

Women and Men at Work

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Paid Work and Family Work

The relationship between family and work has changed dramatically over the years. The first big change occurred with the Industrial Revolution and the rise of capitalism, which shifted most production from households to factories, drastically altering the work patterns of men, women, and children. The last 50 years, however, have brought another equally dramatic “revolution”: women’s rising participation in the labor force. Today, the typical married woman works for pay in the labor force in addition to working at home as a homemaker. Combining paid work and family work has been difficult for women of all classes. In the early industrial period, the doctrine of separate spheres kept middle- and upper-class women out of the workforce, and the task of combining paid work and family responsibilities fell largely on working-class and poor women. But today, a family’s economic level no longer determines whether a woman works outside the home. Thus work/family conflict spans the entire economic spectrum. However, now that more privileged women—who tend to have more political clout—are concerned about blending their work lives and family lives, employers and the American government have begun to address the problem of work/family conflict. Nevertheless, individual women bear the brunt of the problem.

This chapter discusses the effects of women’s labor force participation on their family work, and vice versa, and examines employers’ and governments’ attempts to help people cope with the need to combine paid work and family work.

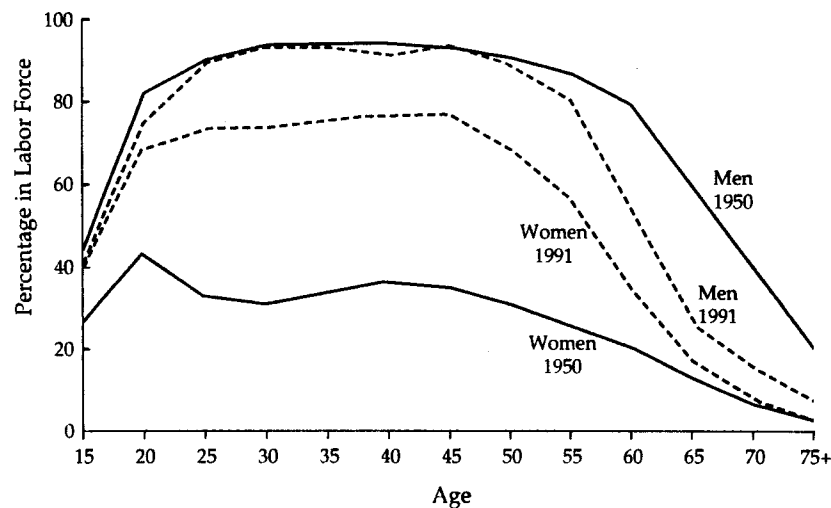
The Decline of the Stay-at-Home Wife and Mother

At the turn of the century, fewer than 4 percent of married women were in the labor force; by 1992, 57.8 percent were (U.S. Women’s Bureau 1993). Mothers’ rising labor force participation is as dramatic as married

women's. Today women are less likely to interrupt their labor force participation for children, statistics show. The more recently women were born, the more likely they are to be in the labor force at every age (see Figure 8.1). Among women born before 1951, labor force participation dropped when they were in their late 20s, but few women born after 1950 are leaving the labor force to have children. In 1976, 31 percent of mothers with a child under 1 year old were in the labor force; that percentage had grown to 53 percent in 1990 and to 68 percent for college graduates (O'Connell and Bachu 1992).

In 1992 both parents were employed in 42 percent of families with children, compared to 35 percent in 1975 (Hayghe 1990, 1993). As Figure 8.2 shows, family-work patterns have changed considerably in the last 50 years. Families with employed husbands and stay-at-home wives accounted for only 18 percent of all families in 1992, compared to 67 percent in 1940. In addition, the skyrocketing divorce rate and huge increases in the number of unmarried mothers have increased the number of families maintained solely by employed women. As Figure 8.2

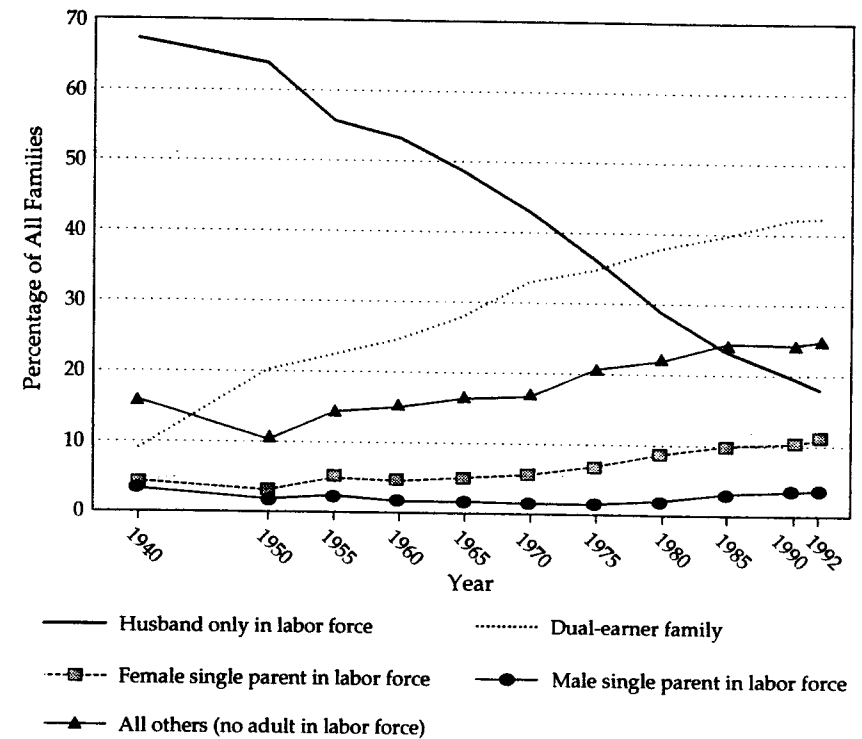
FIGURE 8.1
Labor Force Participation by Age for U.S. Men and Women,
1950 and 1991



Source: Bloom and Brender 1993:figure 2.

FIGURE 8.2

Work Patterns of Families, 1940 to 1992



Source: Data from Hayghe 1990, 1993.

shows, the proportion of female single-parent families in the workforce grew from about 5 percent in 1965 to a little over 11 percent in 1992; meanwhile, the proportion of father-only families has remained stable at around 3 percent.¹

Women's labor force participation has increased during the twentieth century for all women, regardless of their race or ethnicity. However, as

¹The diverse group of "other families" includes persons who maintain their families without being in the labor force. The growth in the percentage of such families since 1940 has stemmed primarily from the increasing popularity of early retirement.

you saw in Chapter 2, in 1900 African-American women were more likely to be in the labor force than white women were, a situation that persisted for decades. Only in the 1990s did white women catch up with black women in labor force participation. By 1993, 57.9 percent of white women and 57.1 percent of African-American women were in the labor force. Hispanic women are less likely to be in the labor force—52 percent in 1993. The Census Bureau classifies several groups as Hispanic, however. Of these, Cuban women have the second highest rate of labor force participation among U.S. women; Puerto Rican women have the lowest rate. Mexican-American women's likelihood of being in the labor force is quite low, resembling that of American-Indian women's. Among men, the pattern differs: 79.4 percent of men of Hispanic origin, 76.3 percent of Anglos, and 69.1 percent of African Americans were employed in 1993 (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1993b).

The differences in labor force participation among these racial and ethnic groups reflect both employers' demand for workers of a particular sex and race or ethnicity and the economic situations of their families. Black women have always been in the labor force in great numbers, both because employers sought low-wage labor and because discrimination against black men heightened black women's need to work for pay. Puerto Rican women's labor force participation is lower because they have finished fewer years of school on average (which makes them less desirable to employers) and because they are more likely to be single parents (which impedes labor force participation). Mexican-American and American-Indian women also lack the education that would make them more attractive to employers; in addition, both groups are concentrated in the Southwest, where fewer jobs are available, and both groups face discrimination. On the other hand, Hispanic men are four percentage points more likely than Anglo men to participate in the labor force, because they have been concentrated in service and farm jobs, where there is a demand for their labor for at least part of the year. The majority of Cuban Americans—who tend to be better educated than other Hispanics—live in the Southeast, especially Florida, where job prospects are better (Smith and Tienda 1988:65–7).

Overall, race and ethnicity do affect the likelihood of belonging to the labor force, but they have different effects for women and men. Among women, the long-run trend is toward convergence, minimizing differences across racial and ethnic groups. Among men, however, the trend has been toward divergence: The differences among black, white, and Hispanic men have been increasing.

Work/Family Conflict

Dramatic changes in family structure and women's labor force participation have not brought substantial changes to the sexual division of labor. Today, most married women share responsibility for the breadwinner role; but men, by and large, have been slower to share domestic responsibilities. Furthermore, no other institution in society, neither public nor private, has stepped in to help working women. As a result, women have shouldered the responsibilities of work and family largely on their own.

Jobs and families both demand enormous commitments of time and energy, especially during the peak years of family formation and career growth. Jobs usually consume about a third of a person's day, not including time spent commuting and preparing for work. In addition, many working women are responsible for caring for four groups: themselves, their husbands, their children, and their elderly parents or in-laws. Children require considerable time, frequently during their parents' paid work hours; children's sicknesses and school events cannot be scheduled around work hours.

In sum, although women enjoy the status, satisfaction, and power that a paid job provides, they also experience the stress of coping with a double day. Many also face logistical problems. Most men with families do not experience these stresses. Indeed, some resent the pressure from their wives to provide more help with family chores. But as you will see, some men also have trouble with their confinement to the breadwinner role.

The Gendering of Work/Family Conflict

"Man may work from sun to sun, but a woman's work is never done." Although employed women must do housework, many married men can simply choose not to (Hochschild 1989). Even wealthy women in high-level jobs do not escape all household labor. Alice M. Rivlin, deputy director of the Office of Management and Budget during the Clinton administration, noted that she often runs into people at the supermarket who are surprised to see her there. "How else do they think I'm going to get food? Do they think I have a staff?" (Burros 1993). Zoe Baird and Kimba Wood were forced to withdraw from consideration as U.S. Attorney General because of improprieties in hiring immigrant workers as housekeepers. In their case, a double standard seemed to be operating: Society has never condemned male appointees who have employed immigrant workers to clean their houses, fix their meals, and tend their

children—presumably because the domestic realm was their wives' responsibility, not theirs.

Some Marxist historians of capitalism predicted that industrialization would lead governments or private entrepreneurs to take over the family's domestic functions. These historians believed that either government or business could provide services like cooking and laundry more efficiently than the family could, thereby freeing women and children to work in the marketplace. As we know, this shift did not occur. In the upheaval of early capitalism, when all other social relations were being renegotiated, why did the family remain the site of housework? One answer is that everyone—except women—benefits from this arrangement. It satisfies employers because it relieves them of the cost of maintaining and reproducing the labor force they depend on. It satisfies men because it saves them from packing their own lunches or laundering their own work clothes.

But this arrangement does not often satisfy women, because bearing sole responsibility for running family affairs is a considerable burden. At home they are responsible for taking care of the needs of all family members, even at the expense of their own needs. In fact, when she marries, a woman adds nine hours a week, on average, to her household labor (Shelton 1992:66). At work, employers often give women fewer opportunities than men because employers assume that women's paid work is less important to women than their family responsibilities, making them less committed to paid work. In the rest of this chapter, we examine how this social construction of housework as women's responsibility affects women's and men's lives.

Problems for Women

In the following sections, we focus on the ways that women and men respond to the competing demands of work and family. For women, the main problem is managing their time efficiently so as to fulfill both their age-old obligations as homemakers and their newer obligations as paid workers. The expressions "double day" and "second shift" were coined to describe employed women's dual responsibilities for paid and unpaid work (Hochschild 1989).

Nevertheless, we should note, being employed benefits women and their families. First, women's employment is essential for most families' economic well-being; often it makes the difference between household self-sufficiency and poverty. Jobs and income are also crucial to the 26 million unmarried women who were in the labor force in 1993. In mar-

ried couples, when both members work full time, year-round, wives contribute over 40 percent of the total household income (Crispell 1993). Combining work and family has positive emotional effects as well. Success in one role—for example, a promotion at work—can buffer a woman from difficulties in another role, such as a divorce (Thoits 1983; Reskin and Coverman 1985). Even for women in dead-end jobs that offer few opportunities for success, employment still brings satisfactions that can complement family work. As sociologist Myra Ferree stated,

Some of the worst difficulties in full-time housework, such as isolation or lack of recognition, may be relieved by certain rewards in the work force, such as ties with coworkers and a paycheck, while some of the problems of paid employment, such as close supervision and fragmentation of the work, can be balanced by rewards at home, such as autonomy and an undivided work process. (1987a:297)

Housework. A major problem for women is finding the time for both housework and paid work. When a woman enters the labor force, each extra hour she puts into her paid job reduces her housework efforts by a half hour (Schor 1991:36). She cooks less, cleans less, and spends less time with her children. Working women substitute daycare centers, fast-food restaurants, and laundries for home-provided services (Bergmann 1986).² Women may also be able to employ a childcare or domestic worker to do some tasks. However, if that worker fails to show up, women must do the work themselves.

Women also cut the amount of time spent on domestic obligations by reducing the number of dependents at home. Many women in professional jobs either wait to have children until after their careers are established, have fewer children than they would prefer, or forgo children or marriage. Among the highest-paid officers and directors of Fortune 500 companies, for example, few of the men but 40 percent of the women were childless (University of California at Los Angeles/Korn-Ferry 1993).³

²Some researchers argue that the amount of housework has increased because it now includes some tasks that used to be performed by others for pay. Until World War II, for example, people telephoned their neighborhood grocer, who would fill and deliver the grocery order. Today consumers do this labor without pay: We go to supermarkets, push carts through crowded aisles, stand in line to pay for our purchases, and then haul them home (Glazer 1984, 1988).

³The causal relationship between childlessness and career success is impossible to establish. Employers that practice statistical discrimination may have weeded out many women with children because they think women's families may interfere with job performance.

Most men and women profess to believe that working couples should share household responsibilities (Schor 1991:104). Yet family demands remain mostly women's responsibility, even among women who work full time. Fully employed women spent an estimated 33 hours a week on housework in 1987, compared to men's 20 hours a week (Shelton 1992:83). A conservative estimate is that women average 65 hours a week in paid and unpaid work (Schor 1991), but other studies report as many as 84 hours a week for married mothers, 79 hours for unmarried mothers, and 72 hours for fathers (Burden and Googins 1987). Women with young children, those in professional jobs, and those who must hold two paid jobs work even longer hours (Schor 1991:21; Shelton 1992). The price of this time crunch for women is less leisure and too little sleep (Hochschild 1989; Schor 1991). Working mothers whom Arlie Hochschild interviewed talked about sleep "the way a hungry person talks about food" (1989:9).

Some women respond to the pressure of the double day by prodding their husbands or partners to do more housework. Interviews with working wives have revealed that many are unsuccessful (Hochschild 1989). One couple avoided divorce over the issue of housework by assigning the downstairs to the husband and the upstairs to the wife. The upstairs included the living room, kitchen, two bathrooms, and two bedrooms; the downstairs included the garage, car, and dog. Men often exaggerate their contributions, as did this man who was asked what he did to share the work of the home:

He answered, "I make all the pies we eat." He didn't have to share much responsibility for the home; "pies" did it for him. Another man grilled fish. Another baked bread. In their pies, their fish, and their bread, such men converted a single act into a substitute for a multitude of chores. (Hochschild 1989:43)

Table 8.1 shows how couples in which both partners hold full-time jobs divide the housework. Two things stand out: Women and men do different tasks,⁴ and women clearly spend more time than men on domestic tasks. Moreover, many of the tasks done mostly by men—such as auto maintenance and outdoor tasks—are weekly or monthly chores and can be scheduled; women's tasks customarily must be done daily. A man

⁴Women and men also did different household tasks in the past. In the nineteenth century, middle-class men did some yard work, were responsible for certain purchases (wine, books, pictures, wheeled vehicles), and helped to paint and paper rooms (Davidoff and Hall 1987:387).

TABLE 8.1

Time Spent on Household Tasks by Full-Time Workers,
Measured in Hours per Week, 1987

Household Tasks	Men	Women	Men as a Percentage of Women
Preparing meals	3.0	8.0	37.5
Washing dishes	2.3	5.2	44.2
House cleaning	2.1	6.6	31.8
Outdoor tasks	4.9	2.1	42.8*
Shopping	1.7	2.9	58.6
Washing, ironing	1.0	3.8	26.3
Paying bills	1.6	2.0	80.0
Auto maintenance	2.0	0.4	20.0*
Driving	1.2	1.7	70.6

*Women as a percentage of men.

Source: Beth Anne Shelton, *Women, Men, and Time: Gender Differences in Paid Work, Housework, and Leisure*. New York: Greenwood Press (an imprint of Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., Westport, CT), 1992, p. 83. Reprinted with permission.

can postpone changing the car's oil for a week if something else comes up, but a woman cannot postpone washing the dishes for a week or making an emergency trip to the pediatrician.

Men in the United States are doing more housework than they used to, but not much more (Hochschild 1989:278; Shelton 1992:75). In 1978, 76 percent of wives who were employed full time did the majority of housework (Ross 1986). In 1987, 66 percent of employed wives still reportedly did most or all of the housework (Harris 1987). Whether their wives work outside the home or not has little effect on how much housework men do. However, men who are better educated or have a young child at home do slightly more than other men (Shelton 1992; Thompson and Walker 1991), as do African-American and Hispanic men (Shelton and John 1993).

The bottom line is that women do much more housework than men. This pattern is likely to continue in the next generation: Daughters of mothers who work full time spend 10.2 hours a week on housework, in contrast to sons' 2.7 hours (Exter 1991). The unequal division of household labor is much the same around the world, although the size of the gap varies. For example, Swedish and Japanese women spend the same

number of hours on housework (31 per week), but Swedish men spend about 15 hours more per week on housework than Japanese men do (Blau and Ferber 1990). Even in Sweden, whose citizens hold liberal gender-role attitudes, women perform three-quarters of the housework (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990).

As women's earnings approach parity with men's, the household division of labor may become more equitable. Cross-national research shows a slight tendency for the division of household labor between the sexes to become a little more equal as women's opportunities to earn money in the labor force expand (Blau and Ferber 1990). In the United States, relative equality between women's and men's earnings leads to men's doing more housework (Ferree 1987b). In "macho" cultures, however, it is not how much women earn, but how much husbands earn, that affects the amount of domestic work husbands do. For example, in Greece, Honduras, and Kenya, low-earning men do not perform housework, apparently because they feel threatened by their wives' earnings; only women in these countries whose husbands earn a relatively high income are able to gain some equality in the family (Safilios-Rothschild 1990).

Childcare. Not surprisingly, the responsibility for finding accessible, affordable childcare usually falls to mothers.⁵ Data from 1991 for households in which mothers worked showed that fathers cared for 20 percent of preschoolers,⁶ other relatives cared for 23 percent, nonrelatives cared for another 23 percent, organized facilities such as daycare centers and nursery schools cared for another 23 percent, and mothers cared for about 9 percent in their workplaces (O'Connell 1993).

Obtaining adequate childcare is the primary source of stress among employed mothers (Ross and Mirowsky 1988). Women's increasing participation in the paid workforce has reduced the number of relatives available for childcare, so parents increasingly rely on organized facilities. However, organized childcare is often inadequate to meet working mothers' needs. First, most centers operate only during standard business hours and offer no care for sick children. In one survey, half the respondents whose child had been sick in the previous month had missed at least a day of work (Hofferth et al. 1991). Second, childcare is seldom

cheap; it constitutes one of the largest work-related costs. Single mothers and poor families are particularly hard hit by childcare costs. In 1990 poor mothers of preschoolers spent 23 percent of their family income on childcare, compared to 6 percent of family income for high-income mothers (Hofferth et al. 1991). Third, not enough affordable facilities exist to meet the demand. One study found that inadequate childcare prevented almost 14 percent of young mothers from working for part or all of the previous year (Cattan 1991). The high cost and inaccessibility of childcare force some parents to leave their children home alone. According to a 1990 study, one out of nine children under age 13 whose mothers were employed were left without any childcare at all (Hofferth et al. 1991).

Despite media scare stories, most experts agree that out-of-home care is not harmful to children. Indeed, out-of-home care appears to enhance children's social skills and learning abilities (Lamb 1992; O'Connell and Bachu 1992). Moreover, high-quality childcare often raises poor children's test scores (Piotrkowski and Katz 1982). The real problem is not whether only mothers can provide good care but where to find affordable, accessible, and reliable childcare.

Care of elderly relatives. Working women increasingly face another family demand: care of elderly relatives. Although most of the rapidly growing elderly population care for themselves, of the 22 percent who were disabled in 1985, most relied on family and friends for care. In 1985, 20 to 30 percent of IBM's and The Travelers' Companies' employees over age 30 cared for an elderly person (Creeden 1989). In 1989 only 3 percent of full-time employees received any kind of help from employers in caring for elderly relatives (Hyland 1990). As the number of elderly increases, a growing number of workers must somehow fit caretaking into their days—by forgoing sleep, leisure, and in some cases full-time employment.

Relocation for a job. Gender stereotypes influence decisions about moving when one partner's career would benefit from geographic relocation. In many managerial and professional occupations, workers advance their career by moving. In the past, employers assumed that committed workers would make these moves, and the workers did. Today, however, geographic moves present serious problems for dual-career couples.

Husbands' and wives' concerns do not carry equal weight in family decisions about whether to move. Usually it is the wives who sacrifice their careers and their earnings so the husband can advance. In 1992, men accounted for 82 percent of all corporate moves (Employee Relocation Council 1992). Mainstream economists would explain that families

⁵Women also predominate among paid childcare providers. In 1990 almost half a million women and 234 men were paid to care for children in someone else's home. Another 188,419 women and 22,932 men worked as providers of childcare in organized setting (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992a).

⁶This figure is a marked increase; it had hovered around 15 percent since 1977.

maximize their total income by following the best-paying job and that this job is usually the man's. But most families favor moving if the husband wants to, even if losing the wife's income will set back her career or reduce the household's income (Bielby and Bielby 1992b). Cultural beliefs support this arrangement. In 1985 a majority of both women and men in a national sample believed that a wife should give up a "good and interesting" job if her husband were offered a better one elsewhere (Simon and Landis 1989). Findings like these highlight men's greater power in decisions that affect the family.

Problems for Men

The conflicts that men experience between their work and family roles differ greatly from those women face. Since industrialization, men's primary family role has been breadwinner.⁷ Thus, men's primary work/family problems occur when they are unable to perform the breadwinner role, are discontented with the role's limits, or view their wives as competitors for the role.

Unemployment. Men's traditional role as primary breadwinner has led researchers to assume that unemployment is particularly problematic for men. Until recently, most research showed more emotional distress among unemployed men than unemployed women, although this is no longer the case (Kessler et al. 1987). These ill effects are worst for men whose wives are employed (Turner 1992). The erosion of their family power presumably heightens men's distress at losing their breadwinner role. Indeed, interviews with families during the Great Depression showed that unemployed men lost their wives' and children's respect. An unemployed father said, "When a father cannot support his family, supply them with clothing and good food, the children are bound to lose respect" (Komarovsky 1940:98). His employed 17-year-old son added, "He is not the same father, that's all. You can't help not looking up to him like we used to" (Komarovsky 1940:100-1).

In societies where men are defined solely as earners, male unemployment is associated with family violence. If society decrees that a man's sole contribution to family life is his paycheck, he will feel worthless if

he cannot live up to that obligation, and feelings of worthlessness can lead to violence. Research for the United States has shown that unemployment increases the likelihood that a man will abuse his wife (Straus et al. 1980:129).

Discontent with the breadwinner role. Many men resent bearing the entire financial responsibility for their families. This responsibility can limit men's options both at work and at home. A cabinetmaker during the Great Depression, for example, wanted to learn radio mechanics, but because he was the sole provider for his family, he could not afford to quit his job to retrain.

Some men acutely feel the disconnection that arises between themselves and their children when work requires that they sacrifice time with their family. One father in a recent study was disturbed by how little he saw his children:

In the past year, I've been lucky to get home on weekends and am often away for six weeks at a time without seeing my kids. A new child was born six months ago, and she doesn't even recognize me. (Andrews and Bailyn 1993:265)

In contrast, one man who took advantage of his company's generous family-leave policy enjoyed the experience: "I got one of the best months [to be home], three months old. It's a great time to inherit a kid" (Fried 1993).

The proportion of men who still believe that the provider role belongs exclusively to men has been falling. In 1988, only 30 percent of a national sample of men agreed that it is best for men to hold the provider role while women take care of the home, down from 69 percent in 1977 (National Opinion Research Corporation 1990; Wilkie 1993).

Power struggles with wives. The traditional division of labor that kept women from contributing financially to the family also preserved men's dominance in the family and kept men from seeing their wives as competitors. Earning wages gives women higher status and more power in family decisions (Blumstein and Schwartz 1983). Men feel the difference: One study found that the more income women earned, the more their husbands felt underpaid (Mirowsky 1987). When women outearn their husbands, relations between the couple can become even more tense.

Families try to avoid such power struggles in various ways. In Ghana, where women have traditionally earned money by selling fish, women reduce tension by keeping their income secret from their husbands. As one woman explained,

⁷Society has given men—but never women—permission to escape from their family obligations. Indeed, only half the women with legal orders for child support receive the full amount. The rest are about evenly divided between those who receive partial payments and those who receive none (Lester 1991).

We never discussed matters having to do with his or my income and work. Once a husband gets to know about the finances of his wife, the man begins to be tight with money. He will not be willing to take some of the financial responsibility [for the children] that he previously was shouldering. Therefore a safe practice is to keep the man in the dark. (C. Robertson 1984:71)

Women's growing labor force participation is difficult for men who fear that it will erode their importance in the family, and families struggle to reduce the tension this change creates.

Responses to Work/Family Conflicts

Attempts to resolve work/family conflicts tend to center on the practical problems of juggling work and family life, particularly the childcare problem. In this country, individual women have been largely responsible for finding ways to accommodate both work and family roles. Only when the problems have become so severe that they spill over into the workplace or affect politicians have governments and private employers stepped in. Some employers have instituted such programs as home work, flexible schedules, and help with childcare. The U.S. government, however, has done little to help families cope. Even when employers or the government have acted, they have addressed mainly childcare issues. Rarely has either looked for innovative ways to assist with day-to-day domestic chores. Thus these chores remain in the family or are turned over to paid providers. In this section we examine the programs that employers have implemented; then we turn to those that European and U.S. governments have initiated.

Employer-Sponsored Programs

Employers have devised some strategies to accommodate family responsibilities—although far fewer than employers provide in other industrialized countries—mainly in order to improve recruitment and to reduce turnover among women workers. Employers with the most far-reaching programs are those, such as hospitals, that depend on a female workforce. When Kaiser Shipbuilding Company sought to recruit women workers during the labor shortage brought on by World War II, it provided on-site, around-the-clock childcare, facilities for sick children, and even cheap carryout dinners for working mothers to take home (Sidel 1986:119). But at war's end, when Kaiser no longer needed to retain women, it abolished these programs. Almost half a century later, a

few employers provide benefits similar to those that Kaiser provided. For example, Riverside Hospital in Columbus, Ohio, which has a female chief executive officer, provides on-site childcare (including care for sick children) and eldercare. More revolutionary is its practice of allowing any employee to fax a shopping list to a nearby grocery store, which then delivers the groceries to a pickup site in the staff parking lot. This section discusses some of the employer-sponsored programs that have been implemented to keep costs down or to retain valued women workers; these programs are now helping some workers cope with work/family conflict.

Assistance with childcare. Over half of employers provide workers with some kind of help with childcare (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1988). Employers institute childcare-assistance programs to address problems of recruitment, absenteeism, and turnover (Ferber and O'Farrell 1991:133).⁸ Figure 8.3 shows the most common forms of assistance. But the most common forms—scheduling policies that make it easier for parents to be home when their children are and childcare counseling and referral services—tend to be the least helpful. Only 5.2 percent of employers provided the most helpful benefit, which is on-site childcare.

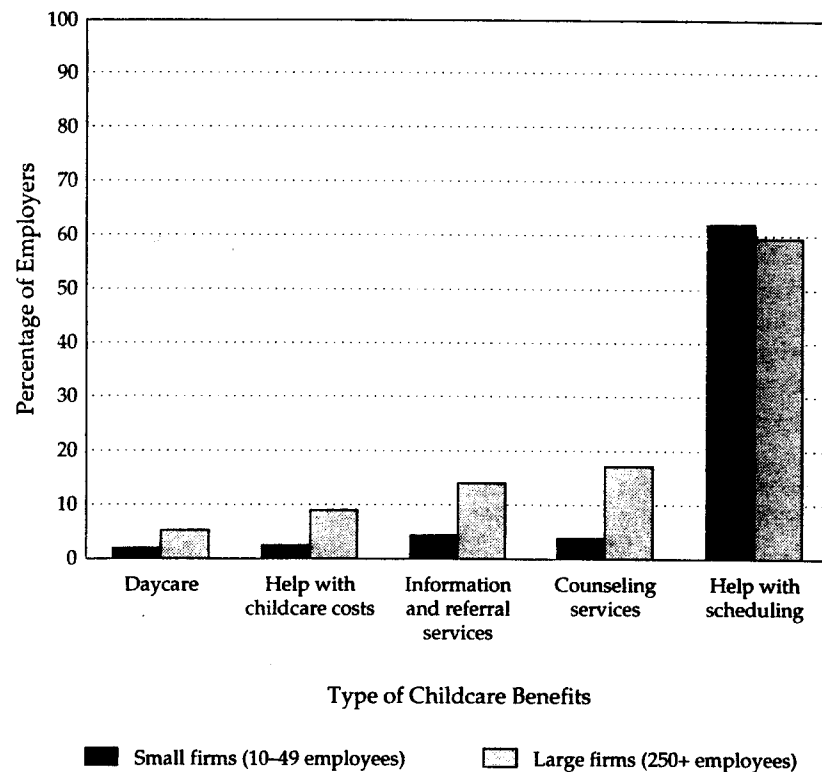
Just because most employers offer some kind of assistance with childcare, it does not follow that most workers get help. As Figure 8.3 shows, large companies are more likely than small ones to provide benefits; however, small companies employ the majority of workers. In 1989, 5 percent of all full-time employees were eligible for childcare assistance, and 11 percent were eligible for flexible scheduling (Hyland 1990). By and large, high-status workers receive far more childcare benefits than other workers. In 1990, 39 percent of female professionals had access to at least one childcare-related employment benefit, but only 11 percent of service workers did (Kleiman 1993a). In the same year, college-educated women were three times more likely to have access to such benefits than high-school graduates were. As economist Heidi Hartmann observed, "Employers care more about the better-educated, higher-skilled workers and try harder to recruit and retain them" (Kleiman 1993a).

Flexible scheduling. Employers in industrial societies traditionally have organized work so that all workers are present during the same hours. This

⁸One study showed that failures in childcare arrangements had caused between 6 and 15 percent of mothers to lose time from work in the previous month (Hofferth et al. 1991:346).

FIGURE 8.3

Percentage of Employers Offering Selected Childcare Benefits, 1987



Source: Data from U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1988:table 1.

tradition is changing, however. In 1991, among full-time, year-round workers, 15.5 percent of men and 14.5 percent of women worked evenings, nights, rotating shifts, or other irregular schedules (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1992d). A government survey found that in 1987, 35 percent of firms offered some workers part-time work and 43 percent offered some leeway in scheduling working hours (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1988). Far fewer firms allowed two people to share a full-time job (16 percent) or let employees work at home some or all of the time (8 percent).

Such policies accommodate workers' family burdens only when workers have a choice about them. Flexibility at McDonald's restaurants, for example, means that workers are supposed to be flexible about working late or leaving early depending on how busy the outlet is (Leidner 1993:51). Employers in the British baking industry hired women part time to increase employers' flexibility in dealing with the fluctuating demand for baked goods (Beechey and Perkins 1987).

Workers who have a say in their hours of work, however, find flexible schedules useful in arranging childcare. In fact, a 1992 poll found that, although the majority of women prefer full-time over part-time work (or no work), they want flexible scheduling to be a condition of full-time work (N. Collins 1993a).

Catalyst (1986), an organization interested in improving women's access to high-level jobs, has put forward a controversial proposal to create a new career path for professionals who want to combine career and family. Workers on this proposed career path would have less demanding work schedules but would be promoted more slowly. Although the proposed slow track would be available to both sexes, the media dubbed it the "mommy track," and past experience suggests that most men would avoid it. If so, Catalyst's proposal would reinforce the traditional sexual division of labor at home while perpetuating sex differences in promotions and authority at work. Although we know of no employers that have formally implemented the "mommy track," an informal separate mobility track for women has long been in operation, as Chapter 5 showed.

Home work. Home work refers to paid jobs that workers do at home. Home workers include two distinct groups: professional workers and clerical or blue-collar workers (Leidner 1988; Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). Employers typically pay clerical and blue-collar home workers on a piecework basis for such tasks as knitting sweaters on a machine, making costume jewelry, or entering insurance claims on a computer. Moreover, the volume and scheduling of work are unsteady, the pay is low, and workers receive few or no benefits (Costello 1989). Such home work is reminiscent of preindustrial cottage industry in some ways. For example, home work has historically used child labor. This practice continues today when the home-working parent must produce a certain number of units or is paid on a piecework basis (Leidner 1988). In the 1940s, the U.S. Department of Labor outlawed most cottage industry, but it became legal again during the Reagan administration. Employers have reintroduced home work for clerical and blue-collar workers to

reduce labor costs by avoiding fringe benefits (such as sick leave and health insurance).

Caring for children while doing another job is a problem for home workers (Christensen 1989:193). Although home work may appeal to women without affordable childcare, many find that working near their children does not necessarily make childcare easier. One home worker who processed insurance claims complained about the company's irregular scheduling of the work load: "If you'd [unexpectedly] get six hours of work someday and you have two little kids at home and you only have three hours worth of TV, when are you going to get the work done?" (Costello 1989:207). Home work is therefore often not a satisfactory solution to work/family conflict for working-class women.

The other large group of home workers consists of high-status professionals. Employers' main reasons for instituting home work for professionals are to enhance their productivity, satisfaction, and retention (Tomaskovic-Devey and Risman 1993). Like clerical workers, professional workers often use computer hookups to do their work. In contrast to clerical home workers, however, professional workers receive the same pay and benefits that they would in the office. Yet they too may experience a cost: Working from home renders them less visible in their organization and thus may reduce their promotion chances.⁹

Summary. Labor shortages predicted for the end of the century may force corporations to take more responsibility for helping employees reconcile family and work. But two problems arise in leaving the hope for change with corporations. First, as we will discuss in Chapter 9, the workforce is polarizing into two groups: privileged workers (managers and professionals) and contingent workers (those with no job security, often in temporary or part-time jobs) who are hired and fired according to employers' labor needs. Employers tend to make family benefits available only to privileged workers. Second, most people work for small companies that cannot afford costly changes. To meet the needs of the majority of workers, the government must become more involved.

Government-Sponsored Programs

Some governments have addressed work/family conflicts by offering services that help both women and men accommodate their dual responsi-

⁹Both sexes do home work; in fact, more men than women work at home. But whereas female home workers spend more time on housework than do comparable women who travel to a worksite, male home workers spend no more time on housework or childcare than their male counterparts do (Silver 1993).

bilities. But the United States has provided fewer such benefits than the governments of many other advanced industrial countries. There are two reasons for this disparity. First, this country has not faced the persistent labor shortages that prompted other countries to encourage women's labor force participation. Only during wartime have labor shortages led the United States to institute such policies. In World War II, for example, when the United States desperately needed women to fill war-related jobs vacated by men, federal and state governments established 3,012 childcare centers (Sidel 1986:119). The second reason that the United States provides fewer benefits is ideological. Whereas European societies place a premium on social welfare, American ideology values individual freedom above all else. The American tradition of individualism is at odds with the notion that a country has a stake in raising the next generation. In contrast, Europeans believe that society bears some responsibility for family well-being and will gain from investing in the next generation.

Neither labor shortages nor ideology are enough to ensure that governments will address the family needs of workers. Consider the Soviet Union, which was the first country to make a public commitment to providing family services—partly because it badly needed women laborers and partly because the country's governing ideology mandated equality between the sexes. Beyond providing childcare, however, the Soviet government did nothing to aid women in their dual roles. In 1984 Soviet women had the highest rate of labor force participation in the world (90 percent) but were still responsible for all domestic labor except childcare (Attwood and McAndrew 1984).

The attempt to provide relief from women's double day has also failed in postrevolutionary Cuba. After offering free childcare for years to draw women into the labor force, the Cuban government decided that incorporating men into domestic work would be cheaper. A 1975 law made men and women equally responsible for family work (Nazzari 1986). However, inequalities in the power of women and men doomed the law to fail. In 1982 women still did virtually all the housework in most households (Catasus et al. 1988).

Are market economies more successful than nonmarket ones in helping women with the double day? In the Western hemisphere, except for childcare, the answer is no. Western European governments offer a wide range of social-insurance programs that cover many basic human needs, including family care (we discuss these later). But none of these countries has devised mechanisms to spare working women from the daily drudgery of cooking, cleaning, and marketing. Instead, they have devised ways to allow women to do these things and still work for pay. Part-time work in Scandinavia, for instance, comes with guaranteed

health-care benefits, which are rare in the United States. As a result, Scandinavian women are less likely than American women to work full time: 50 percent of Norwegian and Swedish women are employed part time, compared to only 25 percent of U.S. women (Kalleberg and Rosenfeld 1990; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 1993a).

Although Western industrialized nations have not relieved women of other domestic duties, many nations do require employers to provide leave for giving birth, rearing small children, and caring for elderly relatives. Mandated maternity or parental leave is now common, as Table 8.2 shows. Sweden's plan is the most extensive: 270 days of leave at 90 percent of pay after a child's birth, another 90 days at a lower rate of pay, and 18 months of unpaid leave.

In comparison, parental leave in the United States is paltry. Until recently, the United States had no federal laws requiring employers to provide any kind of leave (including sick leave), and few employers voluntarily offered it. Although 21 states required employers to provide some form of family leave for some employees (Ferber and O'Farrell 1991:148) in 4 of those states, which were studied in depth, 24 percent of the employers failed to meet the mandated minimum requirements (Families and Work Institute 1991). Then in 1993 President Clinton signed into law the Family and Medical Leave Act. The act, which applies only to establishments with 50 or more employees, requires employers to provide up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave and job protection

after a pregnancy or other family emergency. The act covers both fathers and mothers and both biological and adopting parents (although it excludes same-sex domestic partners). Because most U.S. workers work in small businesses, as we noted earlier, most are not covered. Also, the law is of no value to parents who cannot afford unpaid leave. According to one study, fewer than 40 percent of working women have benefits or income protection that would allow them to take a six-week unpaid leave (9to5 1992).

Maternity- and family-leave policies can help reduce the work/family conflict that women experience, but the policies pose a risk for their beneficiaries. Family leave may reinforce the existing sexual division of labor. Traditional gender roles and men's higher pay mean that wives, not husbands, will usually take the leave. A 1990 survey of the 1,000 largest U.S. companies found that although 31 percent offered paternity leave, only about 1 percent of eligible employees took it (Robert Half International, 1990). Many fathers fear that family leave will cost them a promotion, and they may be right. Catalyst (1986) found that 63 percent of all employers, and 41 percent of employers with a leave policy, disapproved of fathers' taking any leave for the birth of a child. One Oregon employer, for example, worried that men employees would use the leave to go elk hunting (Larson 1993). Even with all their shortcomings, however, family-leave policies are a significant step forward. They force employers to acknowledge workers' nonwork lives. But workers need to be vigilant to ensure that family leaves do not perpetuate women's inequality.

In childcare policies, as in family-leave policies, the vast majority of European countries offer more comprehensive options than the United States does, although the United States offers more than developing nations. Care for preschoolers in Europe is considered a government responsibility, regardless of parents' employment status. In Belgium and France, publicly funded institutions care for 95 percent of children between the ages of 3 and 5; Italy cares for 90 percent; and Denmark cares for 85 percent (Ferber and O'Farrell 1991:168). Swedes have a strong public commitment to childcare, which they express in high taxes for quality childcare centers, in-home care for younger children, and recreation centers for older children (Sidel 1986). The passage in 1990 of the Early Childhood and Education Act moved the United States closer to the European model. Through expanded tax credits for working parents and increased funding for Head Start programs, the law gives low- and moderate-income families more access to childcare.

In conclusion, any nation's policies to provide family leave, guaranteed benefits for part-time work, and publicly funded childcare help

TABLE 8.2

Parental Leave Policies for Selected Western Industrialized Countries

Country	Duration of Leave (in weeks)	Percentage of Pay	Recipient
Sweden	12-52	90 for 38 weeks	Mother or father
West Germany	52	100 for 14-18 weeks	Mother or father
Austria	16-52	100 for 20 weeks	Mother
Italy	22-48	80 for 22 weeks	Mother
Chile	18	100 for 18 weeks	Mother
Canada	17-41	60 for 15 weeks	Mother
United States	12	0	Mother or father

Source: Adapted from John J. Sweeney and Karen Nussbaum, *Solutions for the New Workforce*. Cabin John, MD: Seven Locks Press, 1989, p. 108. Reprinted with permission.

women manage their work and family responsibilities. But if the policies are gendered, they can also hurt women by reinforcing women's subordinate position in the labor market and in the home (Bergmann 1986). Mandatory leave can discourage employers from hiring women for some jobs and confine women to jobs with routine duties, where they can be replaced easily. Mandatory family leave may also keep pay low in customarily women's jobs to offset the cost of leave. Finally, family-leave policies—if men reject them—reinforce the idea that caring for family members is exclusively women's responsibility. The gendered effects of part-time work are also a concern. By making part-time work more available to women, the Swedish and Norwegian governments have helped women cope with the work/family burden; however, they have reinforced the sexual division of labor at home and reduced women's pay and promotion opportunities. Obviously, policymakers must examine such policies carefully to make sure they will encourage sex equality in the home and in the workplace.

Summary

As we noted in Chapter 1, society devalues unpaid domestic work and thus allocates it to the lower-status group: women. If there were a Nobel Prize for dishwashing, women would not be allowed near the sink. Although childcare and family-leave policies are becoming more common, nowhere have employers or governments attempted to relieve women's domestic burdens of cooking, cleaning, laundry, marketing, and dishwashing. Some women can afford to buy these services, but for the most part, these domestic tasks remain thoroughly in women's hands within the private sphere. Labeling these tasks as women's work forces women, not men, to reconcile domestic work with paid work. If fairness is a goal in restructuring the relationship between family and work, inequalities in the sexual division of labor must be addressed. The alternative—women shouldering the entire burden of the double day—will preserve inequality at home and in the workplace for another generation.