



Progress and obstacles **Professional & managerial women in the workplace**



by JOYCE P. JACOBSEN

choices changes

at critical moments
in their careers, men
and women make
different choices—
and those choices
have consequences
for the heights they
ultimately attain



WHEN I THINK OF the women who started college with me at Harvard 25 years ago, I would have been hard-put to accurately predict who would work full-time continuously, who would work intermittently or part-time while their children were young, and who would drop out of the labor force completely while in their child-raising years. My three college roommates and I have among us a PhD, a JD, an MD, and a CFA; four marriages and one divorce; seven children and four stepchildren—and we all have worked full-time continuously. Yet a glance through my twentieth reunion book shows that while our family histories are not unusual, our work histories are. Many of my women classmates are not currently working or have taken substantial amounts of time off, even though they have JDs, MBAs, and other such abbreviated symbols of the overachieving upper-middle class in contemporary America.

As Harvard graduates, my classmates and I made the kinds of educational decisions that could have led us to the top. But not all of us made it. What happened to us once we left Harvard's hallowed halls? What were the choices we faced about our careers and our families—the choices that either kept us on or moved us

People must simultaneously make decisions about their careers and family lives, and every resolution to a question about one part of their life alters the opportunities for achievement in the other

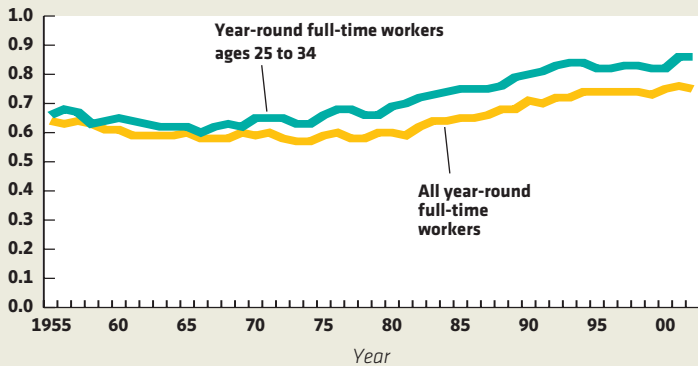
photographs by DEBRA McCLINTON



A shrinking but persistent income gap

Relative to men, women are earning more than before, but this is mainly because men's pay has declined.

Female/male median annual income ratio



Source: Current Population Reports Series P-60

off the path to the top? What befell our male counterparts who also made the choice to slow down their career progression to spend more time with their families? Who among us grasped the brass ring, and how?

Women at work

Women and men still don't have exactly the same career trajectories, but their work lives are starting to look more and more similar. The last half-century has seen a remarkable rise in female labor force participation, as well as a notable decline for men (see chart on page 19). Only about one-third of adult women worked in 1948; today, about 60 percent do. At this rate, we are potentially nearing the day when men and women will work in equal proportions.

Already women and men workers are equally as likely to become unemployed. In the past, women were more likely to be unemployed than men at all stages of the business cycle. But now that women and men work in the same industries and often the same occupations, they are subject to the same economic ups and downs and thus the same chances of losing their jobs in a recession.

Marriage and children, which never had much effect on men's work patterns, now have less effect on women, too. In 1960 women married at a median age of 20.3 years, often marrying right out of high school and/or interrupting their college education. Marriage led to children and thereby to child-raising—and child-raising generally implied women's exit from paid labor. If women reentered the labor force at all, it was after several years, often into part-time work, and generally into work that was job- rather than career-oriented. Today women marry later in their twenties, and they have their children later as well. Thus they are more likely to go on to college, less likely to interrupt their college education for marriage, and more likely to have embarked on a career before marriage.

When they have children, they are less likely to take time out from work, and they take less time off before returning full-time. In 1960 fewer than one in five women with children

under the age of six worked; today, over 60 percent do—almost identical to the labor force participation rate for married women overall. Over three-quarters of women with school-age children work.

Women also work in a much broader range of occupations than they did several decades ago. There is still substantial gender segregation in the labor market, but it derives mostly from differences in representation across jobs at the lower end of the pay and skill scale—jobs like transportation and material moving (87 percent men) or office and administrative support (74 percent women). By contrast, in professional jobs—those most likely to lead to positions at the top of organizations—men and women are more evenly mixed; for example, 32 percent of lawyers and doctors and 41 percent of postsecondary teachers are women. Overall, women comprise roughly half of all management, professional, business, and financial workers, equal to their representation in the workforce as a whole.

Although women's and men's work choices are starting to look more similar, we still see a gap in the rewards they receive for their work. Even among full-time year-round workers, women only receive three-quarters the pay of men (see chart on this page). Women have gained in pay relative to men over time, but mainly because men's earnings were stagnant or declining during much of this period. Women's earnings increased, to be sure, but not rapidly enough to explain their entire gain in relative pay. And it doesn't appear that moving women into male-dominated occupations in and of itself will completely solve the problem, since women are already substantially represented in higher-paying jobs. Within occupations, even female-dominated ones, men are disproportionately represented among the highest earners.

The good news is, among more recent cohorts, the wage difference is smaller, although it has not been completely eliminated. In 1960, the average 25- to 34-year-old year-round full-time woman worker earned 65 percent of the equivalent man's income, but today she earns 86 percent. Younger cohorts appear to be benefiting from greater investment in higher education, increased work experience and lifetime hours worked, rising earnings in many female-dominated occupations, and possibly a reduction in the most blatant forms of gender discrimination in pay and promotion. At the same time, the gender gap in pay is not completely shut. Young women still earn significantly less money than men, and it is likely that the gap will increase over time within this cohort, as these young men disproportionately move into high-paying senior professional and executive positions.

Thus, it is clear that today's women have much greater opportunities for and rewards from work than their mothers or grandmothers did. Yet there is still a long way to go before women and men follow the same career paths—and therefore a long way to go before women and men have the same op-

portunities for advancement, promotions, and pay. What leads men and women to follow different trajectories?

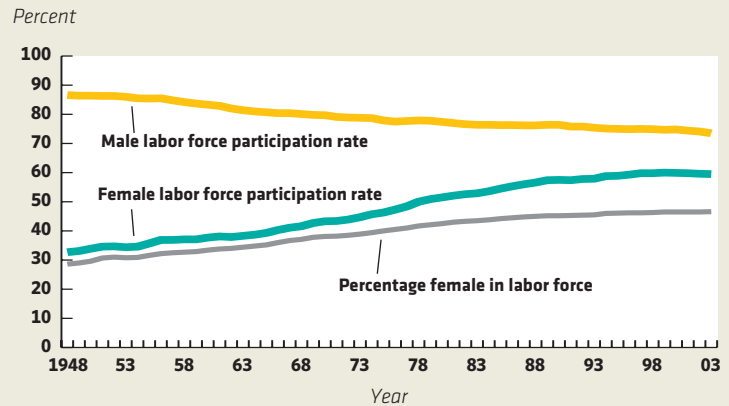
Choices in careers and families

Men and women alike encounter numerous critical points in both their work and their family lives at which a decision they make—or one that someone else makes—will affect their subsequent career path. Some of these decisions might open a door to one career or close a door to another. They might lead to higher or lower pay, or more or less responsibility, or more or fewer opportunities for promotion. They might mean having no children or many, doing more or less housework, or caring for aging parents at home or putting them in a nursing facility. These choices—in career and in family—interact to allow or preclude the possibility of reaching the top.

After college, the first major career decision most people make is about their first job. Of course, as Claudia Goldin points out (see page 4), by this point people have already sorted themselves somewhat by college major. People with majors that lead to low-visibility or back-office fields may have already reduced their chances of winning many top leadership positions in traditional corporations. How much the first job itself matters for someone's ultimate career path, however, depends on the occupation and industry. Some students start off as investment banking analysts, for example, and later go on to pursue a wide variety of careers and leadership positions. But in other professions, such

More and more work for women

More than 60 percent of women work today, up from 30 percent after World War II. Women now comprise nearly half the labor force.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics.

to do enough additional research to become full professors, and senior managers have to decide whether to accept assignments that will put them in line for further promotion.

Within a given career, the choice of what kind of organization to work for can also make a difference. Some firms are more demanding and less flexible than others; a lawyer working for a government agency may find a more manageable workload than one working in a large private law firm. Newer and smaller organizations tend to have relatively flat, nonhierarchical organizational structures, which can mean greater flexibility in job descriptions but fewer opportunities for promotions. Individuals in small startups or professional services firms that are

Career and family outcomes are built from a series of critical choices, such as college major, profession, employer, marital status, and number of children

as military officers, the first position is a clear and distinct step along a progression to the top. Those who do not take that step cannot move up.

For those who ultimately aspire to the top, that first job will turn into a career—a series of increasingly responsible jobs within or across occupations and industries. Careers vary in whether, when, and how advancement happens. Some paths, like corporate manager or college administrator, provide the possibility of quick and frequent promotions, whereas others are slower-moving. Some have a single high-stakes threshold for further advancement: Law associates and consulting managers generally get only one chance to make partner; academics one chance to get tenure. Those who don't make the cut may have to leave their profession entirely or take a lower-paying job in the same occupation in order to remain employed in that line of work. And even in high-stakes occupations, those who have passed the initial hurdle often face further decisions down the road that affect their ultimate access to the top; for example, associate professors with tenure must decide whether

relatively unbureaucratized may have to take on much more responsibility for creating their own promotional paths. On the other hand, more bureaucratic and hierarchical firms may also be limited in promotion opportunities if they are not growing quickly, since advancement in these organizations generally requires others to vacate senior-level positions first. Finally, moving up in some kinds of organizations may require frequent relocations to corporate offices around the country or the globe; in other organizations, one can reach the top without ever having to move.

At the same time that men and women are facing these career choices, they are also making choices about their family lives. These are sometimes portrayed as simple binary decisions: whether or not to get married, whether or not to have children. But the realities of these choices—and their impact on career opportunities—are far more nuanced. Every small resolution to a question about family life alters the opportunities for achievement at work. Will the couple cohabit before or instead of marriage, and if so, for how long? Is household work equally



were the ones who curtailed their pursuit of higher education or chose majors that led to “family-friendly” jobs; who worked in jobs, rather than careers; who dropped out of the labor force or reduced their work hours when their children were young; who limited their aspirations for the sake of their families. As a result, they also bore the brunt of the career consequences: less employment, lower pay, and fewer opportunities for promotion and authority on the job.

But these days, it’s not all women—or even just women—who experience the costs of career-family conflict. Several recent studies of women and men in high-powered professions—ones that require large commitments of time and continuous labor force attachment, especially early in the career—find that only those people who spend relatively more time on child-raising than others in the same job suffer a career or earnings penalty.

For example, in an examination of managers and professionals in a financial services firm, Mary Blair-Loy and Amy Wharton find that although women in the firm earned less than men on average, there was no earnings penalty for mothers rela-

Other things equal, only those women and men who spend relatively more time on taking care of children and family suffer a career or earnings penalty

divided, or is one person expected to take the greater share of responsibility? Are both careers weighted equally, or is one person’s career more important? Will the couple have children early on or later, once their careers are more established? Only one child, or more? Close in age or far apart? Will the couple use paid child care? Work alternate shifts? Have one parent stay home? What are the expectations regarding what shape the home will be in, how much time the family will spend together, how much community service the family will do, and how many lessons the children will participate in after school? Do other family members live nearby or far away, and how much help can they provide with child-raising? Does the community offer support services for working families, such as after-school care or easy transportation to activities? How much assistance do elderly relatives need because of aging-related disabilities? The outcomes of each of these family and career choices affect the heights a person can ultimately attain.

When family and career collide

For most, if not all, people, family and career choices are unavoidably in conflict at times. A family emergency or the decision to stay home with small children might preclude taking a promotion that would lead to greater career growth. Pursuing a career opportunity for one spouse might mean slowing the other’s career path, or even uprooting the entire family. Historically, it was women who bore the brunt of these choices. Whether by preference or by lack of other options, women

tive to other women workers. But both women and men who took advantage of the firm’s family sick leave policy earned less than their peers. Likewise, a study by Mary Noonan and Mary Corcoran examined University of Michigan Law School students who graduated between 1972 and 1985 and found no evidence that marriage or parenthood reduced the probability of making partner. However, both male and female lawyers who took time out of the labor force for child care were less likely to do so. Alicia Sasser’s recent analysis of the Young Physicians Survey shows that women physicians earn less money annually if they are married or have children, but much of the pay gap is related to their working fewer hours per year. At the same time, women physicians who remain single and childless improve their earnings position relative to men over time. And Anne Preston finds that the public university science graduates she studied sorted themselves between a “parent track” and a “fast track.” The earnings of women who remain single and childless actually surpassed those of men who report spending substantial time engaged in child care.

Family characteristics can also affect potential career growth. Sociologist Mary Frank Fox, who recently examined productivity among academic scientists, finds that whether a scientist is in a first or subsequent marriage and whether or not their spouse is also in a scientific occupation both affect how many articles both men and women publish. (Subsequent marriages to scientists appear to be the best for one’s productivity, perhaps because child-rearing may be less of an issue in later marriages.) Fox

also finds higher productivity among women with preschool children than among either women without children or women with school-age children. It may be easier to manage one's work around young children, whose child-care arrangements tend to cover the full work day, than with school-age children, whose school schedules are more difficult to work around.

Thus, even women who have made the commitment to a high-powered profession may still not reach the top, depending on the strength of their commitment to family life. And today, men who dare to step onto the "parent track" can also suffer financial penalties. At the same time, men and women who do not have children or who are not as involved in their children's lives often see their earnings and opportunities increase. In other words, so long as you don't spend too much time with your family, then it need not affect your career to have one.

Spring forward, fall back

Attaining the top takes more than just accumulating a continuous set of experiences that leads to the upper echelons of an organization. Advances occur at discrete points in time, with discretion on the part of both the individual and the organization. At these critical moments, men and women can determine—or at least influence—their own fates.

Women may fall behind at these junctures because they do not act proactively enough on their own behalf. The title of a recent book on women and negotiation—*Women Don't Ask*—says it all. Most research indicates that women are not as effective as men at negotiating for promotions, salary increases, or other work benefits. And many career paths require people to ask for opportunities to move ahead, rather than waiting for those opportunities to be bestowed upon them. In those careers, people who choose to negotiate and to take initiative to create their own opportunities are more likely to succeed—and those people are more likely to be men.

These critical moments are also points at which discrimination may occur. Discrimination need not be an all-or-nothing phenomenon in which, for example,

further reading

"The Human Capital Explanation for the Gender Gap in Earnings;" by Joyce Jacobsen, in Karine S. Moe (ed.), *Women, Family, and Work: Writings on the Economics of Gender*, Blackwell, 2003.

Mommies and Daddies on the Fast Track: Success of Parents in Demanding Professions, by Jerry A. Jacobs and Janice Fanning Madden (eds.), *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 2004.

Women Don't Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide, by Linda Babcock and Sara Laschever, Princeton University Press, 2003.

women are never hired or never promoted or always paid less than men. Instead, it could be that discrimination operates—consciously or unconsciously—by reducing the chance that women move ahead at each juncture. If this is the case, women will be hired and promoted more slowly and will be likely to receive lower pay raises than do men. And even if the effect at each point in time is small, over time the disadvantages will accumulate and fewer women will move up the pipeline.

Nonetheless, evidence suggests that much of the gender difference in career outcomes occurs because men and women make different choices. These choices are changing, to be sure, but women are still more likely than men to make decisions that benefit their families at the expense of their careers (see Rosanna Hertz's essay on page 22 and Nancy Folbre's essay on page 49). It could be that women are making these choices because they genuinely prefer to spend more time with their families, or it could be that they have divested from the work world because they perceive that their opportunities for career growth are limited. But in the end, the outcome is the same—fewer women at the top.

At the same time, this suggests that the best way to improve women's opportunities is to change the tradeoffs at those critical moments. For example, we could make taking time off less costly or improve women's ability to negotiate for the arrangements they would need to stay in the workforce. We could make quality child care accessible and affordable. We could reconsider whether certain organizational hurdles, like tenure or partnership decisions, could be eliminated or changed to be more family-friendly. Indeed, we need to question the very way work is organized. Once we do so, we can build new structures that allow more people to balance their home and work lives.

Today's women undergraduates at elite universities are, if anything, even better prepared for the world of work than my friends and I were when we graduated. But I doubt if they have thought through how to balance career and family any more thoroughly than we did before we reached the real world. I hope, however, that as we restructure the workplace, today's young women won't need to put as much effort into balancing work and family as my generation did. Instead, they will be able to jump the work-family hurdle more gracefully—and thereby tap more of their potential. *

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Married with children: The impact on women's work

Women's labor force participation rates	1960	2002
Single, never married	58	67
Divorced, separated, or widowed	41	49
Married	31	61
no child under 18	34	54
child 6 to 17	39	76
child under 6	18	60

Note: Data are for civilian women 16 or older.
Source: Statistical Abstract of the United States



work & leadership

tests of manhood



AT THE BEGINNING OF the twenty-first century, women have become full-time and continuous participants in the labor force. But even as the gender composition of the workforce has changed, the demands of both careers and motherhood have remained the same. Workers of both sexes are still expected to sequence their lives according to jobs and career demands—getting married after completing school, moving to a new city to get the big promotion, having children at a career transition point. At the same time, mothers are expected to display unending dedication to their children, from providing young children with afternoon milk and cookies to sideline cheering and chauffeuring teens to sports practices and games.

For those who aspire to the top ranks of an organization, the competing demands of work and family aren't difficult to negotiate early on when they are investing in education and career opportunities. The dilemma only arises later, once these men and women are well entrenched in the labor force. It is often a major change or crisis—the birth of a new child, a nanny quitting—that forces families' hands. Then they face the conflict between work and family head-on.

The gender composition of the workforce has changed over the last several decades, but the demands of both careers and motherhood remain the same

by ROSANNA HERTZ





And there's the rub. Work is all-demanding, while raising children is sequestered as a private problem to be resolved by individual families. Since gender equality in employment has not been accompanied with gender equality in the home, the burden of resolution falls primarily to women, who feel they must choose whether work or family will come first. This is especially true for those women who possess the financial resources to have a meaningful choice—which is to say, those who are most likely to be able to reach the top of organizations. What does this conflict mean for women who aspire to be leaders?

Motherhood versus manhood

Most corporate careers are constructed around traditionally male social roles and experiences. This outdated view harkens back to days when wives tended to the home and children, freeing men to pursue careers with a singular focus. However, though dual-career couples are now much more common, the prototypical career has not changed. Employers expect employees to invest themselves fully in their jobs, and employers invest, in turn, in those who do. Long hours, evening and weekend work, unplanned travel, after-hours socializing, lengthy out-of-town training, and high stress levels presuppose that someone who wants to succeed in conventional terms will either have no serious life outside of work or will have someone else, a spouse perhaps, to tend to the details of house, home, and family. Succeeding in an organization, then, requires passing a “test of manhood”—meeting the organization on its own (masculine) terms.

While society promises women they can be and do whatever they want, such freedom does not extend to the choice to become mothers. Instead, women face an expectation of compulsory motherhood, regardless of their career choice. Compulsory motherhood confounds career goals because there is no “right” time to have children. Some women meet this expectation by continuing to work, placing their children in day care or hiring nannies, while other previously work-focused women are startled to discover a deeply rooted belief that they want to be at home as their children’s primary caregivers. Becoming a mother is still viewed as one of

further reading



More Equal Than Others: Women and Men in Dual-Career Marriages, by Rosanna Hertz, University of California Press, 1986.

“Working to Place Family at the Center of Life: Dual-Earner and Single-Parent Families’ Strategies,” by Rosanna Hertz, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, vol. 562, 1999.

Geeks and Geezers: How Era, Values, and Defining Moments Shape Leaders, by Warren Bennis and Robert J. Thomas, Harvard Business School Press, 2002.

women’s primary contributions to their families and the larger community. It is our single most important test of womanhood, and our culture remains deeply ambivalent about women who do not commit to this task. Thus, women’s career aspirations must be reconciled with both personal and social expectations about women’s behavior and roles within the family.

Our social norms demand that women place their families first. But the corporate emphasis on the achievement of organizational, rather than individual, goals directly conflicts with this belief. If a woman decides to take time off while her children are young—following the expectations of compulsory motherhood—her behavior is commonly interpreted as a decision to disinvest in the organization. As one woman I interviewed put it, “It can take years to make up for the fact that you’ve had a child. It’s like something you’ve done to the corporation.” Allowing a child to disrupt her career means she has failed the test of manhood, but not having a child means she has failed the test of womanhood.

When these sorts of career-family conflicts arise, dual-career couples—those in which both the husband and wife are highly educated and pursuing demanding but well-rewarded upwardly mobile professions—have choices not available to those of more modest means. They can remain fully committed to the labor force, become stay-at-home parents, or work part-time. Nonetheless, they face much greater ambiguity and confusion about how to negotiate the work-family tradeoff, since no one partner can claim authority or primacy in the household based on “bringing home the bacon.”

Because of this cultural ambiguity, dual-career couples need to define a set of principles that can guide the pursuit of two careers and simultaneously create an acceptable union between career and family. But most couples cannot accurately describe how their careers are related, how they came to choose those careers, and, most important, how they came to mesh and manage two careers in one marriage. One man struck on what he felt was an apt metaphor: “It’s like a dual carriageway, and we are both going down those carriageways at more or less the same speed, I would say. While those carriageways don’t cross one another, if something happens on one of them, something necessarily happens on the other one.” How couples negotiate their career carriageways, then, has much to do with our cultural conceptions about work and parenthood.

Private solutions

My research over the last two decades has shown that women in dual-career couples adopt a variety of strategies to handle the conflict between work and family. Some choose not to bear children at all. They devote all their energies to their work lives and enjoy the full opportunities to succeed at work, since they are behaving in effect as a man would within the organization. However, they face the cost of not succeeding at home, at least in the eyes of others, since they do not have children. Other women take a market approach to child-rearing—paying

others to provide child care, house cleaning, and so on while they and their husbands continue to pursue full-time careers. They view their children as resilient, not in need of intense mother-nurturing. These women can succeed to a degree in both realms, but many find themselves stretched between the demands of their paid work and social expectations about intensive mothering.

Other dual-career women find ways to keep the family at center stage. Some opt entirely out of the workforce for extended periods of time to care for their children. Despite these women's previous attachment to their careers, their belief in the necessity of intensive mother-nurturing outweighs their fidelity to their work. Similarly, many women who continue to work after child-bearing still believe that the family should be organized around caring for children, not around work. These parents tend to feel like the woman I interviewed who said, "When we

dressed. These private solutions do not go far enough. They do not fundamentally alter our ideologies of work and family.

Leadership: the ultimate test of manhood

Many argue that we could alter these ideologies by creating greater work-life balance. In this view, work and life (family, friends, health, and so on) are the two ends of a pendulum's swing. The idea of work-life balance is to move the pendulum away from work, where it has been stuck too high, and towards the other aspects of life. This should lead to a more satisfying and enriching lifestyle, with one part reinforcing instead of competing with the other. And it places the onus onto the workplace, rather than the family, to change and accommodate this choice.

So far, so good. But the problem is, when we are talking about families in which both spouses have high-powered careers, it is

When we are talking about families in which both spouses have high-powered jobs, it is usually the wife who "balances" and the husband who has the career

decided to have a kid, I decided I wanted to be a mom, a little bit, or why have a child? I just felt that if I am going to raise this kid, I want to be there for some of the events. Otherwise, I wouldn't have bothered."

In some of these families, the mother takes primary responsibility for the children, while in others, both parents are full participants. But in either case, the wives frequently try to straddle the worlds of work and family by working part-time. Part-time workers maintain some connection to the work world and a greater possibility of returning to a position of similar prestige and power, while at the same time, they have more time to be with their children. But part-time work is not a panacea. Organizations frequently make these arrangements on an *ad hoc*, case-by-case basis rather than creating formal policies or structures, which forces each woman to confront and negotiate with the organization as an individual on her own. As a result, other women in the organization do not benefit, and not enough high-prestige, powerful part-time positions are created.

Moreover, it's not clear that part-time work fully passes the tests of manhood and womanhood. Bosses and coworkers still view part-timers as less committed, since they are less available and less a part of the team. This can slow or curtail their job advancement. At the same time, part-time women are looked at askance by those who believe that children need their mothers at home full-time.

So far, change has been slow because we have enacted private, individual solutions, cobbled together in response to what is viewed as a private problem. Dual-career families look to themselves, to the marketplace, and ultimately to their checkbooks for solutions. In only a few instances do they look to their employers or to society for help. The real issue—our unchanged definition of what constitutes success at work and at home—is never ad-

usually the wife who balances. She is the one who reduces her career time or finds a job that is less demanding or becomes a part-timer in order that her husband's career might rise. In a study of parents' decisions about child-care arrangements in their children's first years of life, I found that it was rare for men to scale back significantly when their first child was born, whereas those wives who continued working frequently negotiated reduced work-hour schedules. Even the men who did cut back at first—working one fewer day per week, say—eventually went back to full-time, five-day-per-week employment. Their wives, however, continued to strive for "balance," moving the pendulum even further towards family as they increased their involvement with their young children. One man told me when his second child was born, "I have already experienced fatherhood with my first child. And with the second I didn't even ask my boss because I was promoted and rising fast and we needed the income. Anyway, my wife preferred to continue to work part-time." In these families, work-life balance meant that his career soared while hers limped along.

The ideology of balance reinforces the current structure of careers, which presumes that there is someone other than the employee who tends to the home and children. Work cultures do not care about the employment status of spouses. Thus, those employees who choose to seek balance do so at the expense of violating the cultural norms of careers. From an employer's perspective, work-life balance looks like disinvestment in work—a clear failure of the test of manhood. And to become an organizational leader still requires a singular passionate focus on work. So long as women do the balancing and men continue to keep the tradition of late nights and extensive travel, women will continue to fail the test. Achieving "balance," then, may come at the cost of precluding women from becoming leaders.



The future of women as leaders

If we want women to lead, we will need to change our definition of leadership. The desire among many younger men and women to pursue both a personal and a professional life may help point the way. Take, for example, the case of a 32-year-old female automotive executive profiled in Warren Bennis's and Robert J. Thomas's recent book, *Geeks and Geezers*. She noted that in her company (and in the industry more generally), the operating definition of "leader" was someone who worked extraordinary hours, made all the key decisions in a forceful and directive way, rallied the troops from a corner office, and was ranked by the number of people who reported to him or her. But the value she attached to having a life after work forced her to find a different path. Rather than pull marathon work sessions, she planned her projects carefully, with realistic timetables. Rather than insist that her desk be the crossroads for all decisions, she delegated responsibilities to her team and rewarded them appropriately. And, she mobilized her people to be more efficient, so that they, too, could have a measure of balance in their lives.

To move us closer to the day when this woman's experience is not the unusual but the norm, we need more accounts and case studies of women who are organizational leaders, so we can understand the forces that have helped them to advance in their careers. We need to look at the varied life courses that women select that allow them to demonstrate leadership. We need to know whether it is even possible for aspiring women leaders to be anything other than completely devoted to their work; and if it is, we need to know more about how to combine leadership with families. Most important, we need to use this information to develop models for how organizations can best use the talents of women, rather than forcing women to choose between work or family because it is impossible to do both effectively and simultaneously.

Three-quarters of men and women at every life stage are working more hours than they would prefer. Many wish they did not have to make such drastic choices that preclude either children or a high-powered career. At the same time, organizations are increasingly bearing the cost of losing talented women who cannot make the current system work. We must ask ourselves what it would take to reorganize employment to make it more compatible with family life. But we must also remember that the solution is not just a matter of balance. We need to find better ways to allow talented women to excel. ✧

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paying the price

evidence on how
family choices affect
career outcomes

by CARRIE CONAWAY





IN MAY 2004, Brenda Barnes reached the Holy Grail of the ambitious working woman. Seven years earlier, she had resigned her job as president and CEO of Pepsi-Cola North America—two steps away from the top job at PepsiCo—to spend more time with her family. Yet she returned to the workforce right where she had left off: as the number-two person at Sara Lee Corporation, one of the nation’s largest consumer products companies.

Still, there were consequences. Barnes gave up seven years of earnings, which added up quickly at her Pepsi-Cola salary of \$2 million per year. And there was no guarantee that she could return to such professional heights. Indeed, many people—even, or perhaps especially, people on the path to the top—who make similar choices face the possibility of not only lost earnings, but also reduced future opportunities in the forms of employment, promotions, and authority.

These reduced opportunities do not come, for the most part, because employers instantly demote or cut the wages of people who take time out for family reasons. While discrimination of

this kind may occur, opportunities also decline because of the cascading impact that family choices can have on work hours, relocation decisions, and even career direction.

What are the penalties for stepping, even temporarily, off the career track to care for family needs? And which family choices matter most?

Children and earnings

If family choices have an impact on career outcomes, it should show up in people’s paychecks. The research evidence is quite clear that, at least in recent years, the choice to marry by itself does not reduce people’s incomes. Married men have long enjoyed a wage premium over single men, although the effect has declined somewhat recently. And married women without children earn just as much as single women; indeed, some studies even show a marriage premium for women without children.

Earnings differences don’t appear until children enter the equation. A recent study by researchers David Ellwood, Ty Wilde, and Lily Batchelder presents the best evidence to date on





the wage experiences of women who are currently in their child-rearing years. Their study is also one of the few that looks specifically at highly skilled women, whom they define as women who scored in the top third on a standardized test of ability.

Ellwood and his colleagues find that before child-bearing, the wages of highly skilled mothers and non-mothers were not significantly different. But highly skilled women experience an 8 percent reduction in their wages during the first five years after they have a child relative to similar women who never had a child. After 10 years, the penalty rises to more than 20 percent—and this is after accounting for any reduction in earnings

form is associated with approximately a 0.4 percent reduction in hourly wages for married women and a 0.3 percent reduction for single women. By contrast, household labor time has no effect on married or single men's earnings. Women at the high end of the income distribution may be able to buy themselves out of the housework bargain by paying for services such as cleaning, convenience foods, and child care, but no research to date has examined how much these purchases might reduce women's household labor time.

In addition, as our population ages, more families find themselves responsible for dealing with an aging or infirm parent.

Deciding to get married, have children, or care for elderly relatives affects not just wages, but also other career opportunities such as training and promotions

associated with their having less experience or working fewer hours. Highly skilled men, on the other hand, experience no such negative wage effects after their first child is born.

According to Ellwood *et al.*, one important contributor to the child wage penalty for women is extended leaves. Staying out of the labor force for an extended period after having a child often has a dramatic impact on a woman's wages. Highly skilled women who did not work during the second year after their child's birth earned 10 to 17 percent lower wages than women who did work during that year, even after adjusting for lost experience and how long ago their child was born. Nonetheless, including this factor in the analysis still leaves a significant wage penalty for highly skilled mothers, and one that increases as their children get older. What else might account for this gap?

Housework and parent care

Other family choices could be at play in contributing to the gender wage gap. For instance, although the amount of time women spend on housework has declined notably since the 1960s, women still do significantly more household labor than men (see sidebar on page 31). And several studies by economists Joni Hersch and Leslie Stratton demonstrate that the more housework women do, the lower their wages are—even after adjusting for the possibility (as some economists have argued) that lower-earning women might do more housework simply because the opportunity cost of time spent on housework is lower for these women. Hersch and Stratton's research shows that every additional hour of household labor that women per-

Although the amount of time people spend on parent care is generally less than the amount spent on child care, it might still be enough to affect caregivers' (generally women's) employment. However, the best-designed studies to date on this issue show no such effect. Researchers have hypothesized that time spent on parent care may be coming from time that would otherwise be spent on housework, child care, or leisure, rather than work. While some studies indicate that caregivers may be less productive while at work, there is no evidence so far as to whether this is associated with decreased wages. And there is no research on whether parent care is a bigger or smaller problem for highly skilled women likely to attain top positions.

Training, promotion, and authority

Deciding to get married, bear children, or care for an elderly parent affects more than women's wages. These decisions might also affect women's chances for other career opportunities, such as training or mentoring, promotions, or authority.

Unfortunately, we know little about whether or to what extent family choices affect women's likelihood of getting training or mentoring. Studies are inconclusive as to whether women get more, less, or different training than men, let alone how family choices such as having children might factor into any discrepancy. Women on the path to the top do seem to be less likely to have mentors than men, but it's not clear how much mentorship matters in getting to the top—or whether family choices are the reason behind the mentorship gap.

Family choices do, however, seem to have some association with reduced opportunities for promotion. Economists Deborah Cobb-Clark and Yvonne Dunlop find that for all workers aged 31 to 39 in 1996, there is a negligible sex gap in promotions overall. But women with the best chances to reach the top—those with college or postgraduate education and managerial jobs—appear to be promoted less frequently than similarly educated men, and some part of this difference may be due to family decisions. For instance, about 25 percent of women with preschool children are promoted, more than 3 percentage points fewer than equivalent men. However, women with older children are actually more likely to be promoted than equivalent men, nearly making up the earlier difference among parents of preschoolers. This may

further reading

“The Impact of Childbearing on Wages of Women of Differing Skill Levels,”

by David Ellwood, Ty Wilde, and Lily Batchelder, presented at the Harvard Economics Department Labor Seminar, April 2004.

“Housework and Wages,” by Joni Hersch and Leslie S. Stratton, *Journal of Human Resources*, 2002.

“The Role of Gender in Job Promotions,” by Deborah A. Cobb-Clark and Yvonne Dunlop, *Monthly Labor Review*, 1999.



From personal experience *Women professionals at midcareer*

ON ROLE MODELS: “There are very few visible role models for me to point to, leaders who have responsibility for the money or for the profit and loss in the company.”

ON CHILDREN: “My husband and I are at that point where we’re trying to decide when is the right time to have children; and as I’ve heard today and from many other sources, there is no right time.”

ON THE DOWNTURN: “The largest challenge in my industry is the market downturn in high-tech and the impact on opportunities that has had. People try to preserve either their roles or certain employees, and you start to preserve the folks who are perceived to be similar to you or the breadwinners in their families.”

ON ASPIRATIONS: “My students [seem to be making] a conscious, deliberate choice no longer to reach, but to settle. They are at a select, elite business school, and they

We asked three midcareer women at the Boston Fed’s “Reaching the Top” conference to talk about the decisions they’ve made so far, the challenges they’re currently facing, and the impact of their work on their families and communities.

graduate with their MBAs but with their aspirations set four or five notches lower.”

ON THE PIPELINE: “We had tons and tons of hiring in the late 1990s and had made a lot of penetration [in terms of hiring] female engineers. When we look at that today, not only did we lay off many of them, but we’re at a very bad starting point for advancement beyond those first initial layers of new engineers.”

ON THE INNER CIRCLE: “No matter how smart, how successful, how politically plugged in, I’m not confident that I can even get into that inner circle. But let’s assume for a second that is a feasible option. Do I really want to do what it’s going to take to get there, given my current life?”

ON FAMILY RESPONSIBILITIES: “I enjoy my work, but what I really want to do is go work abroad in another emerging market. But my father is suffering from Alzheimer’s and my in-laws are facing serious health challenges. So for both my husband and I, that’s not in the cards in the short to medium term, and that’s okay.”

ON WORK-LIFE BALANCE: “I remember coming home from work one day and my house was full of kids. There were easily 10 children in my home, and I did not know one of them. My nanny knew significantly more of my neighbors and their kids than I would ever have dreamed of knowing.”

ON COMMUNITY: “I’ve had to seek out ways to hold onto community and family because it wasn’t something that would naturally be there given the kind of job I currently have. I have had to make a sustained effort to not have work be my life, but just one piece of it.”

indicate that parenting women’s promotions have been delayed rather than foregone. Part-time work, which is common among highly educated women with children, may also slow promotions. Women who work part-time are much less likely to be promoted than either male or female full-time workers, although they are much more likely to be promoted than men who work part-time. Moreover, no study has adequately assessed whether women’s family decisions directly reduce their opportunities for promotion or whether instead their (perceived) lack of chances for promotion might lead them to have children or take on additional parental care or household labor responsibilities.

Much research also demonstrates that women are significantly less likely to hold positions with authority over others, whether supervising other employees, having the authority to hire and fire, or having control over others’ pay. Family choices could be part of the reason for this gap; for example, perhaps women would prefer to have less responsibility at work because of the responsibilities they already carry at home. But the few studies that have explicitly examined the impact of marriage or childbearing on women’s authority level at work find no statistically significant association between the two. None have looked at the impact of parent care or household labor.

Facing the consequences

There is still much more to learn about the consequences of

women’s family choices for their careers. We know that the choice to have children has a much greater impact on women’s careers—whether wages, promotions, or authority—than simply getting married or caring for parents. And we know that the effects of these choices are often long-term and indirect, reducing women’s wages and opportunities through how they affect subsequent decisions about whether and how much to work.

But we do not know nearly enough about all the possible penalties women might pay for certain family choices, nor do we know whether the consequences are greater or lesser than they used to be. One thing we do know, though, is that it’s not just women who face these consequences. As Joyce Jacobsen points out (see page 16), anyone who behaves like a woman in the eyes of the organization—who takes time off for child-raising, works part-time, or displays less than complete devotion to the firm—will pay a price in terms of salary and advancement.

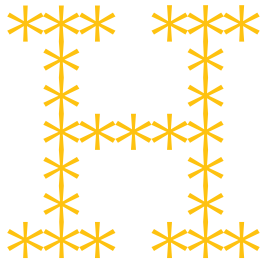
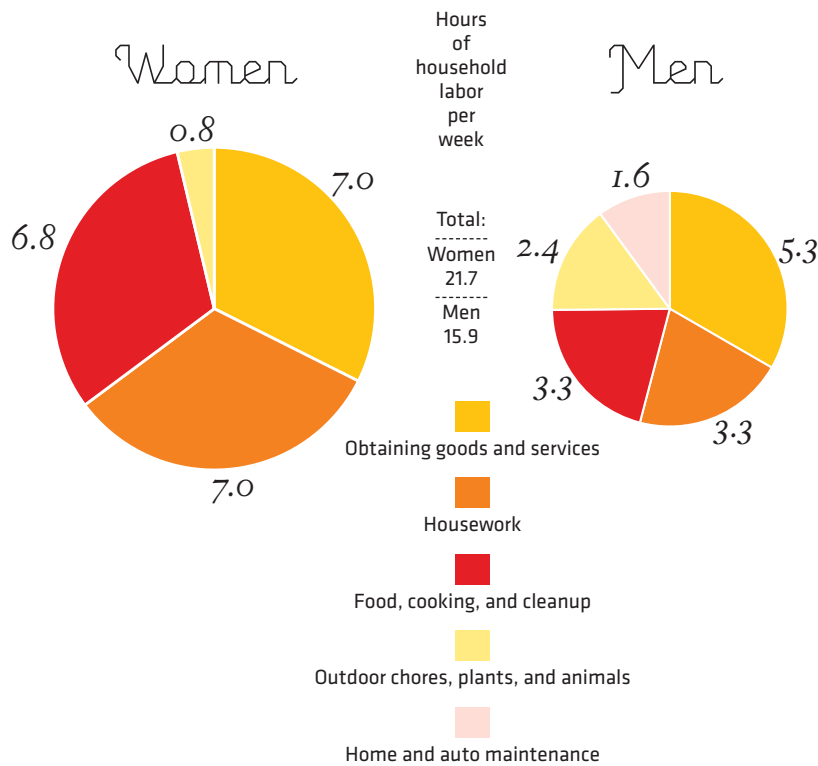
At the same time, Brenda Barnes’ example demonstrates that it is possible to take significant time off from full-time work and still return to top leadership positions. Admittedly, she was not completely idle during those seven years; she served on six corporate boards and as interim president of a hospitality company. And neither is her experience by any means typical. Nonetheless, her path back to the executive suite shows that at least some women can do it all—even if they can’t always do it all at once. *



by CARRIE CONAWAY

where does the time go?





HOUSEHOLD LABOR IS ONE OF the primary battlegrounds over which the work-family conflict is fought. No matter how much time is spent at work, at the end of the day the house has to be reasonably clean, the kids fed, the yard mowed, and the shopping done. With a limited amount of time in the day, every family has to negotiate who will do which tasks and for how long.

For years, women have gotten the short end of this stick. In 1965, the heyday of the stay-at-home mom, women did an average of 30 hours of household labor per week—six times the 5 hours per week men logged. What little household labor men did was concentrated on repair and maintenance work, while women were responsible for cooking, cleaning, laundry, and so on.

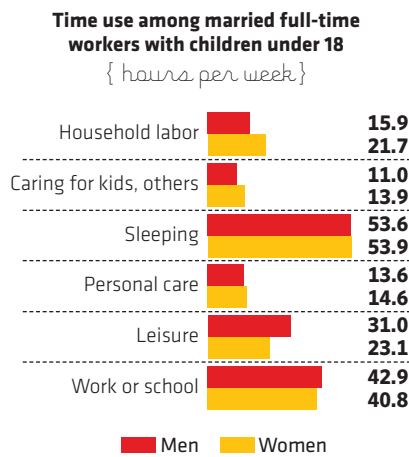
Times have changed, but household labor time hasn't changed nearly as much as one might expect. The most significant change since the 1960s is that about 50 percent less household labor is being done overall. To make up the difference, some families are now buying substitutes such as housecleaning and prepared foods. But other tasks simply go undone; the house is a little more dusty, the dinner less elaborate.

Nonetheless, women still do significantly more household labor than men. The chart at right shows a breakdown of time use

among married people who work full-time and have children at home—people who presumably have a similar amount of time available for household tasks. According to these data, these women spend about 10 more hours per week on household tasks, mostly on household labor and caring for children. To find the time for this, they sacrifice 8 hours of leisure per week relative to men and work about 2 hours less. Furthermore, it's not just the presence of children that creates the sex difference. Even married women who work full-time but don't have kids spend about 8 more hours per week on household labor and 10 hours less on leisure than equivalent men.

Furthermore, the kinds of work women do haven't changed much, either. Women still spend much more time than men on cleaning, cooking, and shopping—tasks which need to be completed promptly and frequently. Men have greater responsibility for outdoor and maintenance work, which can more often be done on a more flexible schedule and which tend to take less time overall.

It's hard to say how much this "second shift" matters for women's ability to reach the top of organizations. But it stands to reason that the more time anyone spends on tasks outside of work, the less time available for work itself—and therefore the less opportunity to move up. *



Source: Family Interaction, Social Capital, and Trends in Time Use Study, 1988-1999. Note: Numbers may not sum to totals due to rounding.