

Women and Work

Has the feminist movement achieved workplace equality?

In the 50 years since author Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* helped spark the feminist movement, American women have made phenomenal gains. Women now comprise more than half of the U.S. workforce, earn half of college degrees and hold half of management and professional jobs. Yet relatively few have gained top executive and political leadership positions, and women still earn less than men for comparable work. Moreover, flexible work arrangements, paid family leave and other accommodations designed to relieve domestic pressures shouldered largely by women remain elusive. Some argue that women have limited their own progress in the quest for full equality — the controversial argument of a recent book by Facebook executive Sheryl Sandberg. But others say persistent cultural and economic barriers are the main reasons the feminist movement remains a work in progress a half-century after it began.



Former Securities and Exchange Commission Chairman Mary L. Schapiro (2009–2012) ranks among the highest-level female officials to have served in the federal government. Since the feminist movement began a half-century ago, women have risen to some of the nation's highest government and corporate levels. Still, career-oriented women face formidable workplace and cultural barriers.

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Women and Work

BY MICHELLE JOHNSON

THE ISSUES

Laura Leigh Oyler decided in seventh grade that education was her ticket to a good life.

“My parents got divorced when I was pretty young,” says Oyler, who grew up in Fayetteville, Ark. “And I remember watching the women in my mom’s social circle, one by one, go through a divorce. They lost their big, pretty houses. They had to go back to work. A lot of them, and my mom was no exception, started cleaning houses. She did that while going to school and raising three children, and I thought, ‘I’m not doing that.’”

Oyler attended law school at the University of Arkansas, where she met her husband. Four years ago she was offered a job in employment law at Reynolds American, the nation’s second-largest tobacco company, with a huge pay jump from her salary as a juvenile prosecutor in Arkansas. Although she had no direct experience in employment law, her fiancé (now her husband) encouraged her to make the leap to the Winston-Salem, N.C., firm.

He is now an associate at a local law firm and Oyler — 32, pregnant with the couple’s first child — just accepted a promotion to lead Reynolds’ youth smoking-prevention efforts.

Having a supportive spouse has been essential for her career says Oyler, the family’s primary breadwinner. “He was the first one to say ‘you can do anything. I’ve got your back. Go for it.’” she says.

Although Oyler is reluctant to call herself a feminist, she realizes her generation benefited from the women’s movement led by her mother’s generation. “I



Getty Images/Allison Joyce

Sheryl Sandberg, Facebook chief operating officer, argues in her new book that women, in their quest for full workplace equality with men, have limited their own advancement by not being forceful enough. Others blame persistent cultural and economic barriers for women’s lack of greater progress.

live in a very different America than women even 30 years ago did,” she says. “A lot of social change happened in the ‘60s and the ‘70s, so I think that I benefit every day from that. And it’s not just women who changed — it’s men, too.”

After women won the right to vote in 1920, feminism waned in the mid-20th century, overshadowed by concerns over the need to reintegrate returning veterans into the national economy after World War II. By the early 1960s, however, the “second wave” of the women’s movement was quietly gaining momentum. Then, in 1963, labor journalist Betty Friedan’s *The Feminine Mystique* landed as a bombshell in the lives of millions of American women.

“The feminine mystique,” Friedan said in a 1964 interview, defined “woman solely in terms of her sexual

relation to men, as man’s sex object, as wife, mother, homemaker and never as a human being herself . . . and has not been good for their marriages, good for women, or good for love or good for men or even good for children.”¹

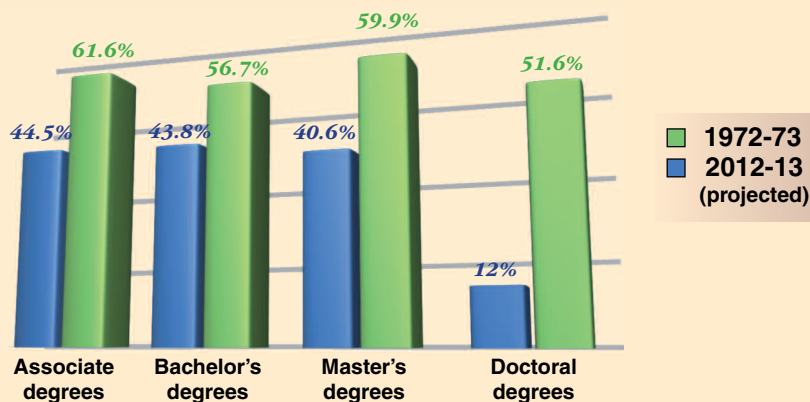
The feminist movement, which Friedan helped lead for decades before her death in 2006, has led to substantial gains in women’s lives over the 50 years since the book was published. Women now make up half the workforce, earn more than half of almost all college degrees and hold half of all professional and management jobs in the United States.² They also have risen to some of the highest levels in politics — including secretary of State and House majority leader — and have run some of the nation’s biggest corporations, including Yahoo and Hewlett-Packard. (See graphics, pp. 648 and 652.)

But despite such gains, women continue to face formidable barriers, from both within and without the movement: Ever since Friedan published her book half a century ago, sharp differences have arisen between those who have seen male oppression as women’s primary obstacle and those who rejected sexual politics and pursued their goals within the traditional male-dominated economic and political system. The movement also has fought a tide of external social, cultural, political and economic barriers that continue to make it hard for many women to achieve full equality. American women still earn less than men for similar work, hold far fewer political and corporate leadership positions, shoulder more of family caregiving burdens and benefit from far

Women Now Earn Most College Degrees

Women are expected to earn more than half of all college degrees in the 2012-13 academic year, a significant increase from four decades earlier. The number of doctoral degrees increased sharply: Women earned 9,553 doctorates in 1972-73 compared with 90,100 in 2012-13 — an 800 percent increase. In 1972-73, women earned fewer than half of all degrees.

Percentage of Degrees Earned by Women



Source: “Degrees conferred by degree-granting institutions, by level of degree and sex of students: Selected years, 1869-70 through 2021-22,” National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, http://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_310.asp

fewer family-friendly corporate and government policies than women in other industrialized countries.³

What’s more, some obstacles women face are self-imposed, according to Facebook chief operating officer Sheryl Sandberg, whose 2013 best-seller, *Lean In: Women, Work and the Will to Lead*, laments the dearth of females in leadership positions and urges women to be more assertive in their professional ambitions.

“It is time for us to face the fact that our revolution has stalled,” she wrote. “The promise of equality is not the same as true equality. A truly equal world would be one where women ran half our countries and men ran half our homes.”⁴

Sandberg’s book has drawn both praise and criticism and established her as a new kind of feminist leader — one who acknowledges the social

and cultural barriers women face but challenges them to confront certain behaviors that she says keep them from achieving their full potential.

Christina Hoff Sommers, a resident scholar at the conservative American Enterprise Institute (AEI), calls the progress of women in the workplace and economy “a great American success story,” since women “are represented in virtually every economic sector and at every level.”

However, she would like to see a women’s movement “that catches up with where women are,” she says. “About 20 percent of women are high-powered careerists. They’re just as committed and high octane [as men], and I’m very glad that we have a society that now permits them to flourish. However, they are not the majority of women. There are just about as many who would prefer to stay home and

be full-time mothers, and there’s a huge group in between. They’re adapters, who want to work part time once they have children. It would be nice if we had a women’s lobby that understood that and made it possible.”

When large numbers of women began entering the workforce in the mid-1970s, nearly half of the country’s families with children had stay-at-home moms and breadwinner dads. Today that is true for only one family in five.⁵ Women increasingly are choosing nontraditional fields, ranging from natural resources conservation to homeland security and law enforcement. They now earn half of all business administration degrees and more than half of degrees in the biological sciences and health.⁶

Nearly three-quarters of Americans say having more women in the workforce has been a change for the better in society and that marriages are more satisfying when men and women share responsibilities of work and children.⁷ But workplaces and laws have yet to catch up with the realities of family life, says Joan C. Williams, director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California’s Hastings College of the Law. The American workplace is “still perfectly designed for the workplace of the 1960s,” Williams says. “It assumes that you have someone else taking care of all your other family obligations, and that just isn’t true anymore.”

Feminist groups lobbying for family-friendly workplace policies have run into stiff opposition from organized business groups such as the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, which argues that they are overly burdensome for businesses. Conservative groups such as the Eagle Forum, based in Alton, Ill., also oppose federally subsidized daycare.⁸

Women have been a major force in American economic expansion. In the 1980s and ’90s, their earnings grew relatively well, says economist Heidi Shierholz of the Economic Policy Institute, a liberal think tank. That

growth helped to narrow the gender wage gap, though not entirely. (See “Background,” p. 657.) Women’s wages continued to rise in the early 2000s, despite forces such as the offshoring of manufacturing jobs and the decline in the power of labor unions. But the severe recession of the last few years has “wreaked havoc on wage growth,” for both men and women, she says.

“The key thing driving women’s wages is the same thing that’s driving everyone’s wages — persistent high unemployment,” Shierholz says.

Besides fighting to get equal pay for equal work, women face the challenge of finding the kind of support necessary to succeed in the workplace, says Chanelle Hardy, senior vice president for policy at the National Urban League, a national civil rights organization based in New York City.

“From minimum wage to workers’ compensation to family leave, are all critical,” she says.

As women, their spouses, women’s rights advocates and policymakers discuss the progress of women since publication 50 years ago of *The Feminine Mystique*, here are some of the questions being debated:

Are women better off today than they were 50 years ago?

The idea that women’s equality benefits everyone is at the heart of feminism.

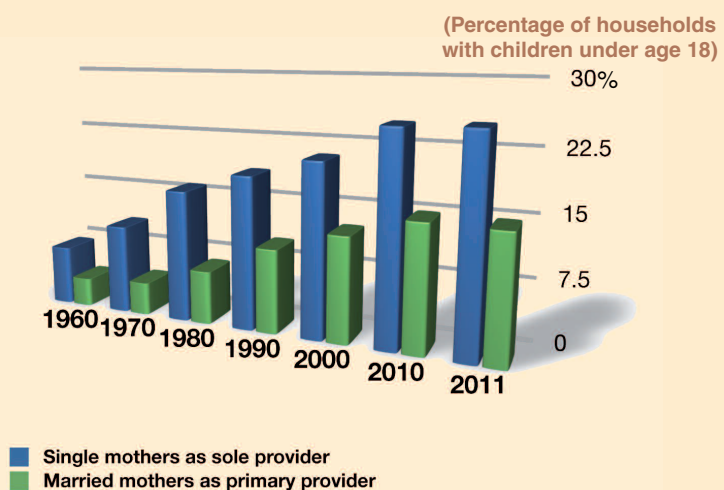
The modern women’s movement challenged discriminatory laws in education and employment and advocated for stronger laws on spousal rape, domestic violence and reproductive freedom.

The women’s movement has worked at the local, state and federal level to change laws, says Eleanor Smeal, president of the Fund for the Feminist Majority and a former president of the National Organization for Women (NOW). “We raised consciousness, but without the change in laws, we could not have influenced public opinion,” she says.

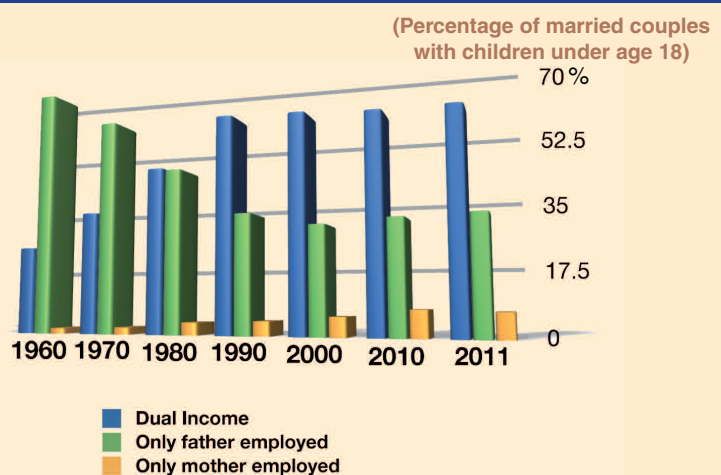
Families More Dependent on Mothers’ Income

Mothers — married or single — were the sole or main breadwinner in a record 40 percent of households with children under age 18 in 2011, compared with only 11 percent in 1960 (top). Single mothers were the sole provider in a fourth of households with children, up sharply from five decades earlier. Meanwhile, the percentage of dual-income married couples with children rose sharply over the past five decades, reaching 59 percent in 1990 before hitting a plateau (bottom). The share of households in which only fathers were employed plunged from 70 percent in 1960 to 31 percent in 2011.

Mothers as Sole or Primary Provider, 1960-2011



Employment Arrangements Among Couples, 1960-2011



Source: Wendy Wang, Kim Parker and Paul Taylor, “Breadwinner Moms: Mothers Are the Sole or Primary Provider in Four-in-Ten Households with Children; Public Conflicted about the Growing Trend,” Pew Research Center, May 29, 2013, pp. 1, 20, www.pewsocialtrends.org/files/2013/05/Breadwinner_moms_final.pdf

Many social and cultural changes brought about by the feminist movement are deeply integrated into American life, but the debate about feminism is far from settled. “For the most part, women are vastly better off on almost every measure than they were 50 years ago,” says Hanna Rosin, author of *The End of Men And the Rise of Women*. (See sidebar, p. 659.)

For example, in 1960, women earned 35.3 percent of undergraduate degrees and only 10 percent of doctoral degrees in the United States. Since 1968, the percentage of women with at least a college degree has tripled.⁹ In the 2012-13 academic year, women earned slightly more than half of all doctorates.¹⁰

Women now comprise 57 percent of U.S. college enrollment.¹¹ In fact, women are attending college — and graduating — in such great numbers that some schools have quietly begun practicing affirmative action for men.¹²

The wage gap between men and women is closing, slowly, in part because of women’s educational attainment. Women, on average, earn 77 cents for every dollar a white male makes, up from about 61 cents in 1960.¹³ At the present rate, women’s earnings won’t catch up to those of men until 2056. The wage gap is even greater for women of color — black women earn, on average, 68 cents for every dollar a white male makes, Hispanic women, 59 cents.¹⁴

In the last five years or so, most of the progress made on the wage gap is not because women have done better — it’s because men have done worse, Shierholz says. “That is not the kind of equity we want to see,” she says. “We want women to see real, rising wages without men seeing declines.”

The recession hit men especially hard. Women, Shierholz says, did better as a group because so many of them work in jobs that are less cyclical than more male-dominated fields such as construction and manufacturing.¹⁵

But for all their progress, women in general today say they are less happy than women were 40 years ago, Rosin says. “That’s probably a natural consequence of [having] lots of choices,” she says. “Often when you are supposed to compete in many different realms, and when your role is less defined, there are just more opportunities to find yourself wanting.”

Economists Betsey Stevenson and Justin Wolfers, both at the University of Michigan, termed the phenomenon “the paradox of declining happiness.” Their findings were consistent among women, regardless of their marital status, age, education or income level. The trend also held true for European women.¹⁶

But, Stevenson says, the decline in reported happiness is not tied to women’s participation in the labor force. Perhaps it’s due to women’s higher expectations, she suggests. “One of the possibilities is that the women’s movement changed how people think about and answer these questions,” she says.

Stevenson and Wolfers also theorized that declines in family life or social cohesion have hurt women more than men. Or, in an era of greater gender equality, women may be more likely to compare their lives with those of the men around them, they wrote.¹⁷ “It wasn’t clear to us why,” Stevenson is quick to point out. “What we were trying to do is document the trend and pose it as something that was important but difficult to understand.”

Some see the happiness data as evidence that the feminist movement has let women down. “The idea that you can have it all . . . has not proven to be very family friendly,” says Janice Shaw Crouse, a senior fellow at the Beverly LaHaye Institute, a Washington, D.C.-based Christian women’s organization that is critical of the feminist movement. “It’s not a pretty picture in women’s personal lives.”

She cites the declining U.S. marriage rate — it hit a record low of 51 percent in 2011 — as a sign of trouble,

along with the fact that people are marrying later. The current median age for marriage is about 27 for women and 29 for men.¹⁸ In 1960, by contrast, 72 percent of Americans were married, and the median age of marriage was the early 20s for both men and women.¹⁹

The reasons for delaying marriage vary; many women put it off until they finish school and get established in their careers. And many couples live together before marriage, instead of marrying.²⁰ Marriage, Crouse says, provides the best environment for raising children, forms an important cornerstone of society and makes women happier.

But the happiness data should be viewed in light of contemporary social and economic conditions, says Stephanie Coontz, a professor of history and family studies at Evergreen State College in Olympia, Wash. “In the 1950s and ’60s, people were measuring their lives against World War II and the Depression,” she says. “People’s standards of happiness change.”

Higher expectations — and greater anxiety — about their careers, their family’s economic well-being, and their ability to provide for the life’s big-ticket items, such as a home and their children’s college tuition, may account for a decline in women’s feelings of happiness, she says. “It’s easy for people to say, ‘well, maybe we’ve opened a Pandora’s box here.’ In fact, I think that’s the wrong way to look at it,” she says. “We’re facing some new challenges — having overcome much worse ones in the past,” she says.

Eagle Forum founder Phyllis Schlafly believes the feminist movement devalued marriage and family, to the detriment of women’s happiness. “The ones who have planned their life without husband and children are living alone,” she says. “And then when they get to be 38 or 40, they realize that life is passing them by. I think there are just so many who are not happy with the choices that they made.” (See “At Issue,” p. 661.)

Women are now the sole or primary breadwinner in 40 percent of households with children under 18. In 1960, that was true for just one in 10 households. Nearly two-thirds of these breadwinners are single mothers, whose median family income was \$23,000 in 2011, well below the national median income of \$57,000 for all families with children. By comparison, among the 37 percent of families in which women out-earned their husbands, the median family income was nearly \$80,000.²¹

“There are groups of women who are in significant distress in our society,” says Ellen Bravo, the executive director of Family Values at Work, a coalition of groups pressing for mandatory paid sick leave laws. “To say we’re better off doesn’t mean that we’re anywhere near done. If we want to measure the progress of women, we have to measure all women.”

Are women limiting themselves?

When it comes to advancing in the workplace, are women victims of a “glass ceiling” or a “sticky floor”?

Plenty of evidence suggests that women encounter systemic barriers on their way up the career ladder — and that they also may impose career limits on themselves, sometimes for the sake of juggling family and professional responsibilities.

Women make up about half of the management ranks at American companies, but relatively few are making it into the executive suite.

In 2012, women held executive officer positions at 14.3 percent of *Fortune* 500 companies.²² Women still face barriers, internal and external, in reaching the highest levels of leadership and achievement in professional life.

As for female behaviors Facebook COO Sandberg sees as self-limiting, women “systematically underestimate themselves,” she said. “Why does this matter? Boy, it matters a lot. Because no one gets to the corner office by sitting on the side — not at the table

— and no one gets the promotion if they don’t think they deserve their own success or they don’t even understand their own success.”²³

But women also face stereotypes. In 2003, Francis Flynn, a professor of organizational behavior at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business, and Cameron Anderson, a professor of leadership and communication at the Haas School of Business at the University of California-Berkeley, conducted a study in which their students were presented the real-life business case of venture capitalist Heidi Roizen, who had leveraged her “outgoing personality . . . and vast professional network” to her advantage.²⁴

However, one group read about “Heidi Roizen,” the other about “Howard Roizen.” The students saw Heidi and Howard as equally competent. But when asked which they liked more, the students chose “Howard.”²⁵

Research into gender stereotypes bears out such findings. Studies show that women are generally expected to be more nurturing, sympathetic and kind and that when they show dominance or self-promotion they may face social or career-related consequences.²⁶ Even when women adopt the same career-advancement strategies as men — saying what they want in their careers, asking for opportunities, volunteering to work long hours — they advance less and their salaries grow more slowly than those of their male counterparts, the studies have found.²⁷

Women also are less likely to negotiate for starting salaries or raises, potentially depriving themselves of hundreds of thousands of dollars in lifetime earnings. A study of graduate students indicated that while 57 percent of the male college graduates negotiated for their starting salary, only 7 percent of the women did.²⁸ Gender socialization explains some of the difference, said Linda Babcock, a professor of economics at Carnegie Mellon University’s Heinz College School

of Public Policy & Management and the co-author of *Women Don’t Ask: Negotiation and the Gender Divide*. While boys are taught to focus on themselves, girls are taught to pay attention to the needs of others first, she said.²⁹

Women also may think — correctly, in some cases — that they’ll face a backlash for negotiating. Babcock’s research revealed a “negotiation penalty” that was 5.5 times higher for women than for men: Both male and female hiring managers were less likely to hire women who negotiated.³⁰

“As for the question ‘are women limiting themselves?’ I think the answer is definitely yes,” says Daria Burke, CEO of Black MBA Women, an organization she founded to support aspiring executives. “But external factors play a significant role in our ability to push past the limits that have been set for us.”

Women also hesitate to help themselves, according to a study by the London-based Institute of Leadership and Management. “Women managers are impeded . . . by lower ambitions and expectations [of themselves],” the study said. On average, men’s higher expectations of themselves and self-confidence help them land management roles three years earlier than women.³¹

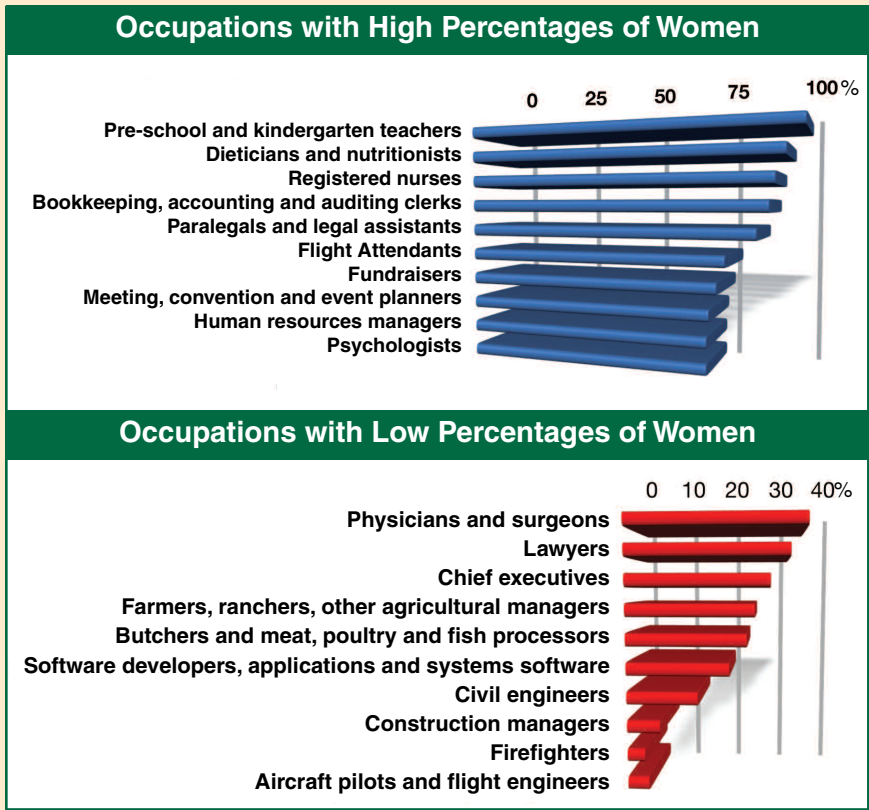
Ambivalence toward leadership also keeps women stuck, said Henna Inam, an Atlanta-based executive coach. She identified several typical self-limiting mindsets.

“If we perceive that leadership involves ‘exerting power over others,’ we are reluctant to lead,” she said. “For many women, social acceptance is much more important than for men.” Women also may think that accepting a leadership role is too stressful, she said, or that they need to improve themselves before they take on a new challenge, or that they can make a bigger difference in their current role than they could in the upper ranks of the organization.³²

A study of 60 corporations by management consultant McKinsey & Co.

Women Lag in Some Occupations

Women predominate in mostly traditional female jobs; they represent 98.1 percent of kindergarten teachers and 90.6 percent of nurses (top). And while women represent more than a third of U.S. doctors and surgeons, they account for only 19.7 percent of software developers and 4.1 percent of pilots and flight engineers (bottom). Overall, females now comprise 53.5 percent of the labor force.



Source: "Current Population Survey," U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, www.bls.gov/cps/cpsa2012.pdf

found that a majority of successful women — 59 percent — don't aspire to the top job. When asked why, they gave answers such as "I'm happy doing what I'm doing."³³

For a lot of women, ambition to climb the career ladder pales in comparison to wanting a balance between work and home life. According to a *New York Times*/CBS News poll, only one-quarter of mothers with children under 18 said they would work full time if money were no object.

"If it were up to me," said Angie

Oler, a University of Wisconsin-Madison researcher who switched to part-time work when her first child was born four years ago, "I would never ever go back to full time. . . . I think the world would be a much happier place if we all worked fewer hours, like if everyone worked just four eight-hour days, and I think we'd all still manage to get all of our work done."³⁴

For AEI's Sommers such views show that women's relationship to the workplace is "still more tenuous than men's, and not because of oppression.

It's because of women's choice, women's freedom."

But women are frequently making those choices inside systems they didn't create, says Williams, of the Hastings College of the Law. Women — and men, for that matter — who want more flexibility in their working lives often are seen as slackers, even when their workplaces offer such arrangements. Moreover, women who leave the workplace to parent full time often face career penalties in the form of lower salaries when they try to return.³⁵

The problem, Williams says, is the pervasive, implicit message in many workplaces that "a high-level professional is someone who makes work the central commitment of their lives."³⁶

"So long as you have workplaces where the work-devotion ideal remains intact, we're never going to be able to address the 'hours problem,'" Williams says. The "hours problem," she says, is the expectation that to get ahead, workers must devote most of their lives to their jobs.

Among college-educated working mothers ages 25 to 44, she says, only 13.9 percent work more than 50 hours a week, compared to 37 percent of their male cohort (men 25-44, with college educations). It's unrealistic to think that more women will advance to the top of organizations — much less that the needs of ordinary working women will be addressed — without a fundamental shift in how workplaces approach work-life balance.

Should workplaces become more accommodating for women?

The discussion about greater work-life balance often begins with the issue of maternity leave. The United States is the world's only high-income country that doesn't offer a legal right to paid time off after the birth of a child. The Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), passed in 1993, mandates 12 weeks of job-protected leave to qualified workers, but the leave is unpaid, limited to

companies with 50 or more employees and only covers employees who worked at least 1,250 hours in the year before requesting leave. As a result, about 40 percent of workers are not eligible for the benefit.³⁷

Congressional Democrats, such as Rep. George Miller of California, have called for extending the FMLA to all workers.³⁸ While a few states have expanded family and medical leave, federal legislation is not expected to be adopted because of strong opposition from Republicans, who believe such measures would constitute onerous government intrusions into private companies' policies.

Only 11 percent of American workers have access to paid family leave, according to the National Partnership for Women & Families.³⁹

"Providing 12 weeks of paid leave is expensive. We should not expect employers to pay for that individually," says Ariane Hegewisch, a study director at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, a Washington think tank that examines the impact of pay equity, immigration and education on women. "It really is something we need to do through social insurance."

A few states, such as California and New Jersey, offer family leave insurance, which — like Social Security or Medicare — is usually funded by a special payroll tax.

Most family-friendly policies in Europe are funded through social insurance. Parental leave policies in other countries vary widely — from Sweden's generous 40 weeks of full-time equivalent paid leave to nearly six years of combined job-protected leave for couples in France and Spain, much of it unpaid. A comparative study of "family friendly" policies in the United States and Europe found that most offered some kind of financial support.⁴⁰ Some American companies do offer paid maternity leave, and a few, such as Google and Yahoo, have begun offering paid paternity leave. But they are the exception.

"Employers are not filling the hole left by regulations," says Hegewisch. Laws are needed, she said, "to create a basic floor."

The benefits of "family friendly" policies, according to Hegewisch, include gender equality, lower infant mortality, higher fertility rates, better child health, labor force growth and lower poverty rates.⁴¹ Paid maternity leave could also help the U.S. address its declining birth rate.

Still, says Roger Clegg, general counsel for the Center for Equal Opportunity, a conservative public policy institute, employers have no compelling reason to provide paid leave or other family accommodations. "Individuals should have choices about where they work, and companies should have choices about how to structure their jobs and allow the market to work these things out," Clegg says. "I think it would be a bad thing if we started moving toward the European model. This kind of micromanaging is bad for the economy, bad for economic growth."

In fact, some economists cite high labor costs as a factor in many European countries' ongoing economic woes.⁴²

The U.S. Chamber of Commerce led the opposition to the FMLA when it passed in 1993 and opposes paid leave. "Employers have constraints on them," said Marc Freedman, the executive director for labor law policy at the Chamber. Even unpaid leave, he said, is too big a burden for many small companies. While larger companies can accommodate FMLA leave for new parents, he said, it can be difficult for them to track employees' medical leave.⁴³

The lack of paid parental leave in the United States may partly explain why women's participation in the labor force has stopped growing, says Francine Blau, a labor economist at Cornell University. It has been at a standstill since the mid-1990s and is falling behind its European counterparts. In 1990, 74 percent of working-age women (16-64) were either employed or looking for a job, the sixth-highest rate among 22 econom-

ically advanced countries. By 2010, it had risen to just over 75 percent, while women's labor force participation in other advanced economies had increased on average from 67 percent to nearly 80 percent. Blau and her co-author, Lawrence Kahn, found that the expansion of "family friendly" policies in European countries explained nearly 30 percent of the difference between American women's labor force participation and that of their European counterparts.⁴⁴

"These other countries started with much more aggressive policies of parental leave and part-time entitlements, and expanded those policies over the last 20 years," Blau says. Such generous policies appear to help women "handle both their work and their family responsibilities and increase labor force participation."

But more of the jobs available to European women were part-time, and a larger share of U.S. women are professionals or managers than among their European counterparts.

"We think there probably are some unintended consequences of these [parental leave] policies, if they become extremely generous," Blau says. Women may "spend more time out of the labor force than they otherwise would have and be more likely to work in part-time jobs than they otherwise would have."

"The U.S. may be too low, but other countries may have gone overboard in the other direction."⁴⁵

While work-family policies are good for parents and children, they're also good for the economy as a whole, Blau says. "If we do not fully utilize the skills and talents, our output is not as great as it would be, and we're not as prosperous as we could be," she says.

Paid maternity leave also increases the likelihood that women will return to work once the leave is over, studies show.⁴⁶ And a study by one of Blau's graduate students at Cornell, Ankita Patnaik, suggests that encouraging men

to take paid paternity leave may have long-term effects on how partners share child care and household duties. Patnaik looked at the long-term effects of Quebec's "use it or lose it" paid parental leave and found that dads who

historian Ruth Rosen, a professor emerita at the University of California-Davis, said of Kennedy, "but in effect that's what he did."⁴⁸

For more than 40 years after women won the vote with ratification of the

they believed that women needed labor protections, such as maximum work hours and minimum wages, which they feared would be abolished under the ERA. Paul's group, meanwhile, felt that labor standards did not promote equality. "Labor legislation as a form of sex discrimination," she wrote, "is enacting another handicap for women in the economic struggle."⁵²

Women's participation in the labor force had been on the rise before World War II, and the war brought about six million women into the workplace between 1940 and 1944 to replace men called up for military service. By the spring of 1944, nearly one-third of all women and girls over age 14 were working, and their ranks in industrial jobs had increased almost 500 percent.

As the war was winding down in 1945, the government waged an aggressive campaign to encourage women to return to their traditional roles as full-time housewives and mothers, or to take jobs in traditional "feminine" (and lower paying) occupations, such as clerical work. But the women were not keen to do so: Polls showed that more than three-quarters of women employed in wartime occupations said they hoped to keep their jobs when the war ended.⁵³

Equal-pay legislation, which would ensure equal pay for women doing work that required comparable skills as their male counterparts was proposed in 1945, mainly as a tribute to female wartime workers. But in a post-war economy focused on reintegrating veterans into the workforce, the legislation languished. Large numbers of American women entered or remained in the workforce after World War II. In 1960, nearly 35 percent of American women over age 16 were working, and public opinion — including organized labor — was rallying around the concept of equal pay for equal work.⁵⁴

But until 1963, opposition from business groups blocked the legislation.⁵⁵

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AP Photo/The Republic/Andrew Laker

Taylor Baker stops to say hello to her 5-month-old daughter, Graesyn Steinkoenig, at the Cummins Childcare Center, part of Cummins Inc., an engine manufacturer, in Columbus, Ind., on Jan. 26, 2012. Baker, who works in the center's office, returned to work seven weeks after having her daughter.

Advocates of family-friendly corporate policies say they are good not only for parents and children but also for the economy.

took the leave were more likely to shoulder more of the domestic chores than those who didn't.⁴⁷ ■

BACKGROUND

The Second Wave

When President John F. Kennedy appointed his Presidential Commission on the Status of Women in 1961, political momentum had been growing to address the issue of women's equality. The 26-member commission, headed by former first lady Eleanor Roosevelt, was charged with investigating discrimination against women.

"I don't think he meant to give birth to the modern women's movement,"

19th Amendment in 1920, feminism in America had largely faded from public view. The coalition that had fought for suffrage splintered, as one wing, the National Woman's Party, began pursuing an Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), led by suffragist Alice Paul.⁴⁹ Another began pushing for legislative changes more narrowly focused on helping to protect working women through the Women's Bureau at the Department of Labor; a third party sought to carve out a more prominent place for women in political parties.⁵⁰

The Women's Bureau, according to historian Georgia Duerst-Lahti, "nurtured a coalition of groups concerned with the plight of working women and favoring protectionist legislation, and in the process it kept a spark of activism alive."⁵¹

By and large, these groups opposed the Equal Rights Amendment because

Chronology

1848-1945

Women press for voting rights and workplace equality.

1848

First women's rights convention takes place in Seneca Falls, N.Y.

1920

States ratify 19th Amendment, giving women the right to vote. . . . Labor Department's Women's Bureau formed to collect data about working women.

1923

Equal Rights Amendment (ERA) introduced in Congress.

1930

Half of single women and 12 percent of wives are in labor force.

1938

Fair Labor Standards Act establishes rules for a minimum wage, over-time pay and child labor.

1941-1945

Almost 6 million women enter the workforce during World War II.

1960s *Women win landmark victories for equal rights in the workplace.*

1961

President John F. Kennedy establishes Commission on the Status of Women.

1963

Kennedy signs Equal Pay Act. . . . Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* spurs women's rights movement.

1964

Civil Rights Act outlaws employment discrimination on basis of race, color, religion, sex and national origin.

1966

National Organization for Women founded.

1968

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission bans sex-segregated help-wanted ads.

1970s *Feminist movement spurs political and social change.*

1972

Congress passes Equal Rights Amendment (ERA), sends it to states for ratification. . . . Congress passes Title IX, requiring gender equity in educational programs.

1973

Supreme Court legalizes abortion, energizing women's movement.

1974

Supreme Court rules employers cannot justify lower wages for women.

1978

Pregnancy Discrimination Act bans firing pregnant women or denying them jobs. . . . Labor Department acts to increase the number of women in skilled construction trades.

1982-2000 *ERA fails; unpaid family leave becomes law.*

1982

Equal Rights Amendment falls three states short of 38 needed for ratification.

1986

Supreme Court declares sexual

harassment in workplace illegal.

1993

Family and Medical Leave Act entitles eligible employees to take job-protected leave.

2001-Present
Equal-pay fight continues.

2001

Female Walmart employees file sex-discrimination claim.

2004

Morgan Stanley agrees to pay \$54 million in sex-discrimination suit.

2007

Supreme Court throws out woman's pay-discrimination claim because it was not filed within a 180-day deadline from her first paycheck.

2009

President Obama signs the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, invalidating the 2007 Supreme Court ruling. The act allows employees to contest pay discrimination 180 days after any discriminatory paycheck.

2011

Supreme Court dismisses *Walmart v. Dukes*, saying it cannot determine whether all 1.5 million plaintiffs were victims of discrimination.

2012

Record number of women elected to Congress — 20 senators and 81 House members.

2013

Census Bureau finds that women are primary breadwinners in 40 percent of U.S. households with children under 18, up from 10 percent in 1960.

Women Still Hold a Fraction of Skilled-Trades Jobs

“There’s a big feeling that these are men’s jobs.”

In the late 1970s, Connie Ashbrook enrolled in a pre-apprenticeship program to become a dump truck driver, her first job toward a career in the skilled trades.

Eventually she became an elevator installer. Her employer was looking for women because the company had a large federal contract and needed to comply with U.S. Department of Labor affirmative action guidelines calling for federal contractors to make a “good faith effort” to hire female workers.

“I always say that I got my job because of affirmative action and all the organizations that fought for equal opportunity, from the civil rights folks . . . to the feminist policymakers and lawyers fighting for women’s equal opportunity,” says Ashbrook, now executive director of Oregon Tradeswomen, Inc., which provides training and networking opportunities for women. “I kept my job because I was good at it . . . but the door was opened because of those people that believed in justice and equal opportunity.”

Women increasingly are an accepted part of construction workplaces, and more women hold key leadership positions in unions and professional organizations than ever before. Despite such gains, however, they still occupy fewer than 3 percent of the nation’s skilled trade jobs and apprenticeships.¹

The construction industry employed 7.1 million people — 5.1 percent of all jobs — in 2011, but women comprised only 2.3 percent of that workforce, which includes electricians, carpenters, bricklayers and other trades.² Moreover, the percent-

age of female skilled apprentices in 2009 was smaller than in 1992, according to the Department of Labor.³

Women can earn significantly higher wages in the trades than in other occupations requiring only a high school education. The median weekly income of a male electrician, for example, is \$855, which is 159 percent of the median wages of a woman with a high school diploma.⁴

So why aren’t more women working in the skilled trades?

“I think there’s a big feeling that these are men’s jobs,” says Francoise Jacobsohn, program director of the Equality Works project at Legal Momentum, a women’s advocacy organization. “It’s just entrenched discrimination.”

The Department of Labor’s Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) tracks whether federal contractors follow affirmative action guidelines. OFCCP Director Pat Shiu said in March that investigators have found violation rates in the construction industry are significantly higher than in other industries. The “vast majority” of those occurred because companies failed to take the established steps for ensuring equal opportunity. Her office has beefed up enforcement efforts, she said, and long-awaited Labor Department employment goals for women and minorities will be published this fall.⁵

“I believe that the key to getting more women and minorities in the construction trades is strong enforcement,” Shiu said.⁶

“You still run into contractors that say, ‘Oh, do I have to take a woman?’” says Leah Rambo, director of training for the

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In June of 1963, a few months before his Presidential Commission on the Status of Women published its final report, Kennedy signed the legislation amending the 1938 Fair Labor Standards Act. The Equal Pay Act required employers to pay men and women equally for doing the same work. It also allowed for pay differentials based on seniority, merit, quantity or quality of production or a factor other than gender. (Current legislative efforts such as the Paycheck Fairness Act are aimed at closing some of these loopholes.)

A few months later, the presidential commission’s final report documented workplace discrimination and recommended equal employment opportunities for women, affordable child care and paid maternity leave.

Both developments came in the same year that *The Feminine Mystique* hit book stores, making 1963 an important year in the birth of the modern feminist movement.

Friedan went on to help found NOW in 1966. In 1970 she led the Strike for Women’s Equality, a march on the 50th anniversary of women’s suffrage that drew an estimated 50,000 women to the streets of New York City and gave the nation its first sweeping visual of the new feminist movement.

Coontz, who explored the impact of *The Feminine Mystique* in her book, *A Strange Stirring: The Feminine Mystique and American Women at the Dawn of the 1960s*, said Friedan’s book struck a nerve among women who had left domestic life during World War II but were expected to return to it once the

war was over, along with younger women who had watched the expansion of new jobs and educational opportunities in the postwar era only to be told it was abnormal for a woman to want anything other than a traditional role as wife and mother.

“It was a catalyst for stuff that was already coming,” she says. “It inspired and had a tremendous emotional impact on women who had at first thought they were neurotic or even crazy for wanting something more out of life,” she says.

The movement also attracted an entire generation of young (mostly white) middle-class women who had been raised with the idea that they would go to college but who aspired to defy the stereotype that Friedan depicted in the book. “They create the noise, they politicize these issues, and in effect

Sheet Metal Workers Local 28 in New York City. “You tell them, ‘Yes you do.’ You still have a lot of people who need to be educated.”

That goes for the public as well, Rambo says. Girls and women generally don’t think of the trades as a career possibility, she says, and they also have to deal with sexual harassment and discrimination.

“A lot of women aren’t prepared for that,” she said.

Jenna Smith thinks sexual harassment is a major reason women drop out of the skilled trades. “They get worn out,” says Smith, who works as the apprentice coordinator at Northwest Line Joint Apprenticeship Training Committee, a multistate organization based in Portland, Ore. “It’s a really scary thing to stand up.”

Smith remembers her own battle to win her journeywoman license after finishing an apprenticeship as an electric-line worker in Eugene, Ore. Smith reported being sexually harassed on the job when she was an apprentice. She was initially denied her journeywoman license, but eventually won an appeal.

Tradeswomen’s groups are trying to get more women in the skilled trades, especially in leadership roles, says Carolyn Williams, director of civic and community engagement for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers union.

“Seeing someone who looks like me sends the message that ‘there’s a place for me here,’ ” says Williams.

— **Michelle Johnson**



Trainees in Portland, Ore., learn carpentry in a state-certified pre-apprenticeship career class for women sponsored by the group Oregon Tradeswomen.

Oregon Tradeswomen Inc.

¹ Timothy Casey, “Still Excluded: There Are Still Virtually No Women in the Federally Created and Supervised Apprenticeship Program for the Skilled Construction Trades,” *Legal Momentum*, March 2013, www.legalmomentum.org/sites/default/files/reports/still-excluded.pdf.

² “A Databook 2012,” U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, pp. 29, 38, www.bls.gov/cps/wlf-databook-2012.pdf.

³ Casey, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

⁴ *Legal Momentum* says statistically reliable data on female earnings is unavailable because so few women are employed in the trades.

⁵ “Director Shiu Addresses ‘Working on Equal Terms’ Summit,” U.S. Department of Labor Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs, March 18, 2013, www.dol.gov/ofccp/addresses/Director_address_WETS_March182013.htm.

⁶ *Ibid.*

create the women’s movement,” Rosen said. “They create the shock troops.”⁵⁶

But they were often made to feel unwelcome in the business world. In a recent commentary for *The Washington Post*, former *Post* restaurant critic Phyllis Richman described the discouraging experience of being asked by a Harvard graduate school professor to spell out exactly how she planned to balance her studies with her family responsibilities if she were to be accepted at Harvard. She replied, 52 years later, in a letter also published in *The Post*: “Before your letter, it hadn’t occurred to me that marriage could hinder my acceptance at Harvard or my career,” Richman wrote to the professor, William A. Doebele, Jr.⁵⁷

After the 1972 passage of Title IX, the federal civil rights law prohibiting

sex discrimination in education, women began heading to college in record numbers.

Women’s access to higher education has been the “big advance” for the feminist movement, Smeal, the former NOW president, says. “Down deep, we thought if we could open the doors women would flood in, but we didn’t really know. I have to say, once we got the doors open more, it went faster than we probably thought it would have gone.”

Women At Work

Still, what women choose to study and the professions they select factor into the persistent wage gap between men and women. Women, especially

women of color, are overrepresented in occupations considered “women’s work” — child care and elder care, for example. (See graphic, p. 652.)

Much of the gender wage gap can be explained by wage differences in “traditionally male” and “traditionally female” occupations.

“Predominantly male jobs, particularly at the higher educated level, tend to pay much more than the female dominated jobs,” says Hegewisch, of the Institute for Women’s Policy Research. “I think the solution to this is not just to say, ‘OK, all women should become engineers now. It’s also how we can more equitably fund and pay for the jobs that are done primarily by women. We do need librarians and teachers and psychologists and social workers. So it’s not just saying women

are wrong to go in for those jobs. Neither is there evidence that as soon as men move in, the wages will go up.”

But the differences in chosen careers can't explain the entire gender wage gap, and discriminatory wage practices also persist, despite laws meant to prevent them.

In 2009, President Obama signed the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act, reversing a Supreme Court ruling from two years earlier. Ledbetter, a supervisor at a Goodyear Tire and Rubber Co. plant in Gadsden, Ala., had been paid less than her male counterparts for years but didn't know about the gap until she received an anonymous tip. Her complaint to the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission eventually made its way to the Supreme Court, which said she had failed to file the complaint within 180 days from when the discrimination first occurred. The Ledbetter law extended the statute of limitations for employees to contest pay discrimination to 180 days after any discriminatory paycheck.⁵⁸

But a pay gap persists, even among women who do not choose traditionally female occupations. According to a 2012 study by the American Association of University Women, an inexplicable gap of about 7 percent remained between men and women with identical experience, education and occupational status one year after graduation from college or after obtaining advanced degrees, even after controlling for every known variable.⁵⁹

And the gap has appeared to widen over time, even among high earners. The gap is driven in part by the choices that women often make when trying to balance work and family, experts say. Harvard University economists Claudia Goldin and Lawrence F. Katz examined the “career cost” of having a family among both women and men in business, medicine and law. They found that women pay a higher cost for having a family than men do. For example, while earnings for males and

females with an MBA were similar immediately after graduation, a substantial wage gap between them existed 10 to 16 years after graduation, when the women's earnings fell to about 55 percent of the men's.⁶⁰

Women with children were much more likely to take time out of the workforce or work part time — 24 percent fewer hours than men or women without children — and MBA moms who dropped out cited family, not career, as the reason, according to Goldin and Katz.⁶¹

They also found that high-powered career women increasingly are going into specialties that allow greater flexibility, even if it means lower incomes. Many women are choosing specialties that allow them to schedule or control their own hours — such as veterinary medicine, pharmacy and other medical specialties — and slowly are helping to make those professions more flexible, the Harvard researchers found.⁶²

Sharing the Load

As a group, working dads are doing more around the house. A March report from the Pew Research “Social and Demographic Trends” found that fathers spend twice as much time doing household chores as they did in 1965 — from about four hours to 10 hours a week. Mothers in two-parent families put in about 18 hours a week, down from 32 hours in 1965. But while both parents spend more time with their children than parents did in 1965, moms spend more than dads do.⁶³

They also tend to carry more of the emotional weight of running a family, says Kerry Fierke, an assistant professor at the University of Minnesota College of Pharmacy.

“We're the ones who send the birthday cards and keep the house set and take on a lot of responsibilities. I'm always working with women on how to shed some of those responsibilities,” Fierke says. She dropped off the management

track in corporate health care a few years ago and now focuses on healthcare leadership issues, especially for women.

While she and her husband share housework and child care fairly equally, she says, “I do more of the management part of it.”

Men may be doing more, but they're also more likely than women to report work-family conflicts and less likely to take advantage of flexible work options offered by their employers, says Williams, of Hastings College of the Law.⁶⁴ “Men who take parental leave, much less go part-time, encounter career penalties because they are seen as more feminine,” she says.

Yet many younger men, particularly college-educated couples, are taking a more hands-on approach to fathering. Fatherhood has gone from a “provide, protect scenario to a team effort, especially nowadays with couples raising children where both work full time,” said 37-year-old Jeremy Foster, an online creative director and designer in Kansas City, Mo.⁶⁵

In single-parent families, however, the “team effort” often involves a logistical juggling act in which children spend time at day care and with a combination of extended family members and friends.

Full-time day care is too expensive for many families, costing more than half the annual income of a family of three living at the poverty level (\$18,530). Single parents are not the only ones who struggle, however. In 40 states (plus the District of Columbia), infant day care costs more than 10 percent of the median income for a married couple.⁶⁶

Child care in the United States is also largely unregulated, often resulting in haphazard conditions and low pay for workers. A 2007 survey by the National Institute of Child Health Development rated the majority of day care centers as “fair” or between “poor and good.”⁶⁷

Except for a brief period during World War II, when day care centers were set

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'End of Men' Author Charts Women's Growing Power

"We can't have this fixed idea that men are more dominant."

In her 2012 book *The End of Men And the Rise of Women*, Hanna Rosin maps what she sees as a seismic cultural shift — one accelerated by the recent recession, in which men lost a disproportionate share of jobs.

Women, she says, haven't just pulled even with men in education and social status — they've surpassed them. It's no longer a man's world.

Rosin, a senior editor for *The Atlantic*, says the book is "not a triumphalist feminist book that says, 'We won. We have everything.' Things have changed a lot, but the change has mixed results."

Here is an edited transcript of CQ Researcher's Michelle Johnson's interview with Rosin.

Q: How have feminists responded to your book?

A: There's been a mixed reaction. I have had to think about why the resistance, why the idea that we are doing well feels to many people like a betrayal of feminism. In an era of feminism in the 1970s, you would cheer at that idea. There was a sense that it was great to be triumphant. Now, as we get closer to more and more power, I think there's a sense that it's dangerous to say we're triumphant. I thought people would say, 'What about CEOs? There are so few women CEOs.' But it was more the mood that surprised me. From more working-class women to middle-class women, the sort of striving women who write me, the response is like, 'Duh, this is completely obvious,' or 'Thank you for laying it out.' And those women would not call themselves feminists. One surprise is that men have reacted pretty positively to the book.

Q: At the beginning of writing the book, you thought that a world dominated by women would be more gentle or nurturing, but what you saw happening with women didn't seem "the result of fixed values or traits." You note the rise in arrest rates among women for violent crime, particularly among juveniles.

A: It seems that these traits exist along a continuum, so as women gain more power, they start to show some of the traits of the more powerful. One of the more surprising findings for me was just looking at the violence statistics. We can't have this fixed idea that men are more aggressive, more dominant, more powerful, and women are weaker and more vulnerable. We move along the continuum. We can move a lot further than we think.

Q: You also write that you had this mental image of an imaginary comic book duo, "Cardboard Man" and "Plastic Woman," but they aren't fixed gender traits.

A: I think part of the reason that women have been more flexible in responding to changes in the economy is because they've been the underdogs. They've had to hustle. They've

had to work twice as hard and fit into the cracks and struggle and struggle. Those two things are connected. Men have had a kind of entitlement to position, so they haven't had to struggle. But there certainly have been periods after World War II when men . . . behaved in ways that I'm describing women behaving now. They came back from war, bought up farms, went to school, got lots of degrees. They were really hustling in that brief period after the war. So no, I don't think those traits are innate.



Hanna Rosin, author of *The End of Men And the Rise of Women*.

Courtesy Hanna Rosin

Q: Ellen Bravo, executive director of Family Values at Work, talks about "the feminization of work." That is, more jobs are temporary, part-time or on contract — something that has been more common for women — and that it's affecting everyone. Would you use that term?

A: The fundamental structures of the economy have changed. It's not like a bunch of men lost their jobs and they'll get them back. The way the economy works and what it values has changed drastically, from a manufacturing economy to a service and information economy. Jobs can change at any moment, because technology can make jobs obsolete in a second. But the key element is the ability to adapt, which effectively means go to school and get whatever degree you need for whatever is happening at the moment. And that's something that women are doing much better than men.

— Michelle Johnson

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up for women who worked in wartime factories, the United States has never had a national child care system. In 1965, Congress created Head Start, a federal program that provides early childhood education for low-income families. In 1971, Congress passed the Comprehensive Child Care Act, which would have set up a federally subsidized national day care system with standards for quality and money for training and facilities. President Richard M. Nixon, who initially supported the legislation, ultimately vetoed it, declaring that it would promote “communal approaches to child rearing over the family-centered approach.”⁶⁸

Head Start expanded during the Clinton administration and serves more than 1 million children in 50 states, but a comprehensive federal child care system has never gained momentum as a national policy issue. Some blame the feminist movement for focusing more on fighting sex discrimination and promoting abortion rights at the expense of working mothers’ needs. Friedan herself echoed that criticism in her 1981 book *The Second Stage*, saying that pushing for family-friendly workplace policies was “the new feminist frontier.”⁶⁹

Obama has proposed spending \$75 billion over 10 years to create a “universal pre-K” system, in which the federal government would provide states with matching funds to set up programs for 4-year-olds, funded with higher cigarette taxes.⁷⁰ ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Leadership Gap

Women such as Facebook’s Sandberg and Anne-Marie Slaughter,

a former high-ranking State Department official and professor of politics and international affairs at Princeton University, argue that true gender equity won’t be possible until a critical mass of women wield power at the highest levels of political and corporate life.

In a widely debated article in *The Atlantic*, “Why Women Still Can’t Have It All,” Slaughter wrote that the best hope for improving the lot of all women, and for closing what some call “a new gender gap” — measured by well-being rather than wages — is to close the leadership gap: to elect a woman president and 50 women senators; to ensure that women are equally represented in the ranks of corporate executives and judicial leaders. Only when women wield power in sufficient numbers will we create a society that genuinely works for all women. That will be a society that works for everyone.”⁷¹

At the current rate of growth, however, it would take more than 70 years for women to pull equal with men in leadership roles.⁷²

Burke, of Black MBA Women, cites studies that correlate female leadership with better financial performance by companies as proof that the gender leadership gap needs to close.⁷³ “Organizations run by women perform better, and not just a little bit,” she says. “The same thing goes for companies that have diverse leadership. You look at Wall Street and who ran it into the ground, and it was largely middle-aged white men.”

For Sandberg, the leadership issue is a feminist issue. She is one of relatively few high-profile business executives to call herself a feminist, and she came in for some withering criticism, some of it from feminists who see her as too elitist to speak to the average woman’s experiences. Others applaud her for speaking up.

“The truth is, feminism could use a powerful ally,” wrote feminist author Jessica Valenti in an op-ed for *The Washington Post*.⁷⁴

Though Sandberg identifies as a feminist today, she didn’t think of herself that way in college. “But I think we need to reclaim the ‘F word’ if it means supporting equal opportunities for men and women,” she said during an interview with *The Harvard Business Review* in April.⁷⁵

Williams, of Hastings College of the Law, says perhaps “executive feminism” is just what the feminist cause needs in order to advance on behalf of other women. “More women in power might well lead to greater success in other arenas,” she said in a recent blog post for *The Harvard Business Review*.⁷⁶

Female leaders aren’t immune to trouble, however. For example, the board of Hewlett-Packard forced out Carly Fiorina as CEO over her business decisions. Other powerful businesswomen, such as lifestyle maven Martha Stewart and hotel magnate Leona Helmsley, ran into legal trouble for their business practices. Stewart went to prison for insider trading, and Helmsley served time for tax evasion and fraud.

Legislative Efforts

Many grass-roots feminists today are focusing on policies that they believe would benefit a wide swath of working American families. Bravo’s Family Values at Work coalition of groups in 21 states is pushing for state and local measures to provide paid sick leave. Some 44 million Americans lack paid sick leave, and millions of others can’t use their sick days to care for others, such as a sick child or parent. Some 60 percent of Latinos, the fastest-growing segment of the American workforce, get no sick leave.⁷⁷

In 2011, Connecticut became the first state to adopt a sick-leave law, and San Francisco, Portland, Chicago and Seattle have adopted similar local measures. A recent New York City ordinance extends sick leave to about 1 million workers,

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At Issue:

Are women better off than they were 50 years ago?



ELEANOR SMEAL
PRESIDENT, FUND FOR THE FEMINIST
MAJORITY; FORMER PRESIDENT,
NATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR WOMEN

WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, JULY 2013

Of course American women are better off today than 50 years ago! As a proud feminist activist for more than 40 years, I don't claim to be an impartial observer. Although inequities remain and the struggle is far from over, women's advancements are revolutionary.

In education, women have soared, both academically and athletically. In the 1960s women comprised a third of students enrolled in college, and some 60 percent never graduated. When I first began speaking for equality, women made up just 3 percent of the lawyers and 8 percent of the medical doctors. Feminists fought restrictive quotas that limited the number of women entering not only professional schools, but college itself. We were taunted with the ditty, "women don't want to be doctors or lawyers, they want to marry them."

Today such taunts are gone. Women are some 57 percent of college graduates and a majority of medical and law students. Women earn some 60 percent of the master's degrees and 52 percent of the doctorates.

In 1963 women were just 20 percent of the paid workforce; today we are nearly half. Women-owned businesses now employ more people than *Fortune* 500 companies combined. Women did not have equal credit opportunities until 1975, and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act did not pass until 1978. Fifty years ago a woman could be fired if she became pregnant. This was a typical fate for pregnant teachers, flight attendants and many more. Today's laws prohibit this practice.

Advances in birth control and abortion, and access to them, have improved women's health, economic well-being and educational opportunities. Women's longevity and maternal health have increased, while infant mortality and morbidity have decreased.

Fifty years ago domestic violence was treated as a personal problem, not talked about in public. Rape was considered a crime of passion, not a crime of violence. That day is over. Feminists at the state and federal levels have passed and are passing laws to combat such violence. Rates of violence, although still high, have been reduced. Sexual assault in the military and on college campuses is at intolerable levels, but an aware public is insisting on change.

Yes, the world is changing for women. Today the movement is worldwide. The need is still great, but the vision, hope and odds for winning women's equality have never been better.



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Whether women are better off today depends on what the goals in life are: to be rich, to be important, to achieve the aims of feminism, or to be happy. Women will have different answers. But because the trigger for this question is the 50th anniversary of the feminist movement, perhaps we should answer in that context.

The goal of the women's liberation movement, as it labeled itself when it was launched in 1963 by Betty Friedan's book *The Feminine Mystique*, was to move all fulltime homemakers out of their homes and into the labor force. This was not based on any economic argument; the feminist rationale was that the home was a "comfortable concentration camp" to which wives and mothers were confined by the patriarchy. As Supreme Court Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg wrote in her book *Sex Bias in the U.S. Code*, "the concept of husband-breadwinner and wife-homemaker must be eliminated from the Code to reflect the equality principle."

The separation of marriage from a recognition of the complementary roles of mother and father, plus the easy divorce laws, brought about the unfortunate separation of babies from marriage. So now 41 percent of births in the United States are illegitimate. Generous federal handouts give women an incentive to look to Big Brother for financial support instead of to husbands and fathers.

A National Bureau of Economic Research working paper by University of Pennsylvania economists reported that women's happiness has declined measurably since 1970. One theory advanced by the authors is that the feminist movement "raised women's expectations" (in other words, sold them a bill of goods), making them feel inadequate when they fail to have it all.

Women's unhappiness is better explained by the fact that the feminist movement taught women to see themselves as victims of the patriarchy and that their true worth will never be recognized, so success in life is forever beyond their reach.

It's sad to read feminists' self-psychoanalysis. Their principal problem was that they took women's studies courses in college where they learned to plan a career in the workplace without any space or time for marriage or babies, at least until the women are over age 40 and their window of opportunity has closed. So they don't have the companionship of a husband in their senior years or grandchildren to provide a reach into the future.

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and hundreds of thousands more get job-protected sick leave without pay.

“Many millions of workers are going without the protections they need in terms of sick days and family leave, so the present market hasn’t worked, particularly for those at the middle and lower ends of the income ladder,” says Vicki Shabo, director of Work and Family Programs for the National Partnership for Women and Families, a Washington, D.C.-based group that advocates for issues including paid family leave, paid sick leave and wage equity.

Shabo’s group is working with House and Senate Democrats to push the Healthy Families Act, first introduced in 2004 by the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy. The measure would allow workers in businesses with at least 15 employees to earn up to seven job-protected, paid sick days a year. The bill was reintroduced in 2013, by Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro in the House and Iowa’s Tom Harkin in the Senate. Both bills are stuck in committee and face widespread opposition among Republicans and pro-business advocates, who do not believe in a mandate for paid sick time.

“Republicans want to ensure that working families have the flexibility to get the health care they need, but we don’t think the answer is a ‘one size fits all’ government mandate,” said Michael Steel, a spokesman for House Majority Leader John Boehner, R-Ohio.

“It represents the intrusion of the federal government into the benefits policies of millions of companies, large and small,” said Republican Rep. Tom Price of Georgia during hearings on the bill in 2009.⁷⁸

Randel K. Johnson, the vice president for labor, immigration and employee benefits at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, said his group was worried that the legislation could later be expanded. “Some say, ‘What’s seven days of paid sick leave?’ My concern is it would never be just seven days. A year from now it will be 14 days,

and then 21,” said Johnson.⁷⁹

A 2013 report by the Employment Policies Institute, a conservative think tank, said in places where paid leave laws have gone into effect, such as San Francisco, workers already are losing jobs.⁸⁰

Democrats also would like to update the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act to provide 12 weeks of paid, job-protected leave for new parents or workers facing family medical emergencies. And they have introduced the Paycheck Fairness Act, which would close loopholes in the 1963 Equal Pay Act. Advocates cite problems with how courts have interpreted the law’s provision allowing pay differentials based on factors other than gender as evidence that the law needs to be clarified.⁸¹ But political observers say the measure stands little chance of advancing this year.⁸²

In the absence of federal action, some states are taking on the issues of equal pay and workplace flexibility. For example, as part of a larger measure fixing loopholes in Vermont’s equal pay law, legislators recently enacted a measure that provides safeguards against retaliation for employees requesting flexible work hours.⁸³ ■

OUTLOOK

More Jobs

The aging of America is likely to influence the job market for women. The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that most of the 30 fastest-growing occupations through 2020 are in female-dominated fields, such as health care, child care and education.⁸⁴

As the baby boom generation ages, the need for home-health and personal-care aides is expected to grow by 70 percent by 2020, creating an estimated 1.3 million additional jobs.⁸⁵

Hegewisch, at the Institute for Women’s Policy Research, also expects many women to work beyond the traditional retirement age of 65, in part because they will need to supplement their retirement incomes. Older women are much more likely than older men to be poor: More than 60 percent of women 65 or older have insufficient income to cover basic expenses.⁸⁶

Jobs in post-secondary education also are projected to grow — by 17 percent — but it is unclear whether those will be full-time positions with benefits or follow the current trend of adjunct and part-time instruction, she says.

The National Urban League’s Hardy expects significant growth in the number of female entrepreneurs. Passage of the Affordable Care Act, designed to make health insurance available to all, is expected to help boost the ranks of the self-employed by 11 percent once it is fully implemented.⁸⁷ The Urban League found that women own nearly half of all black-owned businesses and employ nearly a quarter of all employees at black-owned companies.⁸⁸ Women own nearly 35 percent of all Hispanic-owned businesses.⁸⁹

“They are really being employers and job creators,” Hardy says. Entrepreneurship is seen as a key way to address unemployment in communities of color, and women are leading the way, she says.

“As we look at barriers to growth, [we] have to start focusing on technology and health care and education,” Hardy says.

In the new economy, the best jobs may be the ones that can’t be outsourced easily, writes *End of Men* author Rosin, and women are poised to do well.

“The sure bets for the future,” she wrote, “are still jobs that cannot be done by a computer or someone overseas. They are the jobs that require human contact, interpersonal skills and creativity, and these are all areas where women excel.”⁹⁰ ■

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Feminist Majority Foundation, 1600 Wilson Blvd., Suite 801, Arlington, VA 22209; 703-522-2214; www.feminist.org. Works to advance women's equality.

Institute for Women's Policy Research, 1200 18th St., N.W., Suite 301, Washington, DC 20036; 202-785-5100; www.iwpr.org. Conducts research on women, including pay equity, immigration and education.

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