encouragement can make a significant contribution to the intellectual growth and development of young children and adolescents. Throughout the child's school career, parents may accompany their regulatory homework demands with affective praise and encouragement. Parents usually continue to monitor and encourage their children's academic efforts throughout the high school grades. Parental encouragement remains important. Cook and Willms (2002) in their Canadian study have shown a significant relationship across the grades between "affective engagement" and children's adjustment to school. Other research has shown the importance of parental emotional support to the development of children's autonomy. Praise, modeling a positive attitude towards academic work, and recruiting the child's interest and persistence in the homework task develop the dispositions and attitudes that underlie academic success (Stright, Neitzel et al. 2001).

In describing this first finding, we emphasize that mothers' daily involvement in their children's homework represents the primary way in which mothers construct home academic cultures aimed at producing academically successful children. Having established the primacy and significance of daily homework involvement, we now turn our attention to a consideration of material factors that structure mothers' engagement. In particular, we examine time and resources as two key elements that affect the type of involvement that constitutes the home learning environment. We argue that Canadian mothers are materially differentiated by their capacity to successfully construct an effective home learning environment.

In the next section, we examine the significance of two types of material conditions - time and resources as they affect mothers' ability to construct home learning environments.

**DO MATERIAL CONDITIONS SHAPE  
MOTHERS' UNPAID EDUCATIONAL  
WORK? ISSUES OF TIME AND  
RESOURCES**

In this section, we respond to our second and third analytic queries by investigating two material conditions that we think shape mothers' involvement in unpaid educational work - time and resources. With respect to time, we discuss the ways in which the time that mothers have available for unpaid educational work might affect their daily involvement in homework activities. While the time mothers have available to commit to the homework task can vary for several reasons, one major constraint on available time is mothers' employment status. Those who are working outside the home presumably have less discretionary time than those who are home-makers.

In addition, we discuss the possible ways in which different social class resources underpin mothers' unpaid educational work. Differences in the resources mothers can bring to their role as guides and mentors of homework are broadly indicated by the families' socio-economic level. The SES (Socio-Economic Status) composite index measures the financial, cultural and social capital resources of the family. In relation to structuring the home learning environment - and mothers' involvement in homework - higher levels of SES are assumed to be associated with an appreciation for learning and an understanding of school norms and practice.

Based on these time and resource distinctions, we explore mothers' response to the perceived homework needs of their children. Their grade level, gender, and achievement in math indicate differences in children's homework needs. In the previous section, we talked about the relationship between mothers' involvement in homework activities and children's school grade by noting that as children mature, they gain the skills needed to become autonomous learners. Mothers' help and guidance in dealing with homework assignments consequently declines and we see their

general disengagement across the grades - in general, a "developmentally-appropriate" response (Sweet & Mandell, in press).

Here we consider if and how gender affects mothers' use of their available time to become involved in their children's homework. We examine the question of whether or not mothers' work is gendered in two ways. As shown in the literature, educational work falls disproportionately to mothers rather than fathers. Our analysis explores the further possibility that mothers' educational work is gendered by being enacted differently with sons than with daughters. To the extent this obtains, mothers' educational work reproduces class advantages for their children while simultaneously reproducing the structural conditions that maintain their own gender subordination.

Finally, we examine how responsive mothers are to individual performance differences in children. Mothers are aware of any academic difficulties their children may be having and may be expected to intervene accordingly. In the primary grades, for example, mothers' concerns centre on children acquiring reading skills. In the intermediate and middle school grades, children's performance in other curricular areas becomes increasingly important. While most children become competent readers, mathematics is problematic for many children (Lauzon 2002). In analyzing the NLSCY data, we consequently focus on achievement differences in mathematics, highlighting the performance of those in the lowest quartile on a test of math computation.

To describe how material conditions might shape mothers' involvement in educational work with their children, in particular to capture variations in relation to time and class, we construct two tables that profile the situations of employed and at-home mothers and the different SES levels of their families. In each, we profile mothers' daily involvement with their children's homework not only in relation to children's grade level but also as a response to their child's gender and to their child's performance in mathematics.

Table 1 (see Appendix) presents the results of the comparison between employed and at-home mothers' daily involvement in homework. It shows us that the trend towards disengagement is seen for both employed and at-home mothers, although the at-home mothers' level of involvement is somewhat

higher in relation to all individual differences included in the analysis - children's grade, gender, and achievement.

With respect to grade, greater involvement by at-home mothers in the primary grades continues through the middle school grades - 25% of at-home mothers with children enrolled in grades 7-10 are involved versus 18% of employed mothers. This indicates that at-home mothers remain more involved during the period in which children make the transition from elementary to middle school.

Differences in mothers' response to male and female children are quite marked among at-home mothers. More mothers in this group are involved with their male children (53%) than with their female children (46%). Employed mothers are less involved overall and their involvement is not strongly differentiated by the child's gender.

Both employed and at-home mothers appear to respond to children's achievement in their homework involvement. Both at-home (65%) and employed mothers (60%) are involved with their low-achieving children. More at-home mothers (41%) than employed mothers (31%) commit time to children whose math achievement is average and above average. For employed mothers with more than one child, the high level of involvement with their low-achieving children may be sustained at the expense of those children who are not having difficulty in their math program. Or, it may be that academically capable children of employed mothers acquire greater independence and autonomy.

**DOES SES AFFECT MOTHERS' INVOLVEMENT IN HOMEWORK ACTIVITIES? THE SOCIAL CAPITAL OF MOTHERS**

The second material condition that we think shapes mothers' involvement in homework activities is social class. There is extensive literature that suggests that a family's socio-economic status (SES) affects parents' ability to respond to their children's home learning needs. Parents with more social capital, including material resources, are considered more likely to provide home learning environments that enable children to succeed academically. To the extent that the availability of books, computer access, and a quiet study space is tied to family income, the latter offers a useful

index of the family's capacity to support home study. In fact, most Canadian parents report they possess these essentials. Over 90% have content-relevant books in the home and a similar percentage has set aside a specific study space for their children. A somewhat lower proportion of families have purchased a computer for their child's use. However, this varies by child's age - while relatively few primary school children use a computer, more than 80% of adolescent children have access to a computer in the home (Sweet, Anisef and Lin 2001). To date, Canadian data do not substantiate the finding that the sheer number of material possessions in families actually makes much of a difference in the achievement outcomes of children.

What does appear to affect children's educational achievement is the social and cultural capital of families. Social class is thought to differentiate families according to the value they attach to a family's involvement in educational work, especially homework. This finding is thought to reflect parents' educational background and their personal experiences with the educational system suggesting that parents with higher education have more knowledge and make more efficacious use of their knowledge to promote their children's academic achievement. Thus, families differ not only in their possession of economic capital but also in terms of the social and cultural capital they make available to their children. The latter comprises a complex of dispositions towards achievement as well as an understanding of important social codes that operate in classrooms. The lack of these in lower-SES families frequently disadvantages children (Lam 1997; Leung, Lau and Lam 1998; Otto and Atkinson 1997; Pena 2000).

Table 2 shows the relationship between SES and mothers' homework involvement in terms of mothers' responsiveness to the characteristics and needs of their children. It indicates an obvious awareness among parents at all SES levels of the importance of homework involvement. This is especially so when children are in the primary grades where some 70% of parents are involved. As previously indicated, mothers gradually withdraw from involvement in their children's homework. In Table 2, this trend is relatively uniform across SES categories. More mothers in the upper SES group do, however, disengage when their children move to

the middle-school grades.

Differences by SES level are more apparent in relation to the gender of the child. Mothers in all SES categories spend about the same amount of homework time with their daughters. The proportion of mothers in the middle and lower SES groups, 49% and 48% respectively, who commit time to helping their male children with homework assignments is greater than that of mothers in the upper SES groups where 41% are involved in the homework of their male and female children. The different pattern of mothers' homework involvement with males across SES groups suggests that lower and middle SES level mothers are attending more to the poor performance and perceived greater need of their male children. An alternative explanation would suggest that male children's school performance is still more valued by these mothers. Either way, mothers in the upper SES category appear equally involved in homework activities with their male and female children. Male children from upper SES families may not be given particular priority, or based on their school performance, may be perceived by their mothers as not requiring more attention than their daughters.

Mothers at all SES levels devote nearly twice as much time to children who are performing poorly in math. The proportion of lower SES mothers who are involved in assisting children with their math homework (65%) parallels that of mothers in the middle (61%) and upper (59%) SES categories. Given that low-achieving children of the middle and upper-classes are much more likely to continue on to post-secondary education than the low-achieving children of the working-classes, this finding suggests that middle and upper-class parents may be more effective in their daily involvement in activating social capital in support of their children's achievement.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

What can we conclude from this limited and initial problem-identification foray into the NLSCY data? First, our analysis identifies and describes general patterns in mothers' homework activities that casts some light on their unpaid educational work. Certainly a more extensive, multivariate exploration is needed to clarify relationships among antecedent variables.

Second, basic to a future examination of mothers' unpaid educational work, as represented by their involvement in children's homework, would be the connection between class and gender antecedents, the homework activities of parents, and their effects on educational outcomes. Relationships between SES, parental involvement, and children's educational outcomes are complex. Previous studies have established strong links between SES and educational outcomes but the association between SES and parental involvement is much less sure (Cook and Willms 2002; Ho and Willms 1996). A more complete treatment of how mothers' homework involvement mediates the relationship between family SES and children's achievement is necessary.

Third, with respect to gender, mothers with sufficient time appear to respond to the academic needs of boys. This finding is consistent with research that documents girls' higher educational aspirations and superior school performance. Gender differences across levels of SES suggest that boys from more advantaged backgrounds are performing academically as well as girls and so presumably they require less attention.

Our description of three broad analytic patterns encourages further examination of mothers' involvement in homework. As an aspect of mothers' unpaid educational work, homework activities remain poorly conceptualized and relatively unexamined in the family-work literature. Studies on work-life balance have detailed the constraints on mothers' time imposed by waged work (Duxbury and Higgins 2001) but studies of mothers' unpaid work have not considered homework as a significant component of the caring role. The emerging partnership between home and school, in which parents are required to assume greater responsibility for their children's readiness and preparedness for classroom learning, adds significantly to the child care responsibilities of mothers, especially those employed outside the home (Sweet, Anisef & Lin 2001). Why are mothers, rather than fathers, held responsible for preparing children for school and helping them at home? What role does the school play in perpetuating this gendered expectation? Within the home, how are children's responses to parental homework help also gendered? Do girls respond differently than boys to parental intervention (Abby,

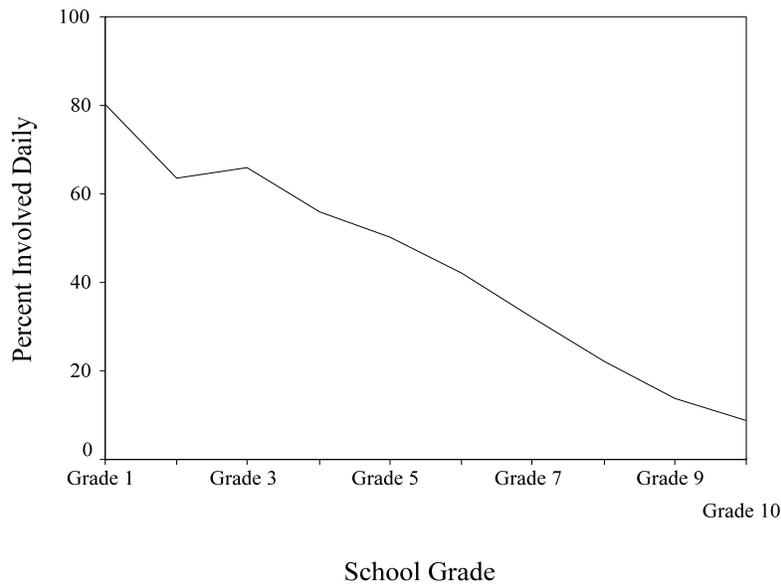
Castle and Reynolds 1998)? Analyses of the contribution of mothers' homework involvement to the construction and maintenance of the home learning environment, their interaction with the school as well as associated costs to family harmony and effects on children's school achievement, would begin to address these questions.

In this paper, we argue that mothers' educational unpaid work, specifically homework activities, ought to be considered in any measure of domestic labour. Recent evidence suggests that, rather than diminishing, mothers' educational work has been increasing over the past three decades (Cooper 2001b). Homework has become a contested topic as mothers, and increasingly, fathers, protest the amount of time they are expected to commit in support of their children's schooling. As recent critics of homework have pointed out, one of the unanticipated consequences

of unpaid educational work is its implication in reproducing class and gender inequities (Kralovec and Buehl 2001). It is through their engagement in these educational unpaid work tasks that mothers may reproduce class advantages for their children and reinforce the conditions of their own subordination. Rarely does anyone question whether or not the home should even be expected to help. To the extent that class differences in the construction of effective home learning environments influence children's academic achievement and post-secondary opportunities, mothers' involvement in homework activities becomes one of the primary ways in which social advantages are reproduced. Rather than facilitating educational equity, ironically, homework becomes implicated in processes that structure educational disadvantage.

**APPENDIX**

**Figure 1**  
**Percentage of Mothers Involved with Homework on Daily Basis**



Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth (Cycle 3)

**Table 1**  
**Mothers' Employment and Their Response to Daily Homework Needs of Children**

Children's Characteristics	Mothers' Employment Status	
	Employed (% Daily Involvement)	At Home (% Daily Involvement)
<b>Grade:</b>		
Primary (1-3) *	68	73
Intermediate (4-6)	49	51
Middle-High (7-10) *	18	25
<b>Child's Gender:</b>		
Male *	43	53
Female *	40	46
<b>Math Achievement:</b>		
Lowest Quartile (Q1)	60	65
Other Quartiles (Q2-Q4) *	31	41

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Cycle 3.  
Note: Employed Mothers are 75% of sample.  
\* indicates significant Cramer's V ( $p < .01$ ) for weighted sample ( $n = 10,196$ ).

**Table 2**  
**Family Resources and Mothers Response to Daily Homework Needs of Children**

Children's Characteristics	Family Socio-Economic Status		
	Lower (% Daily Involvement)	Middle (% Daily Involvement)	Upper (% Daily Involvement)
<b>Grade:</b>			
Primary (1-3)	69	71	69
Intermediate (4-6)	51	49	49
Middle-High (7-10) *	22	22	17
<b>Child's Gender:</b>			
Male *	48	49	41
Female	43	42	41
<b>Achievement:</b>			
Lowest Quartile (Q1)	65	61	59
Other Quartiles (Q2-Q4)	34	33	34

Source: National Longitudinal Survey of Children and Youth, Cycle 3.  
Note: Lower, Middle, and Upper SES families are, respectively: 25%, 36%, and 39% of sample.  
\* indicates significant Cramer's V ( $p < .01$ ) for weighted sample ( $n = 10,196$ ).

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