# Intensive mothering and the perpetuation of gender inequality: Evidence from a mixed methods research

Catherine Verniers, Virginie Bonnot, Yvette Assilaméhou-Kunz

▶ **To cite this version:**

Catherine Verniers, Virginie Bonnot, Yvette Assilaméhou-Kunz. Intensive mothering and the perpetuation of gender inequality: Evidence from a mixed methods research. Acta Psychologica, 2022, 10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103614 . hal-03668161

**HAL Id: hal-03668161**

**https://u-paris.hal.science/hal-03668161**

Submitted on 14 May 2022

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

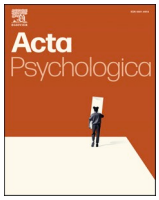
L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

Acta Psychologica 227 (2022) 103614

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Acta Psychologica

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/actpsy



# Intensive mothering and the perpetuation of gender inequality: Evidence from a mixed methods research☆

Catherine Verniers [a,*], Virginie Bonnot [a], Yvette Assilaméhou-Kunz [b]

[a] Université Paris Cité, Laboratoire de Psychologie Sociale, 71 avenue Edouard Vaillant, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France
[b] Université Sorbonne Nouvelle, Institut de Recherches Médias, Culture, Communication et Numérique, 4 rue des Irlandais, 75005 Paris, France

ARTICLE INFO

*Keywords:*
Ideology
Mothering
Gender roles
Computer-mediated communication
System justification
Vicarious dissonance

ABSTRACT

Intensive mothering is a cultural model of appropriate childrearing according to which mothers should unselfishly make a tremendous investment in their child. Using a mixed methodology, we examined the relevance of this ideology to understand the persistence of gender inequality. A content analysis of the most popular French mommy blogs indicates that this ideology remains commonplace, and has even incorporated contemporary concerns regarding sustainable development. Besides the expected themes of the sacredness of the child, the primary responsibility of the mother, and the use of intensive methods for all aspects of childrearing, the analysis of blog posts highlights new themes, including the sacredness of home, need for balance, and the praise of fathers. Furthermore, mommy blogs, as public online diaries involving everyday experience, prompt mothers to confess their failure to comply with intensive mothering demands and, at the same time, to reaffirm their commitment to its principles. Social influence is evidenced by the comments in response to the posts, which demonstrate polarization toward intensive mothering among the readers. A survey study further demonstrates that this ideology is positively related to a series of gender hierarchy-enhancing beliefs and attitudes. As a whole, the present research indicates that intensive mothering should be considered a system justifying ideology, while mommy blogs provide a platform for its diffusion and strengthening.

## 1. Introduction

Women's labor force participation has improved considerably over the past 50 years in most Western countries. Paradoxically, the decline of the male breadwinner model in favor of dual earner families has not translated into a rebalancing of household activities: Women remain largely in charge of unpaid domestic work, and parenthood worsen this gap (e.g., Barnes, 2015; Craig & Mullan, 2010; European Commission, 2018). Improving our understanding of the maintenance of this gender inequality is an important issue given that childcare and housework obligations restrict women's paid work opportunities (OECD, 2017), with a direct loss of economic capital (Gershuny, 2018). A number of scholars sought to document the factors underlying the division of housework between partners, identifying the interplay of individuals' and couples' characteristics—e.g., spouses' earnings, work time and beliefs regarding gender roles—and macro-level features—gender equality at a national level (for reviews see Coltrane, 2000; Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010). Yet, little is known regarding the broader, ideological bases for the persistence of traditional gender roles within the private sphere. Our aim in the present study is to highlight that intensive mothering (IM), an ideology that holds the individual mother primarily responsible for childrearing (Hays, 1996), has adapted over time—in both its content and its dissemination channels—with the consequence that the model of appropriate childrearing ultimately contributes to the maintenance of gender hierarchy. We used a mixed methods research design to document the continuities and changes in IM ideology, and its relationship with hierarchy-enhancing beliefs and attitudes. In addition, our focus on mommy blogs allows for an examination of some features of social influence between bloggers and readers that might uphold IM ideology.

☆ This research was supported by a grant from the Cité du Genre, IdEx Université de Paris, ANR-18-IDEX-0001, and a grant from the Agence Nationale de la Recherche and the Ministère de l'Enseignement Supérieur, de la Recherche et de l'Innovation (ANR-19-CE41-0001-01; research project URGEN).

* Corresponding author at: Institut de psychologie, Université Paris Cité, 71 avenue Edouard Vaillant, 92100 Boulogne-Billancourt, France.
*E-mail addresses:* catherine.verniers@u-paris.fr (C. Verniers), virginie.bonnot@u-paris.fr (V. Bonnot), yvette.assilamehou-kunz@sorbonne-nouvelle.fr (Y. Assilaméhou-Kunz).

https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103614
Received 27 January 2022; Received in revised form 21 April 2022; Accepted 9 May 2022
Available online 13 May 2022
0001-6918/© 2022 The Authors. Published by Elsevier B.V. This is an open access article under the CC BY-NC-ND license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/).

### 1.1. Intensive mothering ideology

#### 1.1.1. Characterization

According to Hays (1996), intensive mothering refers to a cultural model of appropriate mothering structured around three principles: First, children are considered sacred, innocent, and inherently loving and trusting, and as such, should be protected from the "corrupt" outside world. This is achieved through intensive methods, which represents the second pillar of IM. More precisely, appropriate childrearing is emotionally absorbing: children must receive continued and unconditional maternal love, evidenced by permanent loving attention. The method is inherently child-centered; that is, the only proper conduct is to follow the child's lead. Appropriate childrearing is labor-intensive and time-consuming. Thus, a mother's day-to-day job is to educate herself as to the latest knowledge regarding child's development. However, given the uniqueness of each child, she must also learn to identify the unique needs of her child and to adapt her response to her own child's needs and desires. Intensive methods are expert-guided, first because mothers must educate themselves based on expert advice, and second because they have to consult qualified professionals should particular problems arise. These recommended methods are financially expensive: besides the cost of having recourse to expert-guidance (including, but not limited to, pediatricians, child psychologists and psychiatrists), the right toys, the richest activities and the best learning experiences, intensive methods imply lost wages since mothers are expected to cut back their paid work hours to spend more time with their children. Third and finally, according to IM cultural model of appropriate childrearing, mothers are primarily responsible for fulfilling this mandate. Motherhood is deemed to be an instinctive and deep-seated drive in women. Fathers, as a result of their perceived incompetence, can only provide additional help.

Not only is appropriate mothering governed by a series of rules, it is ultimately considered a moral enterprise: mothers are expected to be selflessly committed to preserving the child's purity and innocence in contrast to the logic of self-interested market relations. Implicit in this is the belief that insofar as children are appropriately raised, they can only make the world a better place. As such, IM ideology posits that raising a child is one of the most important things a woman can do for society, and in any event, is more worthwhile than paid work.

#### 1.1.2. IM ideology and gender inequalities

Hays (1996) acknowledged that IM is neither natural nor necessary. IM is a social construction pertaining to ideological coercion, which "operates to convince women that they want (or at least should want) to commit themselves to a task that, in fact, ultimately serves those with the power to manipulate and control ideas" (p.165). The question remains as to why members of a disadvantaged group, namely women, would endorse a set of beliefs that adversely affect them. We rely on system justification theory (Jost, 2018; Jost & Banaji, 1994) to suggest that IM is a system justifying ideology which imbues the gender status quo with validity and legitimacy. Indeed, system justifying ideologies allow for people to feel relatively satisfied with their situation (i.e., serves a palliative function; Jost & Hunyady, 2002), and to convert what *is* into what *should be* (Kay et al., 2009). Interestingly, IM has been shown to be related to other system-justifying ideologies, namely social conservatism and neoliberal ideology (Girerd et al., 2022).

In sum, IM should be considered an apparatus in the Foucauldian perspective: IM ideology encompasses knowledge—scientific statements as well as moral contentions—that regulates individual behavior which, in turn, entrenches the hegemonic power in the entire social body. In that respect, studying how hegemonic power pervades society implies considering the media used for its dissemination: "the important point [is] to locate the forms of power, the channels it takes, and the discourses it permeates in order to reach the most individual modes of behavior" (Foucault, 1976, our translation). Following this view, the present research aimed at studying social media, and more specifically mommy blogs, as a potential contemporary venue for discourse on IM (Flanagin, 2017; Wright et al., 2015).

#### 1.1.3. Contemporary expression of IM ideology

The argument that proper mothering takes the form of IM originates from Hays' combined analysis of historical records, best-selling child-rearing manuals and interviews she conducted with American mothers in the early '90s. The ideology was recently reexamined, leading researchers to acknowledge that IM still provides a hegemonic model of appropriate mothering which has expanded to other Western cultures (Ennis, 2014), including France (Paltineau, 2014). However, the authors highlighted a shift in attitudes toward the experts, who are more often discarded nowadays. Changes in sources for parenting information account for this shift: social media allows parallel dialogue among mothers, and their experience is shared and valued, making mothers the new experts.

### 1.2. Intensive mothering in mommy blogging

Social media refers to online tools that support social interaction between people. The growing body of literature on family and information and communication technologies that has emerged in recent years indicates that parents use social media as a source for parenting information (for a review, see Dworkin et al., 2018). In particular, first-time mothers have been found to participate in blogging to connect with others and achieve social support (McDaniel et al., 2012). Distinct from other online communication, mommy blogs consist of everyday experience written up by women "for whom parenthood is a key identity component" (Morrison, 2010), with posts presented in reverse chronological order. Sometimes referred to as digital confessions or online diaries, mommy blogs facilitate discussion by allowing comments and interactions. Mothers' motivations for blogging include developing connections with others, enhancing mental stimulation, achieving self-validation, contributing to the welfare of others, and developing skills and abilities (Pettigrew et al., 2016). Mothers report consulting blogs to seek information and advice about parenting, to identify problems their children might have, to resolve conflicting parenting guidance, to explore different family perspectives, to confirm their views and practices as mothers, and to check that their child's development is normal (Jang et al., 2015). Therefore, mommy blogs provide normative cultural models of parenting.

It has been suggested that "mommy blogs provide mothers with opportunities to challenge intensive mothering" (Huisman & Joy, 2014, p.102), and even redefine motherhood (Lopez, 2009). However, little evidence supports this view. Stressing the growing popularity of mommy blogs, Lopez argued that mommy blogging is a radical act in that it challenges and reinterprets representations of motherhood. In support of this claim, the author pointed to blog content questioning the label "mommy blogger" and its implication in terms of power, or addressing the issues of the relationships between advertisers and bloggers and the monetization of blogs. It is worth noting, however, that this finding stems from the analysis of 21 blogs selected on the basis of a Google search for the expression "mommy blogging is a radical act." As acknowledged by the author, the selected blogs that mentioned this phrase did not reflect the full spectrum of mommy blogging, nor the more common content.

Rather than challenging intensive mothering, though, we suggest that mommy blogs are a modern adaptation of what Foucault previously identified as the "examinations, consultations, autobiographical narratives, and letters [that] are recorded, transcribed, gathered into files, published and discussed" (p. 85, our translation), the purpose of which is to convey the hegemonic discourse. In contrast with previous work that purposely selected a sample of blogs containing a disruptive discourse on mothering, we chose to examine the content of the most popular mommy blogs. In this manner, we strive to uncover the most widespread discourse encountered by women who read mommy blogs.

### 1.3. Intensive mothering in the French context and the present research

The present research took place in France, which is notable for its strong family-oriented and pro-birth policies (e.g., cash benefits and tax breaks targeting larger families, extensive provision of childcare services, generous parental leave; Thévenon, 2011). Although very few studies have examined IM ideology in France, there is consistent evidence that at least IM practices are currently operating among French mothers. Recently, and in an effort to develop a quantitative measure of attitudes toward IM, researchers conducted interviews among French mothers from the general population (Loyal et al., 2017b). Content analysis found that mothers were still seen as the natural and best caregiver, while fathers were considered less at ease with children rather than inherently incompetent. A previous interview study conducted in the 2010s explored intensive practices among French parents (Paltineau, 2014). In this research, and in striking contrast with IM ideology, it appeared that both fathers and mothers were highly involved in childrearing, leading the author to assert that "we can now speak about intensive fatherhood" (p. 130). These surprising statements must be considered with caution. Indeed, the claim that both parents participate equally in childrearing and therefore that IM is no longer relevant is mitigated by the fact that the interviewees were mainly stay-at-home mothers, living in a marital relationship with a working partner. Therefore, an important goal of the present research is to assess whether the shift in the perceived father involvement is apparent in mommy blogs and, more broadly, whether traditional gender roles within the family are mitigated. To this end, we will focus on both the ideas (i.e., themes), and the emotions and affective states reflected in mommy blogs.

While research has failed to provide consistent evidence about actual gender differences in emotional expression and experience (Niedenthal et al., 2006), the belief in gender specificities regarding emotions is largely disseminated (Shields, 2013). Indeed, there are strong gender stereotypes about emotional expression in Western cultures. Expressing emotions intensely is considered to be typically feminine (i.e. the "emotional woman" stereotype), whereas the minimization of emotional expression is considered to be typically masculine (i.e. the "inexpressive male" stereotype). Importantly, these stereotypical beliefs apply to parenting roles. For example, research has shown that some American childrearing manuals present mothers as emotional and fathers as rational (Shields et al., 1995; Shields & Koster, 1989). In addition, there are differential expectations about which specific emotions women and men should express (Krauth-Gruber et al., 2022; Stoppard & Gunn Gruchy, 1993). Women are expected to express emotions and affective states that communicate submissiveness (e.g., shame or fear, corresponding to ill-being affective states) and that facilitate social relationships (benevolent affects such as love, warmth, support, happiness, and cheerfulness that reflect well-being). On the contrary, men are expected to express emotions and affective states that communicate dominance (anger, contempt, disgust and pride, i.e., malevolent affective states and emotions), even if they can threaten or impair a social relationship. Importantly, research suggests that gender stereotypes about emotions ensure that gender roles are maintained. In fact, women are encouraged to express emotions congruent with the expected role of caregiver, whereas they are discouraged from expressing emotions that would allow them to compete for power and status (Brody, 2000, 2010). Mommy blogs, as online diaries, provide the opportunity to examine to what extent the portrayal of mothers' and fathers' emotions and feelings aligns with gender stereotypes.

The goal of the present research is twofold. First, we aim to document whether the content of the most popular French mommy blogs is in line with IM ideology. To this end, we intend to use a systematic approach to blog selection, and to document all aspects of IM ideology as initially characterized, while remaining open to changes. We will pay particular attention to those features that justify and maintain a gendered view of parental roles, including the emotions and affective states that are at the core of online diaries. We will address these questions in study one, using thematic and lexical analyses. Second, we aim to provide evidence that IM is a system justifying ideology. In study two, we present a survey conducted among a sample of French mothers that examines the relationship between IM and gender hierarchy-enhancing beliefs and attitudes.

## 2. Study 1

### 2.1. Method

#### 2.1.1. Blog sampling

Blog sampling was carried out in summer 2018 by a research assistant under the supervision of the first author. Aligning with the recommendations of the Association of Internet Researchers ethics working committee (Markham & Buchanan, 2012; see also Franzke et al., 2020), and practices reported in prior studies (e.g., Appleton et al., 2014; Pedersen, 2016), blogs are deemed to be in the public sphere since they are not password protected and no registration is required to access or comment on their content. Blogs are furthermore considered in the public domain (The Economic and Social Research Council, 2015). In addition, the scope of the study is limited to analyzing the textual content of the blogs, without any attempt to contact the bloggers to obtain further personal details.

We intended to select the most visited French mommy blogs in order to get access to the most prominent view on parenting promoted in mother blogging. Blog identification consisted of searching for "blog maman" using the most popular search engine in France at the time (i.e., the Google search engine; (AEP Digital, n.d.)). We retained the first two results and made sure that these blogs met the inclusion criteria: First, the blog was written in French language, and then, if this condition was met, we consulted the About Me section (i.e., a static page that includes a biographical summary of the author), and ensured that the blog was written by a woman living in France who identified herself as a mother. Using the blogroll of these first two blogs, we identified other mommy blogs meeting the inclusion criteria. At this point, 22 mommy blogs were identified and indexed. Then, we used the same procedure for each blog presenting a blogroll. This iterative process led to indexing 549 blogs over a period of 2 months. At this point we decided to stop the indexing due to practical constraints of time and resources. Using the Alexa analysis tool, we collected information regarding the audience of each blog. We then sorted all blogs on the basis of their audience, from the most to the least popular.

#### 2.1.2. Collection of blog posts

Blogs typically contain reverse chronologically ordered posts, classified under a limited number of topics. The decision was made to retain for the analysis the last entry on each topic (Hookway, 2008). Accordingly, the first two authors conducted the collection of blog posts, which consisted of copying and pasting into a Word file the text content of the most recently published post in each topic. Collection of posts started with the two blogs first returned by the search engine, followed by the indexed mommy blogs in descending order of their audience. In line with the principle of data-minimization, collection of blog posts and coding took place simultaneously, so that only those blogs actually analyzed were subject to data collection (Ess & Hård af Segerstad, 2019). Furthermore, to ensure bloggers' anonymity, we removed any information that might identify them from quoted text, and we made sure that the text we quoted could not be tracked to the blog (Weller et al., 2018).

### 2.2. Thematic analysis

The two authors responsible for the collection of blog posts analyzed the data. Both authors, in their forties and self-identified as females, have a theoretical background pertaining to the literature on ideologies

from a psychosocial perspective, including IM ideology. Both have professional and teaching experience in qualitative methods. In addition, none of the researchers is a blogging mother nor a mommy blog reader. We adopt a critical realist perspective in the present study (Maxwell, 2012), which implies retaining an ontological realism while considering epistemological constructivism.

We considered template analysis to be the most appropriate technique to answer our research question. Template analysis is a form of thematic analysis in which the researcher starts with a priori themes "identified in advance as likely to be helpful and relevant to the analysis" (Brooks et al., 2015). However, template analysis offers flexibility by allowing researchers to refine or discard initial themes, and to develop new ones in the course of the analysis. Thus, the use of template analysis allows both top down and bottom up approaches to the data (King, 2012). Accordingly, we designed the initial coding template using three main themes (and 12 sub-themes) of IM (Hays, 1996): Children are sacred, mothers are the primary parents responsible for raising them, and proper mothering requires intensive methods (see Table 1). The first two authors individually applied the template to the same subset of 10 blogs (i.e., the eight most popular blogs according to their audience plus the initial two blogs). The initial template was then discussed by the two coders, who revised existing themes so that they included further discoveries, and otherwise added new themes that emerged. They then analyzed subsequent blogs and met on a regular basis during the course of the analysis to decide whether and where to modify the template. The process continued until a point of saturation was reached, at which no new information emerged from further collection of blog posts. Eventually, a total of 18 blogs resulting in 189 posts were investigated (see Supplementary materials Table A.1 for bloggers' characteristics). The third author independently analyzed a random selection of 30% of the posts using the template developed in the course of the analysis. Cohen's Kappa indicated good agreement between raters, ranging from 0.71 for sub-themes to 0.78 for the main themes. Discrepancies were resolved through discussion, leading to recategorizations of codes. Table 1 presents an overview of themes and subthemes.

### 2.3. Lexical analysis

The third author was primarily responsible for carrying out the lexical analysis, assisted by the first author. The third author is in her thirties and self-identified as female; she is not a blogging mother nor a mommy blog reader. Her theoretical background pertains to social psychology of language and computer mediated communication. The 189 posts were analyzed using EMOTAIX, a computer software program that detects words (based on their literal and figurative meanings) related to emotions and affective states (Piolat & Bannour, 2009). EMOTAIX categorizes each term into one of six main valenced categories (three negative: Malevolence, Ill-being, Anxiety vs. three positive: Benevolence, Well-being, Composure) or two unvalenced categories (Surprise, Impassiveness; see Supplementary material Table A.2 for more details on the categorization).

The automatic analysis by EMOTAIX led to identification of 5423 terms. Then, the first and third author checked the automatic categorizations in order to decide whether the terms needed to be rejected (non-emotional literal meaning), clarified (unspecified emotions), or reassigned (negative wording). To perform the categorization checking, the first and third author started by separately coding five posts based on Piolat and Bannour's (2009) recommendations. After this first step, discrepancies were discussed and rules for rejection and clarification specified. Then, the double-checking was done for 804 terms identified by EMOTAIX. The Cohen's kappa was 0.90 for the main categories, indicating good agreement between raters. Then, the categorization checking was performed for the remaining posts, one half by the first author and the other half by the third author and 3410 terms were kept. In addition, the first and third author manually noted for each term kept who the person was who was experiencing the emotion. It could be individuals (e.g. the blogging mother alone, one of her children, the father, etc.) or several people being described as experiencing the same emotion (e.g., the whole blogging mother's family, the blogging mother's children, or the blog's readers). When the blogging mother was the experiencer, we also noted when the trigger was her child/children.[1]

**Table 1**
Final template with sub-themes frequencies.

| Theme | Sub-theme | Frequency |
|---|---|---|
| Sacred* | Sacred child* | 22 |
| | Mother's moral commitment* | 12 |
| | Sacred home | 18 |
| Mother primary responsible* | Mother as the best caregiver* | 4 |
| | Fathering is praised | 24 |
| | Guilt-gap* | 3 |
| Intensive method* | Child-centered* | 30 |
| | Emotionally absorbing* | 20 |
| | Expert guided* | 13 |
| | Financially expensive* | 26 |
| | Labor intensive* | 16 |
| | Stimulation* | 21 |
| Need for balance | | 11 |
| Failure to be a good mom | | 10 |
| Criticism of parents with less intensive methods | | 6 |
| Ambivalence toward the child | | 5 |
| Lowered expectations | | 5 |

*Note*. Themes and sub-themes marked with * were included in the initial template.
Initial template also included the sub-themes Father as incompetent and Mothering as natural. Given the absence of citation related to these sub-themes, they were dropped from the final template.

### 2.4. Findings

#### 2.4.1. Mother and father: different and complementary

All the studied blogs—with one exception—are written by mothers in a heteronormative family, where mother, father and children live together in the same household. Yet, mothers clearly appear as the primary parents responsible for childrearing. This is reflected in the almost systematic use of the first person singular when it comes to child issues. It is also apparent in several posts pertaining to childcare arrangements:

> I wanted to stay with each of them [her children] the first year. For her [her 3rd child], I had to start the day nursery a bit earlier with very few hours in order to secure a place. I ended up accepting the idea, even though it wasn't easy for me to start the adaptation while I was still on maternity leave.
>
> (blog 4)

In this quote, the mother of three expressed a tension between her feelings and the rational decision to leave her child at the day-care service. No reference is made to the father regarding his contribution to childcare or his feelings. In fact, this "guilt-gap," whereby mothers (compared to fathers) spend more time worrying about children sometimes emerged explicitly in mothers' discourse, as for instance in this quote from blog 12, where the blogging mothers discussed the difficult choice to give up home schooling in favor of public school:

> I had to come to terms with making this decision as one tears away a bandage, to be freed from a crushing weight on my shoulders. And I say MY [*sic*] shoulders, because although there was a lot of discussion with [father's nickname] and that the subject annoyed him, I alone bore the weight. As usual, huh.

This quote illustrates the limited role of fathers: They may participate in

[1] Given our focus on mothering, we treated all other triggers as miscellaneous.

discussion and activities pertaining to the family, but mothers are ultimately in charge. In contrast with Hays, however, fathers are not depicted as incompetent. On the contrary, their contribution as father and partner is highly valued:

> My man spends much more time with his sons! He showers them, feeds them, plays with them, rocks them … I don't believe that my father did all this! No, clearly, the new generation of daddies has changed and I find it awesome!
>
> (blog 9)

Still, parental roles are described in a stereotypical manner, as illustrated in this quote: "We walk up and down throughout the downtown streets. Somewhat confusing because I probably don't have a very good sense of direction, I never knew where I was … Here I say thanks to the husband" (blog 13). Throughout the blogs, fathers are portrayed as handymen, athletic, video gamers, reckless, and messy. On the other hand, mothers typically describe themselves as caring, cautious, unsure, and organized. Hence, gendered descriptions essentialize and emphasize the complementarity of parental roles, with fathers largely absent from everyday family life (but praised when they take part) and mothers as the primary caregivers and those most concerned with childrearing.

The lexical analysis provided further evidence for a stereotypical portrayal of parental roles in mommy blog posts. First of all, consistent with the stereotype of the father/man as inexpressive, the feelings of fathers are almost never described. Considering all the posts, there are only 13 terms (0.38% of the total of the terms) referring to affective states experienced by the father on his own. This stands in sharp contrast to the number of terms (590, 17.30% of the total) referring to feelings experienced by the blogging mother's children, and by the blogging mother herself (1970 terms, 57.77%). There are some indirect references to the father's feelings: 101 terms (2.96%) referred to the blogging mother's couple's emotional states, and 146 terms (4.28%) referred to the emotional states of the blogging mother's family as a whole (including children and father). To sum up, the father is portrayed as scarcely, if at all, emotionally involved in parenting. His affective experience is mentioned mainly through shared feelings with the mother and/or the children.

Going beyond frequencies, the type of emotions expressed by the blogging mother herself aligns with gender stereotypes.[2] Indeed, the three type of emotions most frequently reported are those facilitating relationships (benevolence: 611 terms, 31.02%; well-being: 519 terms, 26.35%) and those referring to powerless states (ill-being: 396 terms, 20.10%), that are expected for women. On the contrary, the terms referring to emotions that harm relationships (malevolence: 122 term, 6.19%) and to emotional control (composure: 137 terms, 6.95%; impassiveness: 40 terms, 2.03%), behaviors that are expected for men, are much less expressed by blogging mothers.

#### 2.4.2. Intensive methods

There is a broad consensus that appropriate mothering can only be achieved through gradual and challenging learning (e.g., "I grow up each day thanks to and with my children" blog 7) and in-depth reflection. Expressions such as "I understood," "I told myself," "I've thought," "what my brain dictated to me," "my reflections," "turning the problem over and over again in my head" emphasize the continued cognitive work which is at the core of IM. Constant monitoring and self-evaluation are part of the process and should lead to self-correction. In the following quote, blogging mother 3 describes how mothers should react if they fail: "Accepting being mistaken, asking for forgiveness when we go too far, admitting our errors, trying to do as little as possible … we are standing before our children to account for our mistakes." This quote emphasizes that mothers are accountable to their children, who are considered to be their ultimate judges. This is consistent with Hays' contention that mothering is child-centered. The "follow the baby's lead" premise of IM ideology is particularly apparent in the appeal of unschooling, home-schooling and alternative child-centered methods of education. Blogging mother 12 explained the advantage of such an approach: "It allowed [my daughter] to learn lots of things according to her aspirations and at her own pace." For the blogging mothers, aligning with the child's pace is not at odds with the willingness to stimulate him/her. Stimulating activities in mommy blogs target the development of creativity, reasoning, and autonomy on one hand, and the improvement of academic skills (mainly math ability and foreign languages) on the other hand.

#### 2.4.3. Building the perfect home for a sacred child

Mothers consistently praise their children's inherent virtues and abilities. Children's goodness, sociability and brightness are particularly valued. Consistent with the sacred child vs. corrupt world dichotomy, childhood must be preserved as long as possible, as illustrated in this quote:

> May they keep their rose-colored glasses for a long time. I will do my utmost so that they keep looking at the world with wonder. I hope, however, that they will forget the eagerness of adults, the busy timetables, the strong words.
>
> (blog 4)

Preserving children's purity is also reflected in various blog posts pertaining to child care and housekeeping: "I chose organic and ecological diapers because I try to respect the environment while respecting my baby's skin" (blog 18); "To go further in this healthy practice, I started to use small bottles of essential oils and to make recipes for household maintenance […] I have this feeling of cleanliness when I come back home, I can breathe deeply" (blog 5). These quotes illustrate mothers' commitment to building a safe, pure and healthy home for a sacred child. Such a commitment is also evident in various topics, including breastfeeding rather than using infant formula, home-cooking using organic and raw ingredients rather than use of processed foods, using washable diapers and baby wipes, and preference for zero-VOC paints. These examples provide clear evidence that contemporary IM links child care closely with environmental protection. Considering that the eco-friendly behaviors mentioned by the bloggers entail anticipating needs, identifying actions for filling them, and implementing those actions, and that this work is largely carried out by the mothers, such a shift in IM is likely to worsen the gender gap regarding the cognitive labor associated with household duties (Daminger, 2019).

#### 2.4.4. Resolving the ambivalences

The vast majority of blogs portrays a romanticized view of family life where mothers devote themselves to making their children happy, and find emotional fulfillment in this task: "I'm having fun, I'm happy, as a family, with my kids who are spoiled and who know it, and who give me 200% back" (blog 2). However, within a few of them, and in contrast with the ideal of unconditional maternal love, we found instances of ambivalence toward the children. Regarding her three-year-old boy's disruptive behaviors, this blogging mother says that "my feelings about him are very mixed, on the one hand I eagerly await the day he will start school … on the other hand I will regret that I didn't see him grow up" (blog 3). Another blogging mother referred to her children as a horde of malicious monsters: "I was afraid of them waking up 10 times a night for no reason … afraid of myself being unable to see them with as much love after nightfall. They were Gremlins" (blog 13). In these examples, the blogging mothers express negative feelings about their young children. However, they both simultaneously temper these feelings by reaffirming their dedication, or by using humor, thereby maintaining their alignment with the IM prescription of unconditional love.

The lexical analysis confirms ambivalent feelings toward children (see Table 2). When all the terms referring to feelings experienced by

[2] We were not able to perform these analyses on the fathers' feelings due to the small number of occurrences.

**Table 2**
Categories of emotions and affective states expressed by the blogging mothers.

| | Trigger | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | All | | Child/children | |
| | *n* | % | *n* | % |
| Positive valence | 1267 | 64.31 | 146 | 41.13 |
| Benevolence | 611 | 31.02 | 60 | 16.90 |
| Affection | 557 | 28.27 | 49 | 13.80 |
| Kindness | 54 | 2.74 | 11 | 3.10 |
| Well-being | 519 | 26.35 | 62 | 17.46 |
| Happiness | 114 | 5.79 | 17 | 4.79 |
| Lucidity | 16 | 0.81 | 2 | 0.56 |
| Spirit | 134 | 6.80 | 10 | 2.82 |
| Relief | 113 | 5.74 | 18 | 5.07 |
| Satisfaction | 142 | 7.21 | 15 | 4.23 |
| Composure | 137 | 6.95 | 24 | 6.76 |
| Courage | 50 | 2.54 | 8 | 2.25 |
| Calm | 87 | 4.42 | 16 | 4.51 |
| Negative valence | 622 | 31.57 | 192 | 54.08 |
| Malevolence | 122 | 6.19 | 45 | 12.68 |
| Hate | 88 | 4.47 | 26 | 7.32 |
| Aggressiveness | 34 | 1.73 | 19 | 5.35 |
| Ill-being | 396 | 20.10 | 108 | 30.42 |
| Suffering | 112 | 5.69 | 30 | 8.45 |
| Madness | 22 | 1.12 | 6 | 1.69 |
| Depression | 65 | 3.30 | 22 | 6.20 |
| Disorder | 93 | 4.72 | 27 | 7.61 |
| Frustration | 104 | 5.28 | 23 | 6.48 |
| Anxiety | 104 | 5.28 | 39 | 10.99 |
| Fear | 54 | 2.74 | 27 | 7.61 |
| Tension | 50 | 2.54 | 12 | 3.38 |
| Unvalenced | 81 | 4.11 | 17 | 4.79 |
| Surprise | 41 | 2.08 | 8 | 2.25 |
| Impassiveness | 40 | 2.03 | 9 | 2.54 |

blogging mothers are considered ($n = 1970$), the total of positive affects (64.31%) exceeds the total of negative affects (31.75%). When focusing on the mothers' feelings elicited specifically by their children ($n = 355$), the valence of the terms is more balanced between negative (54.08%) and positive affects (41.13%), with few neutral terms (2.25% surprise and 2.54% impassiveness).

Although explicit instances of ambivalence toward children are rather uncommon, blogging mothers more often stress the need for them to get a break from their kids: "I look after them [her three children] 100% of the time and sometimes I need to hand over the reins so I can have time for myself" (blog 1). It is particularly evident for those blogging mothers who have a job.

> I always knew that I wanted children. I also always knew that I wanted to work, to have a job in which I would thrive. I always knew that the two would go together. However, like many women of my generation, it was not always easy to reconcile my life as a mother and my life as a professional.
>
> (blog 18)

In this excerpt, blogging mother 18 speaks about being a mother and a worker as a natural and obvious choice. At the same time, she acknowledges the challenge of balancing both roles. Evidence of the cultural contradiction underlying her discourse stems from the efforts at justification she makes: "It is common knowledge that the mother who leaves earlier to pick up their children is often a central element in her workplace because she is organized, hardworking, and fulfilled in the end" and "I choose to be self-employed, because it provides me with the necessary balance." Two arguments are put forward to reconcile IM ideology and pursuit of a career: First, mothers complying with IM ideology would be ideal workers; second, working mothers will be well-balanced. This is an instance of ideological work (Berger, 2004) through which the blogging mother resolves the contradiction between IM—which posits that mothers should be selflessly committed to their children—and the labor market—which stresses the pursuit of personal profit. By mobilizing such arguments, the blogging mother states that pursuing a career bolsters her skills and ensures her psychological balance and well-being, which ultimately leads her to be a better mother.

#### 2.4.5. *Failure in performing IM*

Our analysis so far provided consistent evidence that IM ideology, albeit altered in some aspects, prevails in the most popular French mommy blogs. Interestingly, posts also reveals blogging mothers' harsh criticism of parents who fail to comply with intensive methods—the bad parents, including mothers who complain about the children's noise while they participate in school visits, or stay-at-home mothers who request a daycare center. In a long post explaining what it takes to be a good parent, blogging mother 3 makes the following statement:

> Being a good parent … It's asking oneself again and again whether one is too much or not enough present? Whether one has the right attitudes, the right answers … We sign up for putting them first, whatever happens … But at least three examples in my close entourage show me that it's not evident for everyone. Fleeing one's responsibilities, it's common unfortunately.

At the same time, we find some examples of blogging mothers admitting their inability to be "a good mom": "Do I consider myself a good mom? Not sure … For years, I found myself a very poor mom. Not good enough to be a 'good mom'" (blog 1). The idea that good mothering implies complying with high standards, which requires an exhausting amount of work, is widely shared. However, in the face of difficulties, blogging mothers are far more likely to blame themselves for not fulfilling IM standards than to call those standards into question. Quite often, acknowledgment of failure comes with expressions of frustration, anger, and culpability: "I am also a little too physically and mentally tired after this complicated year to be as patient, confident, and benevolent as I strive to be. There are blunders, crying, these fucking [*sic*] angry outbreaks that I cannot channel as I would like to" (blog 12).

Taken together, our analysis suggests that the fact that blogging mothers publicly admit their failure to reach the IM standards, make internal attribution for this failure, and report continued striving to improve their mothering practices, not only preserves IM from being questioned, but is likely to reinforce the validity and legitimacy of its tenets. Moreover, criticism directed toward parents who do not comply with the standards of appropriate mothering highlights the normative function of IM (Brescoll & Uhlmann, 2005; DeJean et al., 2012).

Interestingly, the blogging mothers' commitment to IM and their simultaneous acknowledgement of failure to comply with its imperatives create the conditions for vicarious dissonance (Cooper & Hogg, 2007). Vicarious dissonance theory relies on social identity (Tajfel & Turner, 2001) and cognitive dissonance theories (Festinger, 1962) to propose that people can experience dissonance on behalf of members of their social group, with the result that the standards of the group are upheld (Cooper, 2019; Focella et al., 2016). Specifically, by publicly advocating the group norms, and then admitting to failures to practice what the group preaches, the "hypocrite" member's deviance induces a state of cognitive dissonance among ingroup members, plus a threat to the image of the group. To reduce dissonance and restore the ingroup's integrity, highly identified ingroup observers endeavor to bolster their attitude and change their behavior in the direction of group norms (Focella et al., 2016). To further explore whether the bloggers' expression of failure actually triggers IM-reinforcing responses from the readers, we undertook to examine the comments related to the posts in which we identified this theme, in particular regarding the commenters' agreement and disagreement with the post, and expressions of identification with the group. We predicted that commenters would react to the blogging mothers' failure by asserting their sense of unity and their commitment to IM principles and practices.

### 2.5. Comments analysis

We found the theme Failure in performing IM in 10 instances, corresponding to five posts written by four different bloggers. For the first analyses, only posts were selected, not comments. Consequently, we traced back those five posts and checked for comments. Among the posts of interest, two did not present any comment. The remaining three posts included 25, 17, and 16 comments, respectively, and all were collected for analysis. The first and third authors elaborated a template informed by the third author's previous work (Assilaméhou-kunz et al., 2022) and empirical research on agreements and disagreements in computer-mediated communications (Baym, 1996). A comment whose author takes the same position as the post is considered an agreement. Conversely, a comment whose author takes a position incompatible with the statement of the post is considered a disagreement. Agreement and disagreement can be explicit (e.g., "I agree") or expressed through less direct assertions (e.g., the commenter put forward an argument that aligns with/contradicts the post). Finally, a comment whose author does not take a position one way or the other is considered neutral, as is a comment that does not address the content of the post. In a few instances, commenters expressed more than one opinion in a comment. In these cases, and in line with practices in the field (Gilbert et al., 2009), the raters assessed agreement "on balance."

To capture identification, we relied on four core types of ingroup identity (Milanov et al., 2014): centrality, that is, the chronicity and importance of the group for the self, social identification, referring to self-stereotyping and the perceived similarity with the ingroup members, interdependent identification, the instrumental interdependence between the members of the group, and communal identification, that is, close emotional connection and relationships with the group members. With this template, the first and second author independently coded 10% of the comments. Disagreements between coders were resolved through discussion and led to clarifying decision criteria. Then, the two authors independently coded another 15% of the remaining comments. Only a very few cases required discussion, and agreement was reached after minimal adjustments on the decision criteria. At this point, we decided that the first author would code the remaining comments.

#### 2.5.1. Results

Table 3 presents the final template for the comments analysis. We found few instances of neutral comments. Some of the neutral comments consists of the acknowledgement of the blogger's personal experience without an expression of opinion on the issue at stake, as well as open questions regarding childrearing. We also found instances in which commenters state that they made different parental choices, without criticizing nor approving the blogger's statement. Disagreements are even scarcer. They take place in two comments to a post where the blogging mother 12 explains that she finally decided to put her daughter in public school because she lacks self-confidence and doubts she can handle homeschooling. Two commenters expressed their disagreement with the blogger's contention that she lacks self-confidence. In both cases, the commenters draw on the fact that the blogging mother gave birth at home as evidence that she indeed is self-confident. Importantly, the commenters' contradiction does not by any means indicate a disagreement with IM. On the contrary, the fact that they praise the blogging mother for having given birth at home signals their commitment to IM.

In sum, the vast majority of the comments demonstrate agreement with the blogger. Gratitude ("Thank you very much for your sincerity," C22 blog 13) and approval ("I love you [blogger name]," C1 blog 12) are quite common. Agreement is also reflected in general claims ("Nothing is ever black and white!", C14 blog 12), and personal opinions about the blogger's assertion ("I honestly think that this is a good choice," C1, blog 12). However, most of the commenters rely on their own experience that either aligns with the blogger's narrative ("I find myself in what you say

**Table 3**
Final template for the comments analysis with frequencies.

| | Type of comment | Definition | Example | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Agreement | Gratitude | The commenter is thankful to the blogger | *Thank you for this testimony.* | 20 |
| | Declaration | The commenter explicitly agrees with the blogger | *I understand it must be hard and exhausting.* | 8 |
| | Approval | The commenter provides a positive evaluation of the post/the blogger | *This article is a real ray of sunshine.* | 27 |
| | Personal experience | The commenter recounts an experience congruent with the blogger's statement | *I really sympathize, my daughter only began sleeping through the night at $3^{1/2}$. I couldn't bear it anymore.* | 40 |
| | Proposal | The commenter paraphrases the post | *You spent a lot of time thinking about finding the best solution for your daughter and your family.* | 5 |
| | Counter-proposal | The commenter raises an idea absent from the post | *We tried the melatonin and we made an appointment with a child psychiatrist.* | 10 |
| | General statement | The commenter relies on a common sense idea that is congruent with the blogger's statement | *Nothing is black or white!* | 7 |
| | Personal opinion | The commenter expresses her personal view on the subject that aligns with the blogger's statement | *I think we have to keep in mind that nothing is stuck.* | 10 |
| | Opinion of others | The commenter quotes another person whose point aligns with the blogger's statement | *A colleague told me "Just because we have a problem with school doesn't mean our children have one."* | 1 |
| | URL | The commenter provides a link to an online resource which aligns with the blogger's statement | [The URL is available from the authors] | 1 |
| Disagreement | Counter-proposal | The commenter raises an idea absent from the post that contradicts the blogger's statement | *I would like to remind you that you gave birth at home, so regarding confidence in yourself, confidence in your man and confidence in your daughters, one can hardly do better.* | 6 |

(*continued on next page*)

**Table 3** (*continued*)

| | Type of comment | Definition | Example | Frequency |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Challenge | The commenter questions the blogger's statement | *Maybe the true reasons are elsewhere.* | 1 |
| | Personal opinion | The commenter expresses her personal view that contradicts the blogger's statement | *Sometimes I think to myself, thankfully daddies are here to get a bit of distance.* | 1 |
| Neutral | *I have no comment on that choice.* *How do you live the progressive "detachment" of the child?* | | | 7 |

(…) I completely lost it one month ago," C18 blog 13) or goes further with counter-proposals, that is, instances of IM practices that were not addressed in the post ("We are going to see psychologists specialized in sleep. We hope to find a solution," C7 blog 13).

Comments that express agreement also convey identification markers. In many cases, the commenter explicitly mentions her similarity with the blogging mother ("I recognize myself in this quest for perfection," C8 blog 12) or includes herself in the group ("I see that we are all the same!", C12 blog 13) which indicate social identification. The second most important identification is communal, with commenters acknowledging emotional connection with the blogger as well as other mothers ("Thank you for giving us hope," C10 blog 13; "Hang in there, Moms!", C12 blog13). In a few instances we found indications of centrality, as for example this commenter who concludes her post with the valediction "Signed: A mommy" (C14 blog 13), as well as indicators of interdependant identification ("Thank you for this series of articles which, once again, helped me a lot," C9 blog 12).

Taken together, the present findings are consistent with Focella et al.'s (2016) contention that an ingroup member who acts hypocritically (i.e., whose behavior deviates from the group norm that she/he otherwise promotes) "motivates [ingroup members] to increase their favorability toward the ingroup deviant by supporting his or her message" (p. 90). The following examples illustrate this psychological process. Getting back to blogging mother 12's emotional confession of failure, one commenter expresses sadness (i.e., communal identification) and, at the same time, validates IM as the best practice (i.e., approval): "It breaks my heart when I feel that you are sometimes so tormented and guilty while you do your best for your family, who are lucky to have such an attentive Mum [*sic*]" (C12). Another commenter explains that, albeit "in admiration for homeschooling," she resigned herself to sending her daughter to public school:

> I asked myself the same questions a thousand times a year and a half ago (…) This past year, our eldest child went to regular school in the morning only. I kept a close watch, met the teacher several times when I was upset by some issues, and registered with the parents' committee, to get a foot in the door just in case.
>
> (C13)

By stating that she went through the same questioning, the commenter exhibits social identification with the blogging mother. Then, she shares her personal experience, including a counter-proposal pertaining to a labor-intensive practice—school and teacher surveillance. In the process of vicarious dissonance, the counter-proposal can be considered a bolstering response to the ingroup member deviance. In the present context, it proves the commenter's adherence to IM, and restores the integrity of the group by upholding its norm.

## 3. Study 2

Study 1 provided evidence that IM ideology is pervasive in the most popular mommy blogs, and goes hand in hand with a gendered view of parental roles. The goal of Study 2 is to go further in the examination of the relationship of IM with the maintenance of the gender system. To this end, we conducted a survey with a sample of mothers and measured the participants' endorsement of a set of gender hierarchy-enhancing beliefs and attitudes.

Ambivalent sexism—"an interlocking set of beliefs that reflects a system of rewards (benevolent sexism) and punishment (hostile sexism)" (Glick & Fiske, 2001, p. 117)—is considered a strong system-justifying ideology (Glick & Fiske, 1996; Jost & Kay, 2005). Accordingly, ambivalent sexism is positively correlated with gender system justification (Verniers & Martinot, 2015), political conservatism, and social dominance orientation (Mosso et al., 2013). Assuming that IM, too, is a gender hierarchy-enhancing belief, we expect that (H1) the more the mothers will endorse MI, the more they will endorse ambivalent sexism.

We also assume that IM could maintain the gender hierarchy by encouraging women to stay at home rather than pursuing a career and gaining economic independence. Therefore, we hypothesize that (H2) the more the mothers will endorse IM, the less they will support mothers' work, and (H3) the more they will hold gendered views of social roles. More specifically, we expect IM ideology to be positively related to a specialized gender-role orientation, that is, a preference for a strict distinction between female and male social roles, but negatively related to an androgynist gender-role orientation which rejects gender role stereotypes and posits that women and men can endorse similar roles (Jelen, 1988).

The maintenance of gender hierarchy can also be achieved by discouraging system change. Feminist collective action represents a way to reform the gender system (van Zomeren et al., 2008), and recent research shows that some hegemonic ideologies (i.e., neoliberal beliefs) undermine collective action because they impair women's feminist identification (Girerd & Bonnot, 2020). Accordingly, assuming that IM is a gender system justification ideology, we predict that (H4) the more the mothers endorse IM, the less they will identify as feminists.

Finally, we suggest that, in addition to encouraging traditional gender roles and discouraging system change, IM is related to sanctions against women who challenge the status quo. More specifically, recent research suggests that childfree women—women who voluntary choose not to have a child—face backlash because they deviate from the motherhood mandate and hence challenge the patriarchal structure of society (Verniers, 2020). Accordingly, we suggest that (H5) the more the mothers will endorse IM, the more they will criticize childfree women.

### 3.1. Method

#### 3.1.1. Participants

We planned to recruit 260 women who identify as mothers with at least one child under 18. They were recruited through a research firm and received compensation for their participation in the online survey conducted in 2021. Sample size was determined on the basis of Schönbrodt and Perugini (2013) recommendation to achieve stable estimates for correlations. The survey was preregistered (https://aspredicted.org/blind.php?x=29H_8VB) and approved by a university Institutional Review Board. Due to unexpected events during the recruitment process, the final sample size was 291 participants ($M_{age}$ = 42.14, $SD$ = 8.11, range = 17–65; education: 20.27% had not obtained a high school diploma, 29.89% graduated from high school, and 49.83% had received a college degree; $M_{age}$ of the participant's youngest child = 9.08, $SD$ = 4.94, range 0–17).

#### 3.1.2. Material and procedure

The participants received an invitation to participate in an online study on "family and society." They were directed to the study by clicking on a Qualtrics link. After they gave their consent, they were presented with the measures in the order described below. Unless

otherwise specified, all items were assessed using a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree).[3]

*3.1.2.1. Intensive mothering ideology.* The MIMI (Loyal et al., 2017a) is a French-language scale assessing intensive mothering ideology. The scale comprises 21 items (e.g., "Children's needs should come before their parents") reflecting six dimensions (essentialism, consuming fulfillment, child-centrism, challenge, sacrifice and stimulation). We added 12 items derived from our content analysis of mommy blogs. These items aimed at capturing six additional dimensions: sacred child (e.g., "When you are a parent, you must do everything to preserve your child's innocence"), sacred home (e.g., "Using washable diapers and wipes takes more time, but it's a worthwhile investment"), expert guidance (e.g., "Making the right choices for the child requires spending time learning from reliable sources"), praising the father (e.g., "Today's fathers are great"), need for balance (e.g., "You are a better mom when you balance time for yourself and time for family"), and failure to be a good parent (e.g., "When you can't be the parent you want, you have to work on yourself"), $\alpha = 0.91$.

*3.1.2.2. Opposition to women's work.* We used two items: "Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time or not at all when there is a child under school age?" and "Do you think that women should work outside the home full-time, part-time, or not at all after the youngest child starts school?". Participants answered on a scale ranging from 1 = work full time, 2 = work part-time, 3 = stay at home, 4 = I cannot choose (Verniers & Vala, 2018).

*3.1.2.3. Attitude toward gender roles.* We selected six items that were previously used in large scale surveys (Baber & Tucker, 2006; Haerpfer et al., 2021; ISSP Research Group, 2016; Papacostas, 2012; Wasmer & Baumann, 2018), and which measure specialist gender-role orientation (e.g., "Being a housewife is just as fulfilling as working for pay," $\alpha = 0.55$, three items) and androgynist gender-role orientation (e.g., "In a family, if the father's pay is lower than that of the mother, he is the one who should give up work to look after the children," $\alpha = 0.63$, three items). The two measures had rather low reliability. This could be due in part to the small number of items in each measure. However, these items are widely used in cross-cultural studies and may still be considered quite useful for testing relations between attitudes toward gender roles and other theoretically relevant concepts (Constantin & Voicu, 2015; Schmitt, 1996).

*3.1.2.4. Backlash toward childfree women.* We used one item ("A woman without children can hardly be fulfilled") adapted from Suppes (2020) and Ashburn-Nardo (2017).

*3.1.2.5. Ambivalent sexism.* We used the French adaptation of the ASI (Dardenne et al., 2006) in a short version which comprises 12 items (Rollero, 2014). Half of the items measures benevolent sexism (e.g., "Many women have a quality of purity that few men possess," $\alpha = 0.81$), while the other half measures hostile sexism (e.g., "Women seek to gain power by getting control over men," $\alpha = 0.84$).

*3.1.2.6. Feminist identification.* We adapted the Inclusion of Other in Self (IOS) scale (Schubert & Otten, 2002). The IOS scale is a pictorial measure of self-categorization. The items consist of seven diagrams representing various degrees of self-feminist group overlap, from strong distinction to complete overlap. The participant has to select among seven diagrams the one that best represents her closeness to feminists.

[3] The study materials and the data set are available on OSF: https://osf.io/nfzeu/?view_only=d718727525e04e0d9e2a0979f163fb99.

### 3.2. Results

Analyses were conducted with and without outliers, which were defined as ±3 SD from the sample mean for each variable. We detected two outliers in the IM ideology measure. Their exclusion did not affect the results, except for the correlation between IM and androgynist gender-role orientation. The correlation drops from $r = 0.15$, $p = .010$ in the full sample to $r = 0.11$, $p = .069$ without outliers. Here we report the results of the analyses including outliers.

IM ideology is positively related to all variables—feminist identification excepted—with correlations ranging from small to intermediate (Cohen, 1988; see Table 4). Consistent with our prediction, the more the participants endorse IM ideology the more they hold sexist attitudes. More specifically, there is a positive correlation between IM and benevolent sexism ($r = 0.55$, $p < .001$) and hostile sexism ($r = 0.21$, $p < .001$).

We hypothesized that the more the participants endorsed IM ideology, the more they would hold gendered views of social roles. The results partly support this prediction. On the one hand, there is a positive correlation between IMI and specialist gender-role orientation ($r = 0.44$, $p < .001$), indicating a preference for a gendered division of social roles. On the other hand, there is also a positive, albeit weak, correlation between IMI and androgynist gender-role orientation, whereas we expected a negative correlation (note that this correlation is not significant when outliers are excluded from the analysis). This unexpected result requires some explanation. Among the three items, two taps into the private sphere and notably, are related to childrearing (i.e., "In a family, if the father's pay is lower than that of the mother, he is the one who 'should give up work to look after the children'," "A child actually benefits if his or her mother has a job rather than just concentrating on the home"). Although we anticipated that the participants who endorse IM ideology would reject those items because they weaken the central role of mothers, there is a possibility that their responses were mitigated by the underlying idea of child-centrism. Alternatively, this result may reflect a more androgynist parenting style, in which mothers balance their care-taking responsibilities with a paid job, and share, at least in part, these responsibilities with the fathers. An assumption further reinforced by the results of Study 1, indicating that at least some mothers claim an entitlement to pursue a career while supporting father's involvement. However, and consistent with our prediction, the more the participants endorse IM ideology, the more they expect a mother to cut back her working hours—or even stay at home—when her child is under school age ($r = 0.30$, $p < .001$), and, to a lesser extent, when her child starts school ($r = 0.17$, $p = .006$).

Results do not support the prediction that the more the participants endorsed IM ideology, the less they would identify as feminists. Indeed, feminist identification in our study does not correlate with any of the variables, which raises questions regarding the appropriateness of this measure.[4] Finally, we predicted that the more the participants endorsed IM ideology, the more backlash they would exhibit against childfree women. Results confirmed this prediction. IM is positively correlated with backlash against childfree women ($r = 0.21$, $p < .001$).

## 4. Discussion

This research was aimed at examining the relevance of IM ideology

[4] These results are consistent with those of Girerd et al. (2022) which, in an unrelated research conducted with French women, reported no significant correlations between feminist identification and social dominance orientation or neoliberal ideology endorsement. Future research should use measures that tap different feminist perspectives (e.g., Henley et al., 1998), including the raising "neoliberal feminism" (Rottenberg, 2018). Indeed, endorsement of IMI might be linked positively with some forms of feminism (e.g., neoliberal feminism) and negatively with others (e.g., radical feminism).

**Table 4**
Means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations among the variables of Study 2.

| Variable | *M* | *SD* | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. IMI | 5.11 | 0.72 | – | | | | | | | |
| 2. OWW no school | 2.05 | 0.79 | 0.30** | | | | | | | |
| 3. OWW school | 1.50 | 0.65 | 0.17** | 0.58** | | | | | | |
| 4. Specialist | 4.34 | 1.26 | 0.44** | 0.38** | 0.29** | | | | | |
| 5. Androgynist | 4.17 | 1.20 | 0.15** | −0.11 | −0.12 | −0.03 | | | | |
| 6. Backlash | 3.14 | 1.78 | 0.21** | 0.16* | 0.18** | 0.40** | 0.16** | | | |
| 7. BS | 4.36 | 1.12 | 0.55** | 0.33** | 0.20** | 0.63** | 0.11 | 0.50** | | |
| 8. HS | 3.40 | 1.19 | 0.21** | 0.11 | 0.05 | 0.44** | 0.25** | 0.48** | 0.56** | |
| 9. Feminism | 3.66 | 1.77 | 0.02 | −0.04 | 0.00 | −0.07 | 0.11 | 0.08 | 0.07 | 0.05 |

*Note*. IMI: Intensive Mothering Ideology, OWW no school: Opposition to Women's Work when child is under school age, OWW school: Opposition to Women's Work when child starts school, Specialist: Specialist gender-role orientation, Androgynist: Androgynist gender-role orientation, Backlash: Backlash toward childfree women, BS: Benevolent Sexism, HS: Hostile Sexism, Feminism: Feminist identification.
*N*'s range from 233 to 291 due to occasional missing data on the variables Opposition to Women's Work when child is under school age and Opposition to Women's Work when child starts school.
* $p < .05$.
** $p < .01$.

to understanding the persistence of gender inequality. Using a mixed methods approach to this question, we were first able to document that IM ideology is common and that mommy blogs provide a platform for its diffusion and strengthening. Our content analysis allowed for highlighting large overlaps between IM ideology on the one hand and principles and practices presented in the most popular French mommy blogs on the other hand. First and foremost, blog content indicated that mothers remain the primary caregivers responsible for childrearing. Although we did not find many claims that mothers are the best caregivers, the vast majority of posts deal with mothers' choices, habits, and questions regarding childrearing, confirming that mothers are actually in charge. This is reinforced by the notions of the guilt-gap and mother's moral and emotional commitment which contribute to portraying mothers as primarily concerned with, and morally responsible for, their children's proper development. Second, the belief in children's sacredness and inherent goodness is largely consensual. Therefore, and in line with IM, raising them is a major responsibility that implies intensive methods. However, our analysis provides evidence that not only do mothers give particular attention to their children's development and well-being, they are also committed to providing them with an ideal environment. This is achieved by using ecological products, including cosmetics, clothing, decoration items and by favoring organic and homemade food. In that respect, IM adjusts to the contemporary concern of sustainable development without changing its basic tenets (Takeshita, 2014). It is notable that gender plays a role in sustainable practices, with women engaging in more sustainable behaviors than men, owing to social norms and gender stereotypes (Bloodhart & Swim, 2020). As a consequence this trend in IM is likely to add to mothers' invisible cognitive labor burden (Daminger, 2019).

At the same time, we were able to find some deviations from IM. Regarding the role of fathers, we found that they are not considered less competent (Hays, 1996), nor uncomfortable with children (Loyal et al., 2017a). On the contrary, fathering is largely praised, and we found no evidence of maternal gatekeeping (Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Puhlman & Pasley, 2013). Although the blogging mothers appear to have decision-making power regarding family functioning, they are supportive of fathers' involvement. At first glance, this is a positive shift toward gender egalitarianism. It should be noted, however, that lauding fathers for taking care of their children is not related to equality claims on the part of the mothers. Indeed, fathers' involvement is not intended to replace mothers', but rather to enrich family time. In this sense, fathers' involvement might reflect intensified child-centrism rather than alleviation of the overall burden put on mothers (Bianchi, 2000).

Although blogs place private content in the public sphere, their authors remain relatively unidentifiable, allowing “a less polished and even uglier self [to] be verbalized” (Hookway, 2008, p. 97). Indeed, and in sharp contrast with the principle of emotional fulfillment, we found several instances of women admitting to struggling with their mother role. This is reflected in ambivalence toward their children, in painful self-criticisms and guilt regarding their mothering (in)abilities. This finding echoes previous work indicating that IM sets up unrealistic standards which have costly consequences for mothers' mental health, with high rates of anxiety and stress associated with IM beliefs (Loyal et al., 2017a; Rizzo et al., 2013) and IM behaviors (Forbes et al., 2021). Working mothers' choices seem to be particularly constrained by IM standards, as research has shown that the feeling of pressure to be a perfect mother is associated with lowered career ambition (Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018) and with the de-prioritization of their own needs (Forbes et al., 2021, see also Aarntzen et al., 2019). Hence, the blogging mothers' need for balance may reflect a strategy to preserve their mental health, rather than an inflection in the prevalence of IM.

Comments analysis further illustrates the dynamic of defense, accommodation, and reinforcement of IM ideology. Results of this analysis are consistent with previous work suggesting that blogs are echo chambers, where agreement is more common than disagreement when commenters take a position on a blogger's post (Gilbert et al., 2009). However, our analysis adds to the existing literature by identifying a social influence process—vicarious dissonance—responsible for the group polarization in blogs.

We believe that women's alignment with IM for identity management purposes comes with a cost. Indeed, we suggested that IM is a justifying ideology for unequal gender arrangements. While Study 1 uncovered the stereotypical portrayal of parental roles and emotions in mommy blogs, results of the survey study confirmed this assumption by demonstrating that IM is positively related to a series of gender hierarchy-enhancing beliefs and attitudes. According to system justification theory (Jost & Banaji, 1994), there is a psychological motive to imbue the status quo with legitimacy: System justification serves a palliative function, in that it decreases negative affect and increases satisfaction with one's situation (Jost & Hunyady, 2002, 2005). There is consistent evidence that unequal gender division of housework adversely affects women's mental health (e.g., Ciciolla & Luthar, 2019; Coltrane, 2000). Our own results confirm ambivalent effect on the part of the blogging mothers. Therefore, endorsing IM ideology provides a justification for this detrimental arrangement. More specifically, IM ideology claims that properly raising a child is more important than any other role a woman could occupy, and that mothers have a moral responsibility to society as a whole (Hays, 1996). These are strong arguments likely to rationalize and embellish the overburdening of women with unpaid work related to family responsibilities.

### 4.1. Implications

In addition to this local effect, system justification leads to the

rationalization and maintenance of the system as a whole (Wakslak et al., 2011). Intensive Mothering, as a system-justifying ideology, would benefit men by absolving them from doing domestic unpaid work, and by reducing competition in the job market and political area, which would ultimately enable men to maintain their place in the social hierarchy. Recent findings support this claim. A study conducted on representative data from an international survey indicated that women and men who hold sexist beliefs regarding gender roles justify their opposition to women's professional careers by claiming that women's work threatens family well-being (Verniers & Vala, 2018). In fact, the more people endorse the belief that children and families suffer when mothers work, the more they believe that mothers should quit their job, or at least reduce their working hours. Considering that extra time in employment for men translates into extra human capital with important consequences for the gender wage gap (Gershuny, 2018), IM ideology is key to understanding the interplay of gender inequality at the micro (e.g., sharing of domestic unpaid work) and macro levels (i.e., social hierarchy; Meeussen & Van Laar, 2018; Williams & Chen, 2014).

Intensive mothering is also associated with mothers' selflessness since their unique concern is supposedly about their children's wellbeing (e.g., O'Brien et al., 2020). However, and in line with a social identity perspective (Tajfel, 1982; Tajfel & Turner, 2001), we believe that displaying their commitment to IM may constitute a strategy that mothers use in order to gain a positive social identity. It is noteworthy that blogging mothers are concerned with being "good moms," while distancing themselves from the "bad" ones. By using IM as an evaluative criterion against which mothers are compared and hierarchically ordered (DiLapi, 1989; McHenry & Schultz, 2014), blogging mothers establish IM as a norm (Hogg & Reid, 2006; Marques et al., 1998). We only got access to limited details regarding the living-context of the blogging mothers in our study. However, the fact that almost all blogs are written by mothers in a two-parent family, living in a country—France—providing high financial support to families (Cleiss, 2022), corroborates the claim that only privileged mothers are able to practice IM, and that normative mothers are likely the most affluent ones (Bloch & Taylor, 2014). Therefore, besides its self-promotion purpose, IM may constitute a means of protecting the upper class' distinctiveness (Milkie & Warner, 2014). This does not by any means entail that less affluent mothers escape pressure to conform to IM standards, a pressure that results in an even greater burden for single-parent, precarious families, especially when living in less generous countries (Elliott et al., 2015).

### 4.2. Limitations and future directions

Besides their textual content, blogs' pictures and visual layout may provide information that is not explicitly provided by the blogging mother. For instance, although the blogging mothers in our research did not openly state their social status or ethnic or cultural background, a visual imagery content analysis is likely to provide clues regarding those characteristics (Heinz et al., 2002; Hewson, 2014). Such information would be of particular interest for examining IM from an intersectional perspective (e.g., Dow, 2016; Elliott et al., 2015; Rothman, 2000; Taylor, 2011) in order to document whether and how this ideology varies among mothers as a function of race and class.

The present research is informed by previous studies on "mommy blogs" (Lupton et al., 2016) and, at the same time, it fills a gap in the literature by documenting the French blogosphere with regard to intensive mothering. In studying the most popular blogs in France we were able to find consistent evidence of IM, which indicates that this ideology holds a hegemonic position. According to some researchers, the blogosphere offers room for challenging the dominant representations of mothering (Huisman & Joy, 2014; Lopez, 2009). There is indeed a possibility that mother blogs other than those analyzed in the present study offer such alternative visions. In this case, however, the question of their limited audience should be considered.

Nevertheless, we have reasons to believe that selecting more broadly "parental blogs" might have led to comparable conclusions. Indeed, research tends to demonstrate that parenting platforms are mostly female-dominated, to the point that online parenting spaces are deemed unwelcoming for fathers (Dworkin et al., 2018). This observation is in line with a central tenet of IMI, according to which mothers are primary responsible for childrearing. Blogs written by fathers, on the other hand, could offer valuable insight into current models of fathering (Ammari & Schoenebeck, 2015). Recent research has documented a tension between contemporary expectations for father involvement, and a limited shift in practices (Lewington et al., 2021). Examining fathering ideologies, and how they challenge or reinforce IMI, would undoubtedly enhance our understanding of the maintenance of gender inequalities in the private and public spheres.

Finally, although blogs represent a long-established medium in the parenting digital network (Lupton et al., 2016), parents can communicate through multiple platforms, including instant messaging applications (see for instance Cino et al., 2021). Future research should document whether IMI, which appears as hegemonic in the most popular mommy blogs, remains dominant in other media. We suspect that the social influence process documented in the present research might be even stronger on these platforms, given that the repeated exchange of information on a topic, within a consonant communication network, tends to influence users' perception of consensus, and ultimately their behaviors in relation to the topic (Gill & Rojas, 2021).

## 5. Conclusions

Gender inequality remains common in the Western world, and the role of ideologies in its maintenance is clearly evidenced by abundant research (e.g., Girerd & Bonnot, 2020; Jost & Kay, 2005; Verniers et al., 2016). Foucault (1976) stressed the need to examine the channels through which hegemonic ideologies are disseminated and influence individual conduct. Using a mixed methodology, we have demonstrated that mommy blogs provide echo chambers for intensive mothering, which is a longstanding, adaptable, hegemonic ideology, with connections to gender hierarchy-enhancing beliefs. It is unique in that it portrays mothering as the most important and valuable role a woman can occupy, while at the same time imposes such strict requirements that meeting its standards is virtually impossible. Finally, and as highlighted by Hays (1996, p. 133): "A woman, in other words, can never fully do it right."

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.actpsy.2022.103614.

## CRediT authorship contribution statement

Catherine Verniers: Conceptualization, Methodology, Software, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Original draft, Visualization, Project administration, Funding acquisition.

Virginie Bonnot: Conceptualization, Methodology, Formal analysis, Investigation, Writing – Review & Editing, Funding acquisition.

Yvette Assilaméhou-Kunz: Conceptualization, Methodology, Validation, Formal analysis, Investigation, Data Curation, Writing - Review & Editing, Visualization.

## Data availability statement

Blog posts, although anonymized, can be retrieved easily using a search engine, revealing the identity of the authors and commenters. It is therefore not possible to make the dataset available without violating the privacy of data subjects or revealing other sensitive information. However, the dataset for Study 1 may be available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

## Declaration of competing interest

None.

## Acknowledgments

The authors thank Jessica Leclercq for her support with blog search, Adélie Laruncet for her assistance in creating the dataset. They also thank Cristina Aelenei and two anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

## References


Aarntzen, L., Derks, B., van Steenbergen, E., Ryan, M., & van der Lippe, T. (2019). Work-family guilt as a straightjacket. An interview and diary study on consequences of mothers' work-family guilt. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 115*, Article 103336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2019.103336

AEP Digital. Les parts de marché 2017 des moteurs de recherche en France et dans le monde. Retrieved 20 January 2021, from https://www.aep-digital.com/parts-de-marche-2017-moteurs-de-recherche-france-monde/ (n.d.).

Allen, S. M., & Hawkins, A. J. (1999). Maternal gatekeeping: Mothers' beliefs and behaviors that inhibit greater father involvement in family work. *Journal of Marriage and the Family, 61*(1), 199. https://doi.org/10.2307/353894

Ammari, T., & Schoenebeck, S. (2015). Understanding and supporting fathers and fatherhood on social media sites. In *Proceedings of the 33rd Annual ACM Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, 1905–1914*. https://doi.org/10.1145/2702123.2702205

Appleton, J., Fowler, C., & Brown, N. (2014). Friend or foe? An exploratory study of Australian parents' use of asynchronous discussion boards in childhood obesity. *Collegian, 21*(2), 151–158. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.colegn.2014.02.005

Ashburn-Nardo, L. (2017). Parenthood as a moral imperative? Moral outrage and the stigmatization of voluntarily childfree women and men. *Sex Roles, 76*(5–6), 393–401. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-016-0606-1

Assilaméhou-Kunz, Y., Mésangeau, J., & Balcon-Fourmaux, S. (2022). Comment se renforce le consensus entre utilisateurs sur YouTube? Illustration de la complexité du phénomène des chambres d'écho dans les espaces de commentaires. *YouTube ou la liberté d'expression sous contrainte*. C&F Editions. In press.

Baber, K. M., & Tucker, C. J. (2006). The social roles questionnaire: A new approach to measuring attitudes toward gender. *Sex Roles, 54*(7–8), 459–467. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-006-9018-y

Barnes, M. W. (2015). Gender differentiation in paid and unpaid work during the transition to parenthood. *Sociology Compass, 9*(5), 348–364. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12263

Baym, N. K. (1996). Agreements and disagreements in a computer-mediated discussion. *Research on Language & Social Interaction, 29*(4), 315–345. https://doi.org/10.1207/s15327973rlsi2904_2

Berger, B. M. (2004). The survival of a counterculture: ideological work and everyday life among rural communards. In *Transaction*.

Bianchi, S. M. (2000). Maternal employment and time with children: Dramatic change or surprising continuity? *Demography, 37*, 401–414. https://doi.org/10.1353/dem.2000.0001

Bloch, K., & Taylor, T. (2014). Welfare queens and anchor babies: A comparative study of stigmatized mothers in the United States. In M. Vandebeld Giles (Ed.), *Mothering in the age of neoliberalism* (pp. 199–210). Demeter Press.

Bloodhart, B., & Swim, J. K. (2020). Sustainability and consumption: What's gender got to do with It? *Journal of Social Issues, 76*(1), 101–113. https://doi.org/10.1111/josi.12370

Brescoll, V. L., & Uhlmann, E. L. (2005). Attitudes toward traditional and nontraditional parents. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 29*(4), 436–445. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.2005.00244.x

Brody, L. R. (2000). The socialization of gender differences in emotional expression: display rules, infant temperament, and differentiation. In A. H. Fischer (Ed.), *Gender and Emotion* (1st ed., pp. 24–47). Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511628191.003.

Brody, L. R. (2010). Gender and emotion: Beyond stereotypes. *Journal of Social Issues, 53*(2), 369–393. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4560.1997.tb02448.x

Brooks, J., McCluskey, S., Turley, E., & King, N. (2015). The utility of template analysis in qualitative psychology research. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 12*(2), 202–222. https://doi.org/10.1080/14780887.2014.955224

Ciciolla, L., & Luthar, S. S. (2019). Invisible household labor and ramifications for adjustment: Mothers as captains of households. *Sex Roles, 81*(7–8), 467–486. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-018-1001-x

Cino, D., Gigli, A., & Demozzi, S. (2021). "That's the only place where you can get this information today!" An exploratory study on parenting WhatsApp groups with a sample of Italian parents. In *, 24. Studi Sulla Formazione* (pp. 75–104). https://doi.org/10.13128/ssf-12747

Cleiss. (2022). https://www.cleiss.fr/docs/regimes/regime_france/an_4.html.

Cohen, J. (1988). *Statistical Power Analysis for the Behavioral Sciences* (2nd ed.). Erlbaum.

Coltrane, S. (2000). Research on household labor: Modeling and measuring the social embeddedness of routine family work. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 62*(4), 1208–1233. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2000.01208.x

Constantin, A., & Voicu, M. (2015). Attitudes towards gender roles in cross-cultural surveys: Content validity and cross-cultural measurement invariance. *Social Indicators Research, 123*(3), 733–751. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-014-0758-8

Cooper, J. (2019). Cognitive dissonance: where we've been and where we're going. *International Review of Social Psychology, 32*(1). https://doi.org/10.5334/irsp.277

Cooper, J., & Hogg, M. A. (2007). Feeling the anguish of others: a theory of vicarious dissonance. In *, 39. Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (pp. 359–403). Elsevier. https://doi.org/10.1016/S0065-2601(06)39007-7.

Craig, L., & Mullan, K. (2010). Parenthood, gender and work-family time in the United States, Australia, Italy, France, and Denmark. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 72*(5), 1344–1361. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2010.00769.x

Daminger, A. (2019). The cognitive dimension of household labor. *American Sociological Review, 84*(4), 609–633. https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419859007

Dardenne, B., Delacollette, N., Grégoire, C., & Lecocq, D. (2006). Structure latente et validation de la version française de l'Ambivalent sexism inventory: L'échelle de sexisme ambivalent. *L'Année Psychologique, 106*(2), 235–264. https://doi.org/10.4074/S0003503306002041

DeJean, S. L., McGeorge, C. R., & Stone Carlson, T. (2012). Attitudes toward never-married single mothers and fathers: Does gender matter? *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 24*(2), 121–138. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2012.648121

DiLapi, E. M. (1989). Lesbian mothers and the motherhood hierarchy. *Journal of Homosexuality, 18*(1–2), 101–121. https://doi.org/10.1300/J082v18n01_05

Dow, D. M. (2016). Integrated motherhood: Beyond hegemonic ideologies of motherhood. *Journal of Marriage and Family, 78*(1), 180–196. https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12264

Dworkin, J., Rudi, J. H., & Hessel, H. (2018). The state of family research and social media. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 10*(4), 796–813. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12295

Elliott, S., Powell, R., & Brenton, J. (2015). Being a good mom: Low-income, black single mothers negotiate intensive mothering. *Journal of Family Issues, 36*(3), 351–370. https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X13490279

Ennis, L. R. (Ed.). (2014). *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood*. Demeter Press.

Ess, C. M., & Hård af Segerstad, Y. (2019). Everything old is new again. In Å. Mäkitalo, T. E. Nicewonger, & M. Elam (Eds.), *Designs for experimentation and inquiry: Approaching learning and knowing in digital transformation* (1st ed., pp. 179–196). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429489839-11.

European Commission. (2018). *2018 Report on Equality Between Women and Men in the EU*. http://publications.europa.eu/publication/manifestation_identifier/PUB_DSAU18001ENN.

Festinger, L. (1962). *A Theory of Cognitive Dissonance*. Stanford University Press.

Flanagin, A. J. (2017). Online social influence and the convergence of mass and interpersonal communication. *Human Communication Research, 43*(4), 450–463. https://doi.org/10.1111/hcre.12116

Focella, E. S., Stone, J., Fernandez, N. C., Cooper, J., & Hogg, M. A. (2016). Vicarious hypocrisy: Bolstering attitudes and taking action after exposure to a hypocritical ingroup member. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 62*, 89–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jesp.2015.09.014

Forbes, L. K., Lamar, M. R., & Bornstein, R. S. (2021). Working mothers' experiences in an intensive mothering culture: A phenomenological qualitative study. *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy, 33*(3), 270–294. https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2020.1798200

Foucault, M. (1976). *La volonté de savoir*. Gallimard.

Franzke, A. S., Bechmann, A., Zimmer, M., Ess, C. M., & the Association of Internet Researchers. (2020). *Internet research: Ethical guidelines 3.0*. https://aoir.org/reports/ethics3.pdf.

Gershuny, J. (2018). *Gender Symmetry, Gender Convergence and Historical Work-time Invariance in 24 Countries*. Centre for time use research. https://www.timeuse.org/node/10840.

Gilbert, E., Bergstrom, T., & Karahalios, K. (2009). Blogs are echo chambers: blogs are echo chambers. In *2009 42nd Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences* (pp. 1–10). https://doi.org/10.1109/HICSS.2009.91

Gill, H., & Rojas, H. (2021). Communication mediation model predicting political participation among instant messaging app users: An OSROR approach. *Communication Studies, 72*(3), 490–512. https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2021.1899008

Girerd, L., & Bonnot, V. (2020). Neoliberalism: An ideological barrier to feminist identification and collective action. *Social Justice Research, 33*, 81–109. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-020-00347-8

Girerd, L., Jost, J. T., & Bonnot, V. (2022). *How Neoliberal are You? Development and Validation of the Neoliberal Orientation Questionnaire [2022]*. Manuscript submitted for publication.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (1996). The ambivalent sexism inventory: Differentiating hostile and benevolent sexism. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 70*(3), 491–512.

Glick, P., & Fiske, S. T. (2001). An ambivalent alliance: Hostile and benevolent sexism as complementary justifications for gender inequality. *American Psychologist, 56*(2), 109–118. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.56.2.109

Haerpfer, C., Inglehart, R., Moreno, A., Welzel, C., Kizilova, K., Diez-Medrano, J., Lagos, M., Norris, P., Ponarin, E., & Puranen, B. (2021). *World Values Survey Wave 7 (2017-2020) Cross-National Data-set [Data set]*. World Values Survey Association. https://doi.org/10.14281/18241.13

Hays, S. (1996). *The cultural contradictions of motherhood*. Yale University Press.

Heinz, B., Gu, L., Inuzuka, A., & Zender, R. (2002). Under the rainbow flag: Webbing global gay identities. *International Journal of Sexuality and Gender Studies, 7*(2/3), 107–124. https://doi.org/10.1023/A:1015841032097

Henley, N. M., Meng, K., O'Brien, D., McCarthy, W. J., & Sockloskie, R. J. (1998). Developing a scale to measure the diversity of feminist attitudes. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 22*(3), 317–348. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1471-6402.1998.tb00158.x

Hewson, C. (2014). Qualitative approaches in internet-mediated research: Opportunities, issues, possibilities. In P. Leavy (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Qualitative Research* (pp. 422–452). Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199811755.013.020.

Hogg, M. A., & Reid, S. A. (2006). Social identity, self-categorization, and the communication of group norms. *Communication Theory, 16*(1), 7–30. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2885.2006.00003.x

Hookway, N. (2008). `Entering the blogosphere': Some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research, 8*(1), 91–113. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468794107085298

Huisman, K., & Joy, E. (2014). The cultural contradictions of motherhood revisited: Continuities and changes. In L. R. Ennis (Ed.), *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood* (pp. 86–103). Demeter Press.

ISSP Research Group. (2016). International social survey programme: Family and changing gender roles IV - ISSP 2012 (4.0.0) [data set]. In *GESIS data archive*. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.12661

Jang, J., Dworkin, J., & Hessel, H. (2015). Mothers' use of information and communication technologies for information seeking. *Cyberpsychology, Behavior, and Social Networking, 18*(4), 221–227. https://doi.org/10.1089/cyber.2014.0533

Jelen, T. G. (1988). The effects of gender role stereotypes on political attitudes. *The Social Science Journal, 25*(3), 353–365. https://doi.org/10.1016/0362-3319(88)90036-5

Jost, J. T. (2018). A quarter century of system justification theory: Questions, answers, criticisms, and societal applications. *British Journal of Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1111/bjso.12297

Jost, J. T., & Banaji, M. R. (1994). The role of stereotyping in system-justification and the production of false consciousness. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 33*(1), 1–27. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.2044-8309.1994.tb01008.x

Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2002). The psychology of system justification and the palliative function of ideology. In W. Stroebe, & M. Hewstone (Eds.), *European review of social psychology* (Vol. 13, pp. 111–153). Psychology Press/Taylor & Francis.

Jost, J. T., & Hunyady, O. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of system-justifying ideologies. *Current Directions in Psychological Science, 14*(5), 260–265. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0963-7214.2005.00377.x

Jost, J. T., & Kay, A. C. (2005). Exposure to benevolent sexism and complementary gender stereotypes: Consequences for specific and diffuse forms of system justification. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 88*(3), 498–509. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.88.3.498

Kay, A. C., Gaucher, D., Peach, J. M., Laurin, K., Friesen, J., Zanna, M. P., & Spencer, S. J. (2009). Inequality, discrimination, and the power of the status quo: Direct evidence for a motivation to see the way things are as the way they should be. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 97*(3), 421–434.

King, N. (2012). Doing template analysis. In G. Symon, & C. Cassell (Eds.), *Qualitative organizational research* (pp. 426–450). SAGE Publications Inc.

Krauth-Gruber, S., Yzerbyt, V., & Aelenei, C. (2022). *An intersectional approach to gender and social class stereotypes [manuscript in preparation]*.

Lachance-Grzela, M., & Bouchard, G. (2010). Why do women do the lion's share of housework?A decade of research. *Sex Roles, 63*(11–12), 767–780. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-010-9797-z

Lewington, L., Lee, J., & Sebar, B. (2021). "I'm not just a babysitter": Masculinity and men's experiences of first-time fatherhood. *Men and Masculinities, 24*(4), 571–589. https://doi.org/10.1177/1097184X21993884

Lopez, L. K. (2009). The radical act of 'mommy blogging': Redefining motherhood through the blogosphere. *New Media & Society, 11*(5), 729–747. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444809105349

Loyal, D., Sutter, A.-L., & Rascle, N. (2017). Mothering ideology and work involvement in late pregnancy: A clustering approach. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 26*(10), 2921–2935. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-017-0786-5

Loyal, D., Sutter Dallay, A.-L., & Rascle, N. (2017). Intensive mothering ideology in France: A pilot study. *L'Encéphale, 43*(6), 564–569. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.encep.2017.08.002

Lupton, D., Pedersen, S., & Thomas, G. M. (2016). Parenting and digital media: From the early web to contemporary digital society. *Sociology Compass, 10*(8), 730–743. https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12398

Markham, A., & Buchanan, E. (2012). *Ethical decision-making and Internet research (version 2.0): Recommendations from the AoIR ethics working committee*. aoir.org/reports/ethics2.pdf.

Marques, J., Abrams, D., Paez, D., & Martinez-Taboada, C. (1998). The role of categorization and in-group norms in judgments of groups and their members. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 75*(4), 976–988. https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.75.4.976

Maxwell, J. A. (2012). *A realist approach for qualitative research*. SAGE Publications.

McDaniel, B., Coyne, S., & Holmes, E. (2012). New mothers and media use: Associations between blogging, social networking, and maternal well-being. *Maternal & Child Health Journal, 16*(7), 1509–1517. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-011-0918-2

McHenry, K. A., & Schultz, D. L. (2014). Skinny jeans: Perfection and competition in motherhood. In L. R. Ennis (Ed.), *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood* (pp. 299–312). Demeter Press.

Meeussen, L., & Van Laar, C. (2018). Feeling pressure to be a perfect mother relates to parental burnout and career ambitions. *Frontiers in Psychology, 9*. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.02113

Milanov, M., Rubin, M., & Paolini, S. (2014). Different types of ingroup identification: A comprehensive review, an integrative model, and implications for future research. *Psicologia Sociale, 3*, 205–232. https://doi.org/10.1482/78347

Milkie, M., & Warner, C. H. (2014). Status safeguarding: Mothers' work to secure children's place in the social hierarchy. In L. R. Ennis (Ed.), *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood* (pp. 66–85). Demeter Press.

Morrison, A. (2010). Autobiography in real time: A genre analysis of personal mommy blogging. *Cyberpsychology: Journal of Psychosocial Research on Cyberspace, 4*(2). https://cyberpsychology.eu/article/view/4239/3285.

Mosso, C., Briante, G., Aiello, A., & Russo, S. (2013). The role of legitimizing ideologies as predictors of ambivalent sexism in young people: Evidence from Italy and the USA. *Social Justice Research, 26*(1), 1–17. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-012-0172-9

Niedenthal, P. M., Krauth-Gruber, S., & Ric, F. (2006). *Psychology of emotion: Interpersonal, experiential, and cognitive approaches*. Psychology Press.

O'Brien, K. M., Yoo, S.-K., Kim, Y. H., Cho, Y., & Salahuddin, N. M. (2020). The good mothering expectations scale: An international instrument development study. *The Counseling Psychologist, 48*(2), 162–190. https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000019889895

Oecd. (2017). *The pursuit of gender equality: An uphill battle*. OECD Publishing.

Paltineau, M.-M. (2014). From intensive mothering to identity parenting. In L. R. Ennis (Ed.), *Intensive mothering: The cultural contradictions of modern motherhood* (pp. 120–141). Demeter Press.

Papacostas, A. (2012). *Eurobarometer 72.2 (3.0.0) [Data set]*. GESIS Data Archive. https://doi.org/10.4232/1.11137

Pedersen, S. (2016). The good, the bad and the 'good enough' mother on the UK parenting forum mumsnet. *Women's Studies International Forum, 59*, 32–38. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.wsif.2016.09.004

Pettigrew, S., Archer, C., & Harrigan, P. (2016). A thematic analysis of mothers' motivations for blogging. *Maternal and Child Health Journal, 20*(5), 1025–1031. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10995-015-1887-7

Piolat, A., & Bannour, R. (2009). EMOTAIX: Un scénario de tropes pour l'identification automatisée du lexique émotionnel et affectif. *L'Année Psychologique, 109*(04), 655. https://doi.org/10.4074/S0003503309004047

Puhlman, D. J., & Pasley, K. (2013). Rethinking maternal gatekeeping. *Journal of Family Theory & Review, 5*(3), 176–193. https://doi.org/10.1111/jftr.12016

Rizzo, K. M., Schiffrin, H. H., & Liss, M. (2013). Insight into the parenthood paradox: Mental health outcomes of intensive mothering. *Journal of Child and Family Studies, 22*(5), 614–620. https://doi.org/10.1007/s10826-012-9615-z

Rollero, C. (2014). Psychometric properties of short versions of the ambivalent sexism inventory and ambivalence toward men inventory. In *, 1. TPM - Testing, Psychometrics, Methodology in Applied Psychology* (pp. 149–159). https://doi.org/10.4473/TPM21.2.3

Rothman, B. K. (2000). *Recreating motherhood*. Rutgers University Press.

Rottenberg, C. (2018). *The rise of neoliberal feminism*. Oxford University Press.

Schmitt, N. (1996). Uses and abuses of coefficient alpha. *Psychological Assessment, 8*(4), 350–353. https://doi.org/10.1037/1040-3590.8.4.350

Schönbrodt, F. D., & Perugini, M. (2013). At what sample size do correlations stabilize? *Journal of Research in Personality, 47*(5), 609–612. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jrp.2013.05.009

Schubert, T. W., & Otten, S. (2002). Overlap of self, ingroup, and outgroup: Pictorial measures of self-categorization. *Self and Identity, 1*(4), 353–376. https://doi.org/10.1080/152988602760328012

Shields, S. A. (2013). Gender and emotion: What we think we know, what we need to know, and why it matters. *Psychology of Women Quarterly, 37*(4), 423–435. https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684313502312

Shields, S. A., & Koster, B. A. (1989). Emotional stereotyping of parents in child rearing manuals, 1915–1980. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 52*(1), 44. https://doi.org/10.2307/2786903

Shields, S. A., Steinke, P., & Koster, B. A. (1995). The double bind of caregiving: Representation of gendered emotion in American advice literature. *Sex Roles, 33*(7–8), 467–488. https://doi.org/10.1007/BF01544674

Stoppard, J. M., & Gunn Gruchy, C. D. (1993). Gender, context, and expression of positive emotion. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 19*(2), 143–150. https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167293192002

Suppes, A. (2020). Do women need to have children in order to be fulfilled? A system justification account of the motherhood norm. *Social Psychological and Personality Science, 11*(7), 999–1010. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550620909728

Tajfel, H. (1982). Social psychology of intergroup relations. *Annual Review of Psychology, 33*, 1–39. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.ps.33.020182.000245

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (2001). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In M. A. Hogg, & D. Abrams (Eds.), *Intergroup relations: Essential readings* (pp. 94–109). Psychology Press.

Takeshita, C. (2014). Eco-diapers: The American discourse of sustainable motherhood. In M. Giles (Ed.), *Mothering in the age of neoliberalism* (pp. 117–131). Demeter Press.

Taylor, T. (2011). Re-examining cultural contradictions: Mothering ideology and the intersections of class, gender, and race. *Sociology Compass, 5*(10), 898–907. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1751-9020.2011.00415.x

The Economic and Social Research Council. (2015). *Framework for research ethics*. https:esrc.ukri.org/.../guidance-for-applicants/esrc-framework-for-research-ethics-2015.

Thévenon, O. (2011). Family policies in OECD countries: A comparative analysis. *Population and Development Review, 37*(1), 57–87. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1728-4457.2011.00390.x

van Zomeren, M., Postmes, T., & Spears, R. (2008). Toward an integrative social identity model of collective action: A quantitative research synthesis of three socio-

psychological perspectives. *Psychological Bulletin, 134*(4), 504–535. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.134.4.504

Verniers, C. (2020). Behind the maternal wall: The hidden backlash toward childfree working women. *Journal of Theoretical Social Psychology*. https://doi.org/10.1002/jts5.65

Verniers, C., Bonnot, V., Darnon, C., Dompnier, B., & Martinot, D. (2016). How gender stereotypes of academic abilities contribute to the maintenance of gender hierarchy in higher education. In K. Faniko, F. Lorenzi-Cioldi, O. Sarrasin, & E. Mayor (Eds.), *Gender and social hierarchies: Perspectives from social psychology* (pp. 27–38). Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Verniers, C., & Martinot, D. (2015). L'EJSAG, Une Échelle de justification du système Spécifique au genre: Validation auprès d'une population d'adolescents et d'adultes. *L'Année Psychologique, 115*(1), 107–140. https://doi.org/10.3917/anpsy.151.0107

Verniers, C., & Vala, J. (2018). Justifying gender discrimination in the workplace: The mediating role of motherhood myths. *PLoS ONE, 13*(1), Article e0190657. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0190657

Wakslak, C. J., Jost, J. T., & Bauer, P. (2011). Spreading rationalization: Increased support for large-scale and small-scale social systems following system threat. *Social Cognition, 29*(3), 288–302.

Wasmer, M., & Baumann, H. (2018). German general social survey 2016: English translation of the German 'ALLBUS'-Questionnaire. In *GESIS Papers*. https://doi.org/10.21241/SSOAR.59027

Weller, W., Bassalo, L.d. M. B., & Pfaff, N. (2018). Collecting data for analyzing blogs. In U. Flick (Ed.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative data collection* (pp. 482–495). SAGE Publications Ltd. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781526416070.n31.

Williams, M. J., & Chen, S. (2014). When "mom's the boss": Control over domestic decision making reduces women's interest in workplace power. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations, 17*(4), 436–452. https://doi.org/10.1177/1368430213497065

Wright, S., Graham, T., & Jackson, D. (2015). Third space, social media, and everyday political talk. In A. Bruns, G. Enli, E. Skogerbø, A. O. Larsson, & C. Christensen (Eds.), *The Routledge companion to social media and politics* (1st ed., pp. 74–88). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315716299-6.