

CQ Researcher

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Future of Feminism

Are women returning to a 1950s mind-set?

The founders of the feminist movement some 40 years ago envisioned a glorious new era of equality for working women. But today more than half of employed parents can't take time off to care for sick children, and day care costs more than tuition at a state university. To be sure, women have made tremendous strides: Most mothers are in the work force today, and women account for half the managerial jobs and half the law-school graduates. But women still lag behind male counterparts in many ways, including wages. Many U.S. jobs are not "mother friendly," leading some women to opt off of the career treadmill and forcing out blue-collar workers. Some sociologists are asking whether feminism has failed, particularly in its inability to transform domestic life, where women still do the bulk of household chores. Indeed, some disparage women for returning to a 1950s mind-set — when "a woman's place was in the home." But some young feminists assert that child rearing should be respected work.



Philadelphia author Miriam Peskowitz, 41, says most employers don't enable women to combine work and parenting.

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RECIPIENT OF SOCIETY OF PROFESSIONAL JOURNALISTS AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE ♦ AMERICAN BAR ASSOCIATION SILVER GAVEL AWARD

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Cover: Philadelphia author Miriam Peskowitz, 41, says most employers don't enable women to combine work and parenting. She runs a Web site for feminist mothers, www.playgroundrevolution.com. (Miriam Peskowitz)

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Future of Feminism

BY SARAH GLAZER

THE ISSUES

A bus driver is fired for arriving three minutes late to work because her son had an asthma attack. A divorced mother loses her janitor's job for missing a day of work after her retarded son's babysitter didn't show up. A telephone-company clerk is ordered to attend a two-week training course out of town on the first day of her return from maternity leave — or be fired.¹

It wasn't supposed to be this way. In the 1970s, founders of the feminist movement envisioned a glorious, new era of equality: Women doing the same job as men would get the same pay. The glass ceiling keeping women out of the executive suite would be shattered. And child care woes would be banished by a network of reliable, inexpensive day-care centers.

To the dismay of the early feminists, however, more than half of employed parents today can't take time off to care for sick children; day care costs more than tuition at a state university.² The United States remains one of only five countries — out of 168 — that does not mandate paid maternity leave.³ And many employers, to remain globally competitive, require blue-collar employees to work overtime and white-collar employees to put in 70-hour weeks.⁴

On the other hand, feminists back then would have been astounded to see that most mothers are in the work force today and that women account for half the managerial jobs and half the law-school graduates.

Nonetheless, many wonder why women haven't risen further. Women



Xerox Corp.

Xerox CEO Anne Mulcahy is a rarity among female executives. While women account for half the nation's managerial jobs, fewer than 2 percent are CEO's for Fortune 500 companies. Many young women today see the new feminist frontier as reshaping the workplace so parents — including fathers — have more flexibility to take care of children without economic penalties or loss of job status.

may be managers, but fewer than 2 percent are CEOs for *Fortune* 500 companies; women make up half the new hires at law firms but only 17 percent of the partners in 2005.⁵ And, women still earn less than men — only 77 cents to a man's dollar, on average — a gap that widens as women get older and have children.⁶ (See graph, p. 316.)

In the march toward equality, women's growing participation in the labor force has been hailed as a major indicator that men and women have attained equality. But that march stalled in 2000 at 77 percent for women ages 25-44.⁷ About 60 percent of all women age 16 and over are in the labor force, compared to nearly 75 percent of men.⁸

In a controversial 2003 article, *The New York Times* declared that an "opt-

out revolution" was under way among professional women who had left their jobs to stay home with children. The article raised questions about whether women were returning to the values of 1950s domesticity, when middle-class women viewed wifedom and motherhood as a lifetime occupation.⁹ Several economists have since disputed that there was a real decline beyond the job losses suffered by both men and women during the dot-com bust. (See sidebar, p. 327.)

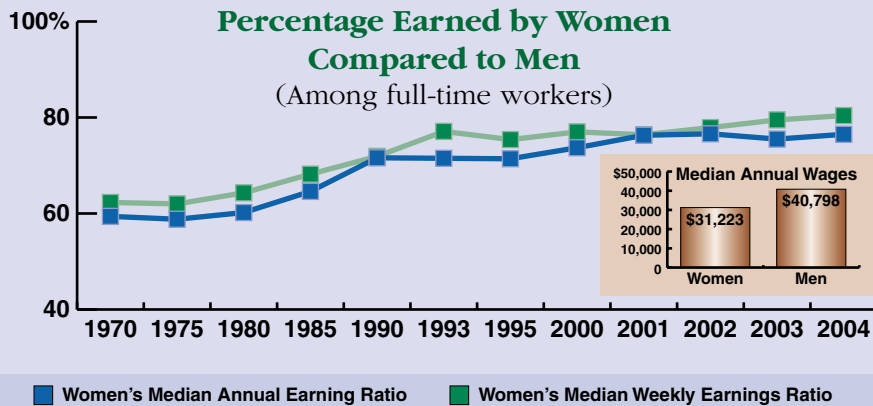
Some experts also point out that professional women with advanced degrees represent only a small portion of all working women, many of whom do not have the luxury of quitting a job, and that career women often leave their jobs reluctantly.¹⁰ However, the tug between home and workplace is not an entirely upper-class phenomenon.

"For social workers, nurses or teachers, the salaries are so low that once they add in babysitting costs the numbers don't work out. So they end up quitting," says Philadelphia author Miriam Peskowitz, who interviewed 70 families for her 2005 book *The Truth Beyond the Mommy Wars: Who Decides What Makes a Good Mother?*

Working mothers get three-and-a-half hours less sleep per week than non-working mothers in order to spend more quality time with their children, according to new research by University of Maryland sociologist Suzanne Bianchi. "There may be a point of exhaustion where the quality of life is so low that women cut back and say, 'This isn't working. Something's got to give,'" says Bianchi. What "gives" is usually their job, she adds.

Women Still Earn Less Than Men

Women's wages continued their steady climb relative to men's in the 1990s — but more slowly. By 2004, women earned 77 percent as much as men doing similar work on an annual basis and an all-time high of 80 percent on a weekly basis.* In 2004, median annual earnings were nearly \$10,000 more for men than for women (inset).



* Annual earnings ratio data include self-employed workers. Weekly data are for wage and salary workers and are not restricted to full-year workers.

Source: "The Gender Gap Ratio," Institute for Women's Policy Research

When employers today demand long hours or mandatory overtime, they assume that most workers can behave as if they have spouses at home to take care of the kids.¹¹ Joan Williams, a professor at the University of California's Hastings College of Law, has documented more than 600 suits by employees who claim employers discriminated against them because they are parents. "Case law shows that women aren't opting out — they're being pushed out by bias," Williams says.

Women in their 20s and 30s see the new feminist frontier as reshaping the workplace so parents (including men) have more time and flexibility to take care of children without economic penalties. Mothers' groups are coalescing around a legislative agenda that includes the right to paid sick and parental leave and part-time work with benefits.

"This is a set of issues that's very important to swing voters — namely

women," says Karen Kornbluh, policy director for Sen. Barack Obama, D-Ill. While business interests oppose measures that could increase the cost of hiring, some major corporations argue that flexible work schedules actually improve productivity by reducing burnout and turnover (*see p. 328*).

Yet the biggest, most established women's organizations have failed to make workplace flexibility a top priority and are losing fresh blood as a result, say some critics within the movement. Less than a quarter of young women identify themselves as feminists, according to a 2001 Gallup Poll.¹²

"Where the woman's movement has stalled is in work-family issues," says Leslie Calman, vice president for external relations at the International Center for Research on Women (ICRW) and a longtime feminist activist. "There's an ambivalence" at the major women's organizations, she says,

about the choice to stay home with children. Yet, "Scratch any woman in her 20s and 30s, and the issue is flex-time, child care, male-female sharing of work at home. Women's organizations have taken themselves out of the middle-class picture by focusing exclusively on reproductive rights."

In just the past year, for example, major women's groups like the National Organization for Women (NOW) have campaigned — unsuccessfully — against the nominations of two Supreme Court justices with conservative abortion records and a new abortion ban in South Dakota. Polls show the majority of Americans support legal abortion, but with restrictions, and some critics say the women's movement's refusal to acknowledge that ambivalence is costing it potential supporters.

"If pro-choice people were more willing to adopt the position of those in the middle — that abortion should be legal but every effort made to reduce its incidence — a lot more people would join our movement," says Frances Kissling, president of Catholics for a Free Choice. "A lot of young feminists are very appreciative of someone saying this and feel that feminists since the '70s shut them down when they express feelings about the issue."

Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America, says "the right to choose is not a single issue; it's tied to fundamental rights of freedom and privacy for women. It's linked to other policies the women's movement has fought for, including women's independence to make economic decisions." Recent threats to women's rights, including South Dakota's ban and the refusal of some pharmacists to dispense birth control, have led many young women who were not otherwise politically active to contact her organization, she says.

As for the charge that the movement has neglected family issues, "The people who are saying that don't know what the feminist movement is doing,"

protests Eleanor Smeal, president of the Feminist Majority Foundation and a former president of NOW. “The women’s-rights movement has been [fighting for] publicly funded child care as long as I’ve known. Who testified on behalf of family leave before Congress? * I did in the mid-1980s on the part of all women’s groups!”

Yet a host of new Web sites, blogs and organizations sprouting online reveal a fresh approach to reaching women in their 20s and 30s. Alison Stein, 25, says she deliberately avoided the word feminist when recruiting members in this age group for a new women’s organization. But concerns about balancing work and family proved a powerful draw. “It’s the issue people should be using to get younger women involved,” says Stein, founder and director of the Younger Women’s Task Force of the National Council of Women’s Organizations, an umbrella group representing 20 million women.

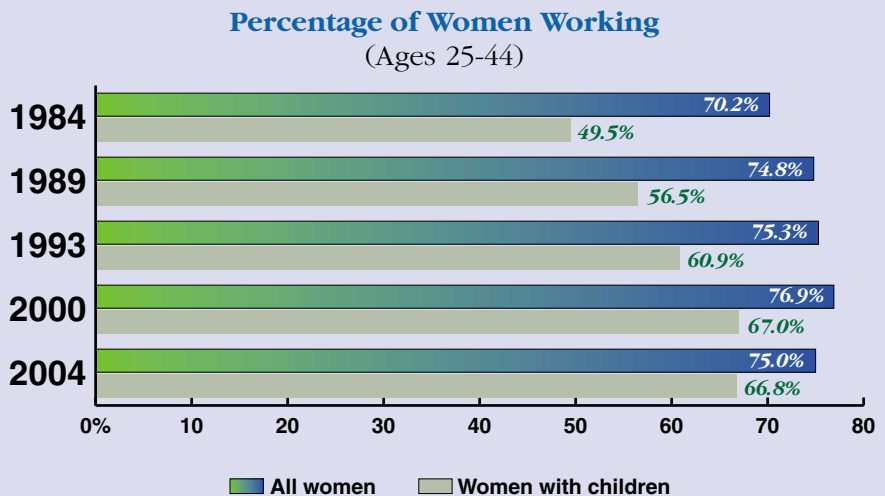
Meanwhile, *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd worries that young women’s distaste for feminism goes deeper than disliking the label. “Narcissism trumps feminism” is how she describes young women’s seeming obsession with looking sexy to attract a man — which she calls a “cultural rejection of what the early feminists fought so hard for.” Citing the growing taste for cosmetic surgery, Barbie-doll dimensions and “The Bachelor” reality TV show — in which women claw one another’s eyes out to get a man — she quips, “If you had sat [*Ms.* magazine founder] Gloria Steinem in a chair in 1968 and shown her the future, would she even have bothered?”

Here are some of the questions being raised in the workplace, the political arena and online:

* The Family and Medical Leave Act, which provides 12 weeks of unpaid family leave, was signed by President Bill Clinton in 1993.

Mothers Are Not ‘Opting Out’

The percentage of women in the work force increased from 1984 until 2000, when it began to drop. The decline was roughly the same for women with children and all women, undercutting anecdotal theories that more mothers today are “opting out” of the work force to stay home with their children.



Source: “Are Women Opting Out? Debunking the Myth,” Center for Economic and Policy Research, December 2005

Has feminism failed?

Since the 1970s, women have made huge strides. Yet for every advance, questions arise as to why women are not doing better.

Most of the women’s movement’s early efforts focused on direct discrimination in hiring, promotion and pay. But some experts now believe women’s failure to earn as much as men or to climb to the top of the corporate ladder is due to “indirect” discrimination, which penalizes women for being society’s child bearers.

“Why are women’s earnings still different from men’s if we’ve had all this equality? It’s indirect discrimination,” says Martha Farnsworth Riche, former director of the U.S. Census Bureau and a demographer at Cornell University’s Center for the Study of Economy and Society. Motherhood changes women’s work-life decisions, she points out,

which results in economic penalties. After having children, a professional woman may decide to become a teacher so she can have summers off — and her pay declines — or she won’t take a promotion because it’s too time-consuming, Riche observes.

The tendency to interrupt work for a few years, scale back hours or take advantage of parental-leave policies keeps women from advancing, according to many economists. When women initially enter the work force, they earn almost as much as men: 87 cents to a man’s dollar between ages 25 and 29. But when they start having children, women fall behind. By the time they reach their early 40s, women earn only 71 cents to a man’s dollar.¹³

Interruptions in women’s careers account for up to a third of the gender pay gap, according to one study.¹⁴

Cornell University economist Francine D. Blau has also found that about 40 percent of the wage gap remains “unexplained” after taking into account such factors as women’s tendency to enter lower-paid professions. That suggests direct discrimination still plays a role, she says. (*See sidebar, p. 319.*)

The pay gap might also increase with age because women hit the infamous “glass ceiling” at the top of their professions, says Blau, explaining that the gap becomes most pronounced among women in the top 10 percent of salaries. All these factors help explain why women occupy only 16 percent of corporate officers’ chairs even though they fill half of the nation’s managerial jobs.¹⁵

Law Professor Williams contends that many women hit the “maternal wall” of discrimination before they ever reach the glass ceiling. For example, a civil engineer in Pennsylvania was awarded \$3 million in a lawsuit because she was passed over for promotion after the birth of her son. She testified that the president of the company asked her, “Do you want to have babies or do you want a career here?”¹⁶

Yet such work-life issues have been a low priority for feminist organizations like NOW, argues the ICRW’s Calman. That’s partly because feminist leaders “want to be CEOs, to be empowered in male ways and run things,” she says. “They know if a woman stays home it’s less likely she will be a CEO.” Calman recalls a meeting where a mother with an advanced business degree said she was staying home with her child. “What a waste!” was the muttered reaction from a leader of a feminist organization.

But it seems like the right decision to younger women who want to care for their children at home but keep their hand in a career. “Many of us are saying you can be a stay-at-home mom and a feminist,” says Philadelphia author Peskowitz, 41, who runs a Web site (www.playgroundrevolution.com)

for feminist mothers. But she says most employers don’t enable women to effectively combine work and parenting, pointing to her own fall in status and pay when she decided to teach part time.

“For previous generations it was about access [to the workplace]; for this generation it’s parenting,” says Amy Richards, 36, co-founder of Third Wave Foundation, a feminist foundation based in New York City that aims to combat inequality for women ages 15-30. She is writing a book titled *Opting In: The Case for Motherhood and Feminism*.

To criticism that the movement has overly focused on abortion rights, national women’s-organization leaders respond that abortion rights form the basis for the economic rights young women are seeking. Some young feminists agree but say the movement has turned them off by not publicly acknowledging that abortion is often a difficult and sad decision. “Coming out about these things and having open conversations does point to political solutions,” says Jennifer Baumgardner, a New York author and maker of “I Had an Abortion,” a documentary film.

Others say the movement needs to think about ways to restructure the workplace to make part-time work more of an option and less economically precarious. “Most studies show most women would like to be in the work force at least part time; that’s a bit of a reality check on the idea that women are returning to values of the 50s,” says Judith Stadtman Tucker, founder of the Web site Mothers Movement Online.

But some movement leaders warn that the focus of new mothers’ groups on part-time work is largely the province of middle-class and upper-class mothers. “For a lot of women part-time work is not viable because they don’t have the income that allows them to go part-time,” says Deven McGraw, chief operating officer of the National Partnership for Women and Families.

Policies to support working mothers — like paid leave and subsidized child care — have trouble succeeding because they’re expensive and involve big government, notes Katha Pollitt, a feminist columnist for *The Nation* magazine. Day care’s expense is one reason more women’s groups aren’t working on it, according to Smeal of the Feminist Majority Foundation. “Funding is very difficult in this area,” she says. “You’ve got centers costing \$10,000-\$20,000 per child annually.”

But many young mothers want more time with their children at home, not institutional day care. Baumgardner, who has a toddler, says “some of the things imagined 30 years ago aren’t solutions I’d imagine now. When I think of government-run day care, I think of the post office in my neighborhood. It’s disgusting and has bullet-proof windows.”

Conservative critic Kate O’Beirne, author of the new book *Women Who Make the World Worse and How Their Radical Feminist Assault Is Ruining Our Schools, Families, Military, and Sports*, writes, “The feminist movement has long been on a collision course with what we know to be true about the natural bond between mother and child.”¹⁷ Feminist demands for equality have denied the biological differences between men and women by insisting — erroneously — that women are every bit as committed to their careers as men are, she argues. The disparity in wages between women with children and men is “not sex discrimination but rather the result of choices mothers freely make in their desire to balance work and family responsibilities.”¹⁸

But many women say their decision to drop out of the workplace was not a “free choice.” Hunter College sociologist Pamela Stone studied professional women who dropped out of their careers when they had children and found most wanted to continue

Gender Pay Gap Hits Mothers Hardest

The “59 cents” pin was a fashion favorite among feminists in the 1970s to protest the lower income women earned, on average, for every dollar made by men. But the pin became obsolete by 1989, when women earned almost 69 cents on the dollar, narrowing the wage gap.¹

Women’s wages have continued to climb — but more slowly. By 2004, women earned 77 percent as much as men on an annual basis and an all-time high of 80 percent on a weekly basis.

But the good news hides even bigger disparities in earnings, economists say, by ignoring the fact that most women either work part time or drop out of the labor force to care for their families. When those differences are taken into account, women earn about 60 percent less than men over a 15-year period — a cumulative loss of more than \$270,000 each — according to the Institute for Women’s Policy Research.²

The good news also ignores the fact that women earn almost the same as men until they reach the age of childbearing and more important, child-rearing. From ages 25 to 29, they earn 87 cents to a man’s dollar. By the time they reach the 40-44 age group, their earnings plunge to 71 cents to a man’s dollar.³

One study found that before childbearing, 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 compared to childless women. After 10 years, the penalty rises to more than 20 percent — even after taking into account any reduction in mothers’ working hours.⁴

Economists describe this as a “motherhood penalty.” Some economists say the penalty stems from the extended leaves mothers often take from their jobs, but others say that work interruptions account for only about one-third of the gender earnings gap.

“There’s all kinds of evidence to suggest mothers are discriminated against,” says Cornell University sociologist Shelley Correll. She recently asked students to evaluate the résumés of hypothetical job applicants with comparable work experience.

She found that women with children were given poorer evaluations than men or women without children and were held to higher standards of punctuality.⁵

“A large component of the gender wage gap is really that mothers’ wages are depressed,” says Correll. “If women don’t have children, they tend to do pretty well at work.”

Some people say women can’t expect to have it all — if they want to do as well as men they could choose not to have children. But says Correll: “As a society, this can’t be a solution; you’d be saying no women should have children.”

Several studies have shown that the more housework women do the lower their wages are — even after adjusting for the possibility that lower-earning women do more housework because they can’t afford to hire a cleaning lady.⁶ And the motherhood penalty is worse for women with a high-school diploma than for those with a college degree, perhaps because they work in more rigid jobs. “If I have to leave at 4:30 for a child-related emergency, it’s more likely to be noticed” at such a workplace, suggests Correll.

Cornell economist Francine Blau finds that after she adjusts for obvious factors, like the fact that women often enter lower-paid occupations than men, about 41 percent of the wage gap is unexplained. The biggest wage gap — for older women at the highest salary levels — suggests they’re bumping up against the proverbial glass ceiling. “We’ve made so much progress that what is left are more subtle, unconscious barriers,” she says. “The remaining barriers may be hard to correct.”

“If women don’t have children, they tend to do pretty well at work.”

— Cornell University sociologist Shelley Correll

¹ Francine D. Blau and Lawrence M. Kahn, “The U.S. Gender Pay Gap in the 1990s: Slowing Convergence,” National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2004; www.nber.org. Women earned 59.7 percent of men’s earnings in 1979.

² “Still a Man’s Labor Market: The Long Term Earnings Gap,” Institute for Women’s Policy Research, June 4, 2004; www.iwpr.org.

³ Sylvia Ann Hewlett and Carolyn Buck Luce, “Off-Ramps and On-Ramps,” *Harvard Business Review*, March 2005, pp. 1-10, 4.

⁴ Carrie Conaway, “Paying the Price,” *Regional Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, First Quarter 2005, pp. 27-29.

⁵ Shelley J. Correll and Stephen Benard, “Getting a Job: Is There a Motherhood Penalty?” June 13, 2005 (unpublished paper).

⁶ Conaway, *op. cit.*, pp. 27-29.

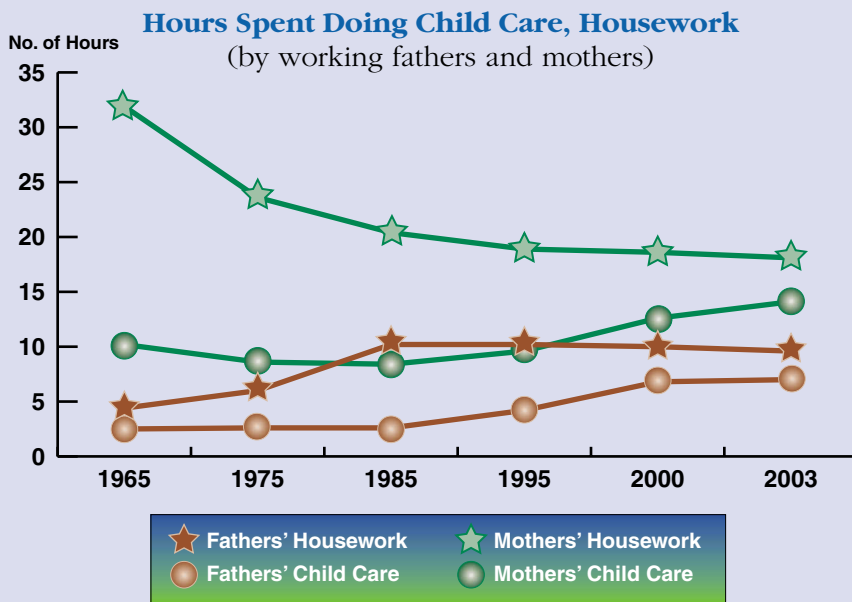
working at least part time, but their employers were too inflexible. “These women have been seen as the poster girls for the failure of feminism,” she says. “They’re not. It’s the failure of major institutions of society.”

Poor, single working moms and those on welfare often face this dilemma far more cruelly, as they can often afford only inferior child care, and each hour of child care purchased reduces their disposable income. In 1973, the late

Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, D-N.Y., wrote, “If American society recognized home-making and child rearing as productive work . . . the receipt of welfare might not imply dependency. But we don’t. It may be hoped that the

Working Moms Do Most 'Home' Work

Fathers do more housework and child care now than they did in 1965, but working mothers today spend twice as many hours as dads at both tasks.



Source: Suzanne Bianchi, et al., "Maternal Employment and Family Caregiving," Department of Sociology and Maryland Population Research Center (MPRC), University of Maryland, Dec. 9, 2005

women's movement of the present time will change this."

Although some feminists argued that a mother's child rearing should be treated like paid work, the movement did not succeed in applying this philosophy to mothers on welfare during Moynihan's lifetime. But in recent years some states — notably Minnesota and Montana — have created programs to pay welfare mothers to stay home to care for their own children instead of telling them to find work and farm their children out to child care.¹⁹

Is there a glass ceiling at home?

"Think about it. Who routinely unloads the dishwasher, puts away the laundry and picks up the socks in your house? Who earns the largest share of the money? Who calls the shots?" author Judith Warner asked recently in a

New York Times op-ed. The answers for many families are the same as they were 50 years ago, she pointed out, even though the outside world for women has changed enormously since then. The feminist revolution remains incomplete because of its failure to reshape domestic life, she argued.²⁰

Research shows that mothers still do twice as much housework as their husbands and are usually expected to be responsible for child care.²¹ Could this "second shift" at home be keeping them from advancing in the workplace?

Yes, argues Linda Hirshman, a retired professor of philosophy and women's studies at Brandeis University, in a widely debated piece in the liberal *American Prospect* magazine. The number of women in elite jobs doesn't come close to men's, she argues, because "the real glass ceiling is

at home." In describing housework as repetitive tasks that interfere with women's flourishing, she harks back to pioneering feminist Betty Friedan's original radical critique in *The Feminine Mystique*: "Vacuuming the living room floor — with or without make-up — is not work that takes enough thought or energy to challenge any woman's full capacity."²²

The issue of the unfair division of labor in the home is "what the workplace was [for feminists in] 1964 and the vote in 1920," Hirshman argues. Her solution for women: Train for high-paying jobs and marry down, so your job doesn't get sacrificed for his.

Since 1965, fathers have actually more than doubled the number of hours they spend on housework — to 9.6 hours week — and nearly tripled the number of hours they spend on child care — to about 7 hours a week. But women still spend nearly twice as much time as men on both housework (18 hours) and child care (14 hours), according to University of Maryland sociologist Bianchi.²³ (See graph at left.)

It may be a noble ideal to get men to do half the housework and child care, but they won't do it as long as the workplace penalizes them for it, cautions Hastings law Professor Williams. "We've got a workplace designed to marginalize anyone not available to the employer all the time," she says. "Men earn 70 percent of the family income, and masculinity is defined as the provider role. They can't do half at home and live up to expectations placed on them as men. The key pressure point is the workplace."

Several recent studies of employees in high-powered professions find that only those who spend more time on child rearing than their colleagues suffer career or earnings penalties. A study of financial-services professionals found that both women and men who took advantage of a firm's family-sick-leave policy earned less than their peers. "In other words, so long as you don't spend

too much time on your family, then it need not affect your career to have one," concludes Joyce P. Jacobsen, chairwoman of the Wesleyan University economics department, in a recent review of the studies.²⁴

Conservatives bristled at Hirshman's contention that women who stay home handling diapers and garbage have "voluntarily become untouchables." "The domestic sphere may not offer the sort of brutalizing, dominating power Hirshman admires, but it is the realm of unmatched influence," responded *New York Times* columnist David Brooks. "If there is one thing we have learned over the past generation, it is that a child's IQ, mental habits and destiny are largely shaped in the first few years of life, before school or the outside world has much influence."²⁵

Likewise, argues feminist economist Nancy Folbre of the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, "the notion that feminism equals participation in paid employment seems simplistic and formulaic and outdated to me." Women lose something when they focus entirely on paid work, she says, because "the true rewards of life come from relationships that are not driven by pecuniary gain or career ambition."

Folbre has long argued that a mother caring for a child is a valuable economic activity that the family would otherwise have to purchase. "It's a set of services that men have taken for granted; literally it's a grant — it's a gift," she says. But it's hard to get men to share the load, she acknowledges.



Getty Images/Alex Wong

New York Times columnist Maureen Dowd, author of the 2005 book *Are Men Necessary?*, sees young women's seeming obsession with their appearance as a "cultural rejection of what the early feminists fought so hard" to achieve.

"But what if you have a choice between getting your partner to take on more responsibility for care work or just ending the relationship? Which hurts your family more?" she asks. "A lot of women are facing this choice." If those women decide to continue doing the extra work themselves, "I don't think that indicates a loss of commitment to feminist ideals," she says. "It's just a practical decision that taking care of family and relationships is for them more important."

Most conservatives argue that women freely choose to stay at home because they prefer domestic tasks. "I'm not sure the average mother would be happy if half of the child rearing was done by men," says University of Virginia sociologist W. Bradford Wilcox. He

recently found that traditionally minded women who do most of the housework are more content with their marriages than feminist women.²⁶ "The question is whether men will ever engage in family life on a 50-50 basis," Wilcox says. "No society in the world has come to that point." Even in egalitarian Sweden, women do most of the child rearing and dominate such traditionally female occupations as social services and health care, according to Wilcox.

Economist Jacobsen suggests that when the wife earns more money, the man will stay home with the kids because it makes economic sense. For example, since her husband retired, he's been in charge of the children's schedules, while she pursued a hard-charging career.

Richards of the Third Wave Foundation is her family's main breadwinner. When she's expected to take care of her two children after a stressful day, she

finds herself having a typical male reaction: "Listen, my work brings in the money; yours doesn't."

But she doesn't see that macho reaction as the solution. "To me, the ultimate goal of feminism was not to have women and men switching those roles but not to have them based on economics in the first place."

Are women returning to a 1950s mind-set?

New York investment banker Shannon O'Hara, 38, the mother of two, has been surprised at how lonely her career path has been. * Only

* Her name has been changed to protect her privacy.

one other female business-school classmate is still working, and hardly any other mothers from her daughter's private school are working. Even more surprising, she says, most of them look askance at her as if to ask, "Your husband doesn't make enough money to support you?"

O'Hara thinks most of her female business-school classmates threw in the towel because of a combination of male chauvinism at work and strains on their families. Her typical workday is 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. and involves frequent overnight travel. "It hits you every time you miss something," like a child's school play, she says. But one reason she keeps working is to send a positive message to her daughter. "It's a crime if after all this education, you can do whatever you want but the message is — go marry some rich guy."

Marrying some rich guy seems to be frequently on the minds of young women, according to some observers of today's dating scene. Among women in their 20s and early 30s, "There's this incredible, intense anxiety about commitment and a feeling that marriage is men's to bestow," says Kamy Wicoff, 33, a New York writer whose book on marriage in her generation, *I Do But I Don't*, is scheduled to be published in June. "You look at your 20s as not 'real life' but as a fun, single phase." Eventually, marriage becomes necessary, she says, "because a career doesn't sustain you."

In interviews with 80 college-educated young women, Wicoff was surprised by how much they were spending on clothes and beauty products — \$30,000 was one woman's estimate of her yearly expenditures. These young women are, in essence, a "product on the marriage market," she says, "so they have to spend a lot on their appearance."

The statistics about certain groups of elite women back up Wicoff and O'Hara's anecdotes. A survey of three Harvard Business School graduating classes

found that only 38 percent of women end up in full-time careers; a broader study showed that a third of white women with MBAs are not working full time.²⁷

To learn what happens to women with advanced degrees, Brandeis University's Hirshman interviewed about 80 percent of the 41 women who announced their weddings in *The New York Times* social pages over three Sundays in 1996. She found that — at about age 40 — nearly all of the college graduates with careers were home with their children. Half the married women with children were not working at all, and among those working part time, several were a long way from their original career paths.²⁸

While this trajectory sounds a lot like the 1950s, when women ended their careers after they married, does it represent a broader trend? *Nation* columnist Pollitt pooh-poohs the idea. The women who announce their weddings in the *Times* are "a very small class of elite women who come from wealthy families and plan to marry wealthy men," she says. "Those women never had a commitment to the work force." Moreover, it makes economic sense to quit, she adds, "if you marry some guy and he's a bond trader making \$1 million, and you have a choice working as a lawyer for \$200,000."

While about 20 percent of women say they want to stay home with children as their life's work, the rising number of women in the labor force tells another story. According to the most recent figures from the Bureau of Labor Statistics, female participation in the labor force rose steadily from 43 percent of all women in 1970 to 60 percent by 2000 and only receded slightly — to 59 percent in 2004, the most recent year for which the bureau has statistics.²⁹ Even if women's work force participation has reached a plateau, there's no hint that it's moving backwards in any significant way.

Indeed, recent research suggests that rather than dropping out permanently

from the work force, professional women are taking temporary "off-ramps," averaging about two years, before returning to work, according to a recent survey by economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett in the *Harvard Business Review*. Even in this group, most women cannot afford to quit their careers entirely, the survey found. Less than a third of the women said they had quit because their spouse's income was sufficient for the family to live on.³⁰

In addition to the pull of family, there were "push" factors that made women head out the office door, such as unstimulating assignments once they became mothers and a lack of advancement opportunity.³¹ Indeed, work-related reasons were more important in pushing professional women with children to leave their jobs than a desire to return to traditional family roles, Hunter College sociologist Stone found. In interviews with more than 50 professional women in seven metropolitan areas, only 20 percent said they'd found their permanent calling in caring for children.

Most were ambivalent about quitting their jobs, and many said the decision was "protracted and agonizing," according to Stone. Before dropping out, these women had averaged 13 years in the world of 60-hour workweeks in male-dominated fields like law, business and the sciences.³²

Among the most common reasons for leaving was workplace inflexibility — either an inability to negotiate a part-time schedule or a conviction that the employer would never even consider it. "Women who get into Harvard Law School believe in the system — jobs have to be 60-plus hours a week," says Stone.

The women Stone interviewed "wanted to create a sense of family and have a presence in their children's lives," she says. Many were married to men in hard-driving jobs who were rarely home. The women "were not willing to have

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Chronology

1920s *Women's-rights advocates shift their focus from the domestic sphere to legal equality and voting rights.*

1920

The 19th Amendment gives women the right to vote.

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

1963

Equal Pay Act guarantees "equal pay for equal work."

1964

Author Betty Friedan condemns housewifery in *The Feminine Mystique*. . . . Civil Rights Act bans sex discrimination against women.

1965

Head Start is established.

1966

Friedan founds National Organization for Women (NOW).

1968

Newspaper want ads that seek "men only" are ruled illegal.

1970s *Feminists win the Roe v. Wade abortion decision but lose on child care legislation and the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).*

1971

President Richard M. Nixon vetoes Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have established child care programs.

1972

Title IX of the Education Act forbids federally funded educational programs, including sports, from discriminating on the basis of sex. . . . Congress passes the ERA.

1973

Supreme Court legalizes abortion nationwide in *Roe v. Wade*.

1977

Indiana becomes the 35th and last state to ratify the ERA, three states shy of the 38 needed.

1978

Pregnancy Disability Act classifies pregnancy as a medical disability and bans discrimination on the grounds of pregnancy or childbirth.

1980s *More mothers enter the labor force, prompting feminists to argue for more focus on family issues.*

1981

Friedan argues in *The Second Stage* that the women's movement should help improve family conditions through flexible work policies.

1987

Half of women with infants are employed at least part time.

1990s *Women in labor force peak at 60 percent.*

1992

Third Wave Foundation founded for young feminists.

1993

President Bill Clinton signs Family

and Medical Act requiring large employers to offer workers 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a child or relative.

2000s *Mothers' groups agitate for more government and workplace support; pro-choice movement loses major abortion battles.*

2000

The percentage of working mothers with infants drops for the first time since measurements began in 1976.

2001

Ann Crittenden's *The Price of Motherhood* argues mothers should get more flexible policies in the workplace.

2002

California becomes first state to require paid parental leave.

April 27, 2005

Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, D-Mass, introduces bill to provide seven days of paid sick leave for a parent or a sick child.

Sept. 29, 2005

Senate confirms Judge John G. Roberts Jr. to Supreme Court over opposition of pro-choice groups.

November 2005

Flexible work policies are supported by 53 corporations.

Jan. 31, 2006

Senate confirms Judge Samuel A. Alito to Supreme Court, over opposition of pro-choice groups.

March 6, 2006

South Dakota becomes first state to ban abortions since *Roe v. Wade*.

Is Raunch the New Feminism?

Many '70s-era feminists are horrified by the raunchy behavior among today's young women — breast-baring “Girls Gone Wild” videos, the mainstreaming of pornography, stripper chic (stripping and pole-dancing classes at health clubs) and exhibitionistic, promiscuous dressing. Sex-oriented “Cake” parties for women are only one form of “raunch” reported by *New Yorker* writer Ariel Levy in her recent book *Female Chauvinist Pigs*.

Some observers of today's young, female social scene — notably *New York Times* columnist Maureen Dowd in her 2005 book *Are Men Necessary?* — worry that today's young women are elevating a concern with sexual allure over the struggle for equality in the workplace and the political arena.

According to Levy, embracing pornography and raunch is a way for women to thumb their noses at the moralizing of the Second Wave feminists of the '70s, some of whom fought to outlaw pornography as degrading. As even Dowd acknowledges, “If you talked about heels or babies or cute guys, it was considered frivolous.”

But Levy says raunch is also a “garbled attempt at continuing the work of the women's movement” — the strand that sought to liberate women's enjoyment of their sexuality. In today's incarnation, however, she says young women are embracing just one kind of sexuality, in which they're desired as sex objects but don't get to enjoy sex themselves.¹

Younger feminists retort that much of this concern is misplaced. Being proud of one's female body *is* being a feminist, they say, and wearing a tight shirt isn't being slutty but is the modern equivalent of giving up bras. “There is power in being sexual,” insists Jennifer Baumgardner, 35, a New York author and filmmaker. “Younger people have been informed by the feminists of 30 years ago, who thought it was important to have sexual expression, whether that takes the form of bondage or stripping.”

Has the feminist movement failed to convey to today's young women the message that females should not be treated as sex objects? “I don't buy it for a second,” Baumgardner answers. “My philosophy of feminism is more about the freedom to do things — not protecting girls from pop culture.”

But the celebration of sexuality has taken some disturbing forms in a culture where prostitution, porn stars and stripping

are increasingly popularized in fashion, movies and on the Internet.

“Girls are latching onto that notion and acting it out. One way is being paid to give boys blowjobs in the bathroom at school,” says Mandy Van Deven, 26, director of community organizing at Girls for Gender Equity, which works with middle-school girls in low-income Brooklyn neighborhoods. The answer she gets from the girls? “Sure, it's a bit like prostitution, but because you're the one in control of your sexuality, you're deciding what you do. It's better than the girl doing it and not getting paid for it.”

There's no clinical data comparing the percentage of girls vs. boys that perform oral sex or statistical evidence that there's more oral sex among teens than in years past. But in interviews with 50 boys and girls ages 12-18, Levy found plenty of anecdotes. “What all of these adolescent incidents have in common are, of course, exhibitionism and oral sex — oral sex for the boys, that is,” she reports.²

With a lot more casual sex going on, and the pressure to “do it” starting as early as age 11 or 12, some young women express concern that the balance of power has tipped too far toward men, who now expect sexual intercourse on the first or second date. “I grew up with boys who felt entitled by the idea they could have sex with girls in a way that they didn't have a generation before,” says

33-year-old Kamy Wicoff, a New York writer whose book on marriage in her generation, *I Do But I Don't*, will be published this June. “There was no code of behavior that protected women.” While some women have responded by adopting the same ho-hum attitude toward sex as men — as portrayed in the popular TV series “Sex and the City” — others decry their mothers' liberated generation, which they see as having created higher divorce rates and latchkey children. They look back to an idealized era when family roles were more clearly defined.

Women in their early 30s “have seen this total wreckage” from the baby boomer generation's social upheaval, says Wicoff. “A lot of women want to skip their mothers' generation as role models and go back to their grandmothers.”



Getty Images/Frazer Harrison

Lessons in stripping and pole dancing are popular at Sheila Kelley's S Factor Studio in Los Angeles.

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¹ Ariel Levy, *Female Chauvinist Pigs* (2005), pp. 74-75.

² *Ibid.*, p. 144.

Continued from p. 322

their children taken care of entirely by caregivers,” she says. And women who shifted to part-time or job-share positions often found themselves “mommy tracked” — given demotions that played a role in their decision to quit. Many of these women “tried to hold onto their job,” says Stone. “They left as a last resort.” ■

BACKGROUND

Suffrage Movement

The American women’s movement initially had two goals: equality in the public sphere and improvement in the domestic sphere. Equality in public life won out as the primary goal of both the 19th-century suffrage movement and the 1970s women’s movement, argues retired Brandeis University sociologist Janet Zollinger Giele in *Two Paths to Women’s Equality*.³³

The suffragists emphasized the sameness of men and women when arguing that women had an equal right to the vote, education and the professions. Another camp — dubbed “maternal feminists” by historians — emphasized women’s roles in caring for children and fought for legislation protecting them with shorter workweeks and less dangerous work.

Today, concerns about women’s differences are resurfacing, as young women raised to expect workplace equality find their status impeded once they become mothers. “Many equal-rights advocates seemed to think of women as men and so skipped the problem of the family,” Giele writes of the 1970s feminist movement. “But . . . one of the main reasons women lack equal education, employment and pay is that they have unequal (and greater) responsibilities for family and children.”

In her first public address before the New York Senate, Elizabeth Cady Stanton — one of the founders of the women’s-rights movement — demanded that married women be able to earn money, share marital property and custody of children and obtain a divorce. Partly in response, the legislature in 1848 passed the Married Women’s Property Act, allowing wives to hold property in their own name. In 1857 and 1860 the state’s lawmakers amended the act to allow women to collect their own earnings, share joint custody of their children and inherit equally with their children when widowed. Other states soon enacted similar laws.³⁴

But husbands were left with full control of all property created during the marriage. During the Industrial Revolution of the mid-19th century, men began working outside the home as manufacturing jobs replaced farming. But wives’ household labor remained intense — typically including gardening, canning, sewing, raising animals, making soap and caring for children. Nevertheless, the courts viewed women’s home labor as voluntary. It was no longer considered labor; it was “love.”³⁵

After the Civil War, the suffragists’ agenda shifted to legal equality — specifically the right to vote — and in 1920 the 19th Amendment to the Constitution gave women the right to vote, after having been pending in Congress for 45 years.³⁶ Since then, suffragists’ descendants have focused on gender equality rather than differences between the sexes. For example, after the National Woman’s Party proposed the Equal Rights Amendment in 1923, it opposed any form of protective legislation for working women, including shorter hours.³⁷

During World War II, women were aggressively recruited into the workplace to aid the war effort.³⁸ Nevertheless, in the mid-1940s, 43 states still limited the daily and weekly hours a woman could work outside the home,

and 15 states prohibited night work for women.

Yet partly because of women’s enormous wartime contributions, the Equal Rights Amendment — which had been introduced in every Congress since 1923 — was briefly resurrected in 1946. Although backed by President Harry S Truman and both major parties, a divided Congress failed to pass the measure.³⁹

Modern Movement

During the 1960s, women around the country organized local consciousness-raising groups that pushed for a more egalitarian workplace role for women. Friedan’s enormously influential 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique* attacked the traditional division of labor between men and women, describing the home as a “concentration camp” for full-time housewives.⁴⁰ She founded the National Organization for Women in 1966.

Another major feminist organization, the National Association for the Repeal of Abortion Laws (NARAL) was formed in 1969, later becoming NARAL Pro-Choice America.

The 1960s and ’70s saw the passage of tough, new civil-rights laws. In 1963 the Equal Pay for Equal Work Act made it illegal to pay a man more than a woman for the same job. In 1964, the Civil Rights Act forbade gender discrimination in hiring and promotion. In 1968, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ruled that help-wanted ads specifying “men only” were illegal. And in 1972, Title IX of the Education Act mandated that all educational programs receiving federal funding, including sports, could not discriminate on the basis of sex.⁴¹

By the late 1970s, women’s expectations about working had been transformed.⁴² In 1966, nearly 75 percent

of women graduating from four-year colleges had majored in female-dominated subjects like education. But by the early 1970s, female undergraduates were moving into career-oriented concentrations that often required advanced degrees. As more women majored in subjects like business, they also entered the work force in larger numbers. While only about half of the women born in the 1930s worked, about 80 percent of those born in 1950 worked.

The 1970s saw the largest increase in women's labor-force participation in history.⁴³

Harvard economist Claudia Goldin cites the advent of the birth-control pill in the late 1960s as a major influence on these changes. By lowering the risk that pregnancy could derail a career, the "pill" lowered the costs to young, unmarried women of pursuing careers that required substantial, early investments of time. The Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision legalizing abortion also contributed to the sense that women's fates were no longer tied to childbearing.⁴⁴

In 1972 Congress passed the Equal Rights Amendment, declaring, "Equality of rights under the law shall not be denied or abridged by the United States or any state on account of sex." Five years later, Indiana became the last state to ratify the ERA. But the amendment was not ratified — missing that goal by three states — considered a major defeat for the women's-rights movement.

In 1978, the Pregnancy Disability Act gave workplace recognition to



Suffragists picket at the Republican Party convention in Chicago in 1920. The American women's movement initially sought both equality in the public sphere and improvement in the domestic sphere, but equality in public life became the primary goal.

Library of Congress

women's biological differences. Treating pregnancy as no different from a medical disability that would require a man to take time off, it was America's first national policy on employment and motherhood and the first step toward parental leave.

Child Care, Parental Leave

In the 1960s, the United States began to develop a fragmentary child care system. The establishment of Head Start centers in 1965 coincided with a dramatic rise in mothers entering the work force. Responding to reports of scandalous conditions in unlicensed facilities, a coalition of child-development experts, feminists and minority groups lobbied for the Comprehensive Child Development Act, which would have established early-childhood-education programs designed to break the cycle of poverty. Although passed by Congress in 1971, President Richard M. Nixon vetoed it.

Efforts to revive the act in 1975 and 1979 failed, according to Giele, because feminists' major efforts then were focused on the Equal Rights Amendment and reproductive rights. As a result, she says, their support for the idea that universal child care should be available to help liberate women was "mainly rhetorical."⁴⁵

By 1987, half the mothers of infants under age 1 were employed at least part time. Working mothers in the 1980s became increasingly aware that little provision had

been made for their other job — caring for children. Many began to propose parental leave as the best way to handle the conflicting demands of work and family. At the same time, radical feminist writers like Kate Millet were declaring that women would never be free until the family was obliterated.

Friedan lashed out against this viewpoint, arguing that feminism was ready to move to *The Second Stage*, as she titled her 1981 book. By focusing on "individualistic" women's rights like abortion, she argued, the women's movement had developed a blind spot about the family, abandoning the subject to conservatives. She urged the movement to move beyond prizing work above family and to focus on expanding parental leave and getting more flexible workplace policies and better child care centers.

In 1993, after an eight-year battle and two vetoes by President George H. W. Bush, a coalition of women's groups and conservatives overcame business opposition to pass the Family and Medical Leave Act. Signed into

Are Mothers Opting Out of Work?

A *New York Times Magazine* cover story, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” asked in 2003: “Why don’t more women get to the top?” and answered “They choose not to.”¹

After decades of climbing, the percentage of career women with infants working or seeking employment began to decline slightly in 2000, a trend the *Times* interpreted as evidence that professional mothers were deserting the work force.

Starting at 31 percent in 1976, the percentage of mothers with infants who were working rose almost every year until hitting a high of 58.7 percent in 1998 and then began to drop, from 55 percent in 2000 to 53 percent in 2004.²

More recently, the *Times* reported last September that undergraduate women at Yale were planning to quit their jobs when they enter their 30s to have children, setting off a storm of controversy in the blogosphere about whether they represent a larger trend.³ The *Times* survey was not based on a scientific sample, according to Cornell University sociologist Shelley Correll.

Economist Heather Boushey at the Center for Economic and Policy Research points out that a recession following the dot-com bust in the early 2000s led to sustained job losses for both men and women — both mothers and non-mothers.⁴ Others say the increasing proportion in the female population of young Hispanic women — who are culturally less inclined to work outside of the home — might also have brought the rates down.⁵ Taken together, many economists agree that the trend since 2000 has been one of leveling out rather than a decline. Nevertheless, “we haven’t explained why it’s leveled out,” says Katharine Bradbury, a senior economist at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston.

“We don’t know for sure if it’s a pause or consolidation or a kind of longer-run plateau,” says Cornell economist Francine Blau. She speculates that the cause of the leveling off may be that women are simply running out of time. “The division of labor within the family is still relatively unequally divided between men and women. That’s at least a possible limit this is bumping up against.”

Nancy Folbre, a professor of economics at the University of Massachusetts-Amherst, says women have cut back on the easy household chores, like cooking and cleaning. “All along the way, women have done their best to protect quality time with their kids,” she observes. She suggests mothers may quit rather than sacrifice this time with children.

Based on women’s past patterns, opting out seems unlikely as a permanent aspect of women’s lives, argues Harvard University economist Claudia Goldin. A Mellon Foundation study of 10,000 women who graduated from college by 1981 found that

on average the women in the survey spent only 1.6 years out of the labor force.⁶

It’s too early to tell if women who finished school 10 years ago and are now in their early 30s will follow a similar pattern. But other patterns, such as women having babies at later ages and fairly constant employment and marriage rates, “don’t spell big opt-out to me,” Goldin concludes.⁷

And compared to the 1980s, women are opting in: Women are half as likely to opt out of employment today because of children than they were in 1984, according to Boushey.⁸

Today more than 70 percent of women with children are either working full time, part time or looking for work. But University of Maryland sociologist Suzanne Bianchi says this statistic hides another reality: Only about a third work full time year-round; many are working part time or only part of the year.

“There’s room to go in terms of full-time, year-round” employment for women, Bianchi says. Her studies show that the average working parent works 65 hours a week if both paid work and child care and housework are included. “Women cut back their labor-force participation when they have really high child care demands,” says Bianchi. “That’s one way they find time.”

The fact that young mothers take time off from work once they have children may also reflect a younger generation’s confidence that they can return to their careers at the same wage and rank that they left.

“Our grad students have babies while they’re in graduate school,” Bianchi observes. “It doesn’t signal that they’re not committed to finishing their degree or getting a job the way it did 30 years ago.”

Although statistics show that mothers are penalized in terms of wages and promotions if they step out of the work force, young people are “making a bet they won’t suffer those wage penalties,” observes Bianchi. “Some of us are skeptical.”

¹ Lisa Belkin, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” *The New York Times Magazine*, Oct. 26, 2003, p. 42.

² Linda Hirshman, “Homeward Bound,” *American Prospect*, Dec. 20, 2005.

³ Louise Story, “Many Women at Elite Colleges Set Career Path to Motherhood,” *The New York Times*, Sept. 20, 2005.

⁴ Heather Boushey, “Are Women Opting Out? Debunking the Myth,” Center for Economic Policy Research, December 2005, www.cepr.net.

⁵ “More About Women in the Labor Force, March 12, 2006, Demo Memo at <http://demomemo.blogspot.com/2006/03/more-about-women-in-labor-force.html>.

⁶ Claudia Goldin, “Working it Out,” *The New York Times*, March 15, 2006, p. A27.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Heather Boushey, “Are Mothers Really Leaving the Workplace?” Council on Contemporary Families, March 28, 2006, at <http://www.contemporary-families.org/subtemplate.php?t=briefingPapers&ext=pr306>.

law by President Bill Clinton, it permits workers to take 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for a sick family member, bond with a new baby or

recover from their own illness without losing their jobs or health insurance. More than 50 million Americans have taken job-protected leave since

the law’s enactment, according to the National Partnership for Women and Families, the leading advocacy group for the legislation.

The 1970s feminists are often referred to as Second Wave feminists to emphasize their lineage from the 19th-century suffragists. In January 1992, Rebecca Walker, daughter of the African-American writer Alice Walker, declared in *Ms.* magazine “I am the Third Wave” and later that year founded the Third Wave Foundation aimed at women 18-35. Richards, co-founder of the foundation, says the movement was reacting against the Second Wave’s “very narrow definition of feminism” that many young women found overly puritanical.

“Could I be a feminist and acknowledge I liked Barbie when I was a kid? For anyone to acknowledge you liked Barbie was to concede you’d been duped by the patriarchy,” says Richards. “What Third Wave said was, ‘If something appeals to you, it doesn’t preclude feminism.’ ” ■

CURRENT SITUATION

Avoiding Labels

Young women rarely identify themselves as feminists today. Only 25 percent of women considered themselves feminists in 2001, according to a Gallup Poll, down a percentage point from a similar poll in 1999.⁴⁶ But the data also show that basic feminist issues have more popular support than the label itself.⁴⁷

Many young women associate the word feminist with the stereotype of a ‘60s-era bra-burning, hairy-legged activist. Others disavow the label because they believe most feminist activists are middle-aged, says Stein, of the Younger Women’s Task Force.

“I went to a meeting of a national women’s group and was the youngest in the room by 20 years,” says Stein, who founded the task force a year ago to reach women in their 20s and 30s.⁴⁸ Her group solicited members in places where activists aren’t usually sought — like churches and health clubs — to discuss the most pressing issues in their lives as young women. The task force now has more than 3,000 members in 11 chapters. Their solicitations deliberately avoid using the word feminist, especially when it comes to semi-rural areas like Pennsylvania’s Poconos. “Trust me,” Stein says, “if they used that word, they would have few people at their meeting.”

Some chapters lobby on traditional feminist issues like abortion rights, but work-life-balance issues are most likely to get younger women involved, Stein says. “Every woman knows how hard it is to balance this stuff, and every woman wants to talk about it.”

That’s the focus of the Mothers Movement Online Web site, whose founder, Judith Stadtman Tucker — a former full-time graphic designer — says she became a feminist after becoming a mother. Until recently, Web sites like Tucker’s and mothers’ groups have lacked the backing of big grassroots organizations.

But Tucker senses “a reinvigorated interest” at NOW, one of the largest old-line feminist organizations. At its national conference last year, NOW resolved to start an initiative around mothers’ and caregivers’ economic rights. Tucker belongs to a committee that has formed to advocate for paid parental leave and expansion of the existing Family Medical Leave Act to include employees at firms with fewer than 50 employees, among other family-friendly initiatives.

Those issues are also part of the platform of Momsrising.org, a new organization being formed by moveon.org co-founder Joan Blades and Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, author of the 2004

book *The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy*. Rowe-Finkbeiner’s own poll of college women found that most were turned off by the word “feminist.” “Many young women haven’t seen the penalties of being a woman until they have children,” she says.

According to Rowe-Finkbeiner, the gender wage gap in the United States is higher than in other industrialized countries because “we don’t have paid family leave, subsidized child care or health care” — all programs momsrising.org will seek. Rowe-Finkbeiner and Blades have co-authored a new book, *The Motherhood Manifesto*, which argues that the federal government needs to revamp its policies along European lines to support working mothers and children.

“In countries with paid leave, women don’t take the same wage hit when they come back to work, and society is more supportive,” Rowe-Finkbeiner says.

Family and Sick Leave

Nearly half the nation’s private-sector employees are not covered by the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) because they work part time or for businesses with fewer than 50 employees. Family-leave-advocacy groups want the bill expanded to cover more employees and other family needs like attending parent-teacher conferences.

But expansion is unlikely because of opposition from business groups, which want to crack down on what they see as abuses under the existing law — changes family advocates say would weaken the law. Michael Eastman, director of labor law policy at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce, says personnel managers commonly complain that employees use the law to duck out of work for minor conditions like a cold or a broken toe.

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At Issue:

Are women giving up by opting out?

LINDA HIRSHMAN

AUTHOR, GET TO WORK: A MANIFESTO FOR WOMEN OF THE WORLD, TO BE PUBLISHED IN JUNE 2006.

WRITTEN FOR *CQ RESEARCHER*, APRIL 2006

it's now around 20 percent harder for a girl to get into college than a guy. Since more women want to go to college than men, colleges have responded by discriminating against them in order to preserve something like a 50-50 ratio.

The colleges justify this sexist, punitive behavior on the grounds that the more women outnumber men on any given campus, the less men want to go there. And we must have men in our colleges, even dumb ones, or we will lose the status race for sure. Because girls don't confer status.

Women are a lot less likely to confer status because they will opt out of the workplace — get tenure and quit, if their employer won't run a day-care center for them. As Princeton President Shirley Tilghman once said, Princeton aims to train the future leaders of society. And ex-tenured, retired academics won't become leaders and they won't become the kind of alumnae who give big bucks to their alma mater.

Why do you think colleges give preference to the children of their alums, maintain the sexist and drunken fraternity culture, pay their football coaches more than their physicists? Out of love for humanity, as Adam Smith famously asked, or for their dumber but harder-working male alums' donations? And it's all perfectly legal.

Recently, the Web site of the American Conservative Union carried an essay advising employers to stay away from employees who demand day-care centers or risk bankruptcy. Even the fabled 100 Best Companies for Working Mothers (*Working Mother* magazine) produced only a feeble 30 percent rate for company child care programs. Imagine what the other hundred-thousand companies are like.

Although employers can't refuse to hire women, they turn them into failures in a thousand unseen ways. The chipper new book *This Is How We Do It*, from *Working Mother* CEO Carol Evans, extols the virtues of Flex Track, sequencing, job sharing and all the other heart-warming ways that women find to limit the demands of the workplace. What Evans does not tell her readers is that, cozy anecdotes aside, those strategies bring with them almost certain career suicide. The law profession: 40 percent female; law partnerships: 17 percent female.

Are these part-time lawyers letting down the team? Well, put yourself into the mind-set of a partner with limited mentoring time. Anticipating that she is twice as likely to demand part-time work sometime in the prime career years, what does a new, young, female law associate look like? Unless she's extraordinary, she looks like a losing proposition, that's what.

MIRIAM PESKOWITZ

AUTHOR, THE TRUTH BEHIND THE MOMMY WARS: WHO DECIDES WHAT MAKES A GOOD MOTHER

SHE RUNS THE WEB SITE WWW.PLAYGROUNDREVOLUTION.COM.

Once upon a time, I had a low-paying, high-prestige job. I was a professor at a major public university. I taught religious and women studies. I won teaching awards and research grants, I published well and received tenure at a relatively young age. My job was a good one, at least for someone without children.

Unfortunately, this good job didn't come with the basic elements that workers who are also parents need. It didn't offer paid maternity leave or paternity leave, at least not at my job level. It didn't offer high-quality, subsidized, on-site child care. Nor did it offer backup child care. There didn't seem to be any of the other supports that working parents might need, such as part-time work with fair wages and prorated benefits.

Not wanting to totally ditch my career when my first child was born, I left my position for the uncertainties of part-time work at another university. A shame, really, for the university that had just tenured me. It had invested tens of thousands of dollars over and above salary into my research and scholarship. What odd, shortsighted vision: I'm offered a job for life but not sustained through the relatively short period in which parents of young children need the most help.

Did I opt out? Absolutely not. When workplaces don't provide the basic supports mothers and fathers need, that's no opting out. Training women to take professional jobs but not supporting us as working mothers is a squeeze-out, a force-out.

Some feminists call us disappointments. I disagree. The new feminist movement now organizing around motherhood does not offer solutions that blame individual women and label them failures. It sees the core problem: The workplace hasn't changed to support family life, nor have schools, nor our health-care system, nor our public policies. Our society favors productivity over caretaking and hasn't yet risen to the humane challenge of rebalancing both. For now, mothers are caught in the middle.

It's not a politically retrograde choice to leave a workplace that squeezes you too tight; to refuse to work all day for pay and work all evening at home; to refuse the exhaustion of our mothers, amplified by the huge rise in the hours we are expected to work.

No, this is called a boycott. It's called resistance, and it needs a voice and it needs a path. Some very articulate moms, from both the low-income and high-income points on the economic spectrum are providing just this voice and path. This is the new, mother-supporting and family-friendly feminism.

Continued from p. 328

“Their condition flares up every Friday at 4 p.m. or after the weekend,” he says. “Employers need more tools to help them combat chronic absenteeism; I’m talking about fraudulent use of the FMLA.”

California is the only state that provides paid leave, funded by monthly employee contributions. Since 2002, workers have been able to take up to six weeks — at partial pay — to care for a new baby or sick relative.

Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., introduced a bill in April 2005 — the Healthy Families Act — that would give workers the right to seven days of paid leave if they or a child falls sick. It has strong support from family-advocacy groups and the National Partnership for Women and Families, which points out that nearly half the nation’s workers have no paid sick leave.⁴⁹

“When both parents are working, you don’t have a structure anymore where you have someone staying home with a sick child,” says McGraw. “A lot of our low-wage families can’t afford to be docked a day of pay; it can be the difference in being able to pay the rent that month.”

The Chamber of Commerce opposes the bill, contending it could become another major headache like the FMLA. As for the argument that workers shouldn’t have to lose their jobs for carrying out parental duties, Eastman says market forces rather than congressional mandates should solve that problem. “Word gets around if you’re a bad employer,” he says. “People start to look elsewhere.”

Workplace Flexibility

Some prominent corporations have taken a different tack, arguing that workplace flexibility can help retain experienced workers while improving

performance and the bottom line. A coalition of 53 companies, including such giants as Philip Morris and Time Warner, released a report last November supporting flex-time, part time, job-sharing and telecommuting as good business practices.⁵⁰

“Flexibility drives financial performance and is a key management tool,” says Donna Klein, president of the nonprofit group that released the report, Corporate Voices for Working Families. Companies using flexible approaches have less absenteeism, less turnover, less burnout and increased ability to recruit and retain good workers, according to Klein.

In an effort to stem the loss of experienced women attorneys, several leading law firms have recently begun to offer the option of working part time while staying on track to make partner. It costs a firm \$200,000-\$300,000 to replace a third-year associate, according to Cynthia Calvert, co-director of the Project for Attorney Retention, and some firms have vowed to “stop the bleeding,” in the words of a leading partner of one such firm.

When Calvert’s Project surveyed firms in Washington, D.C., in 1999-2000, it could not find a single firm where a part-time lawyer had made partner. By 2004, almost every one of the 60 firms surveyed said they no longer disqualified part-time attorneys from the partnership track, and 40 percent had conferred partnership status on attorneys who had worked part time, according to Calvert.

The political polarization over such issues stems from the initial portrayal of flexibility as an accommodation to women, Klein suggests. “In reality, men are as anxious to have flexibility as women,” she says. Indeed, for younger Gen X and Gen Y workers, “flexibility is at the top of the list of what they want from a corporation, and they are asking for it in campus recruitment data.”

Taking their cue from Europe, some mothers’ groups want to go further, citing a British law that allows employees to request part-time work unless the employer can show it is economically harmful.⁵¹

Kornbluh, of Sen. Obama’s office, has proposed following the British model “because women are the ones who pay the price for the lack of flexibility.” Bill Clinton ran on his support for the family leave bill and won married women’s votes in 1992 and 1996, Kornbluh observes, and work flexibility could be a similar draw for this group of voters.

But the Chamber’s Eastman cautions that such legislation might increase the cost of doing business and make it more difficult to create jobs. For example, if a company has to hire another half-time worker to do the rest of the job, it could mean providing a second benefits package, which can be costly, he observes. Pointing to the current unrest in France over employment laws, Eastman notes unemployment among French youth exceeds 20 percent but that employers are discouraged from making new hires because the required benefits package is so expensive.

The group Workplace Flexibility 2010 is trying to build nationwide consensus on improving flexible working conditions. The organization grew out of a decade of research that concluded, “there is a mismatch between the structure of work and the structure of family,” says Katie Corrigan, co-director of the group at the Georgetown University Law Center.

“A lot of different constituencies have a stake in the game beyond families with children,” she says, such as semi-retired elderly, baby boomers caring for aging parents and Gen X-ers who want time to go bungee jumping.⁵²

Some states also are showing interest. Thirteen states have created rules requiring state agencies to allow part-time work, and 12 states provide benefits to part-time employees.⁵³

At the same time, however, global competition and communications technology are pushing employers to either outsource jobs to countries that don't require benefits or switch to non-fulltime employees who don't qualify for expensive benefits. Nearly a quarter of the work force is employed in non-standard positions such as part time, temporary, freelance, on call or self-employed, and many companies are cutting back health and pension packages.⁵⁴

Reproductive Rights

When it comes to abortion rights, many feminist groups feel they've been under constant assault in recent years. They not only lost two battles against pro-life Supreme Court justices (Chief Justice John Roberts and Associate Justice Samuel Alito) but also watched as South Dakota banned abortions, the Food and Drug Administration refused to allow over-the-counter sales of emergency contraception and some pharmacists have refused to dispense birth control.⁵⁵

Most polls show that a majority of Americans support legal abortion, with restrictions.⁵⁶ In the words of President Clinton, abortion should be "safe, legal and rare." The National Abortion Rights Action League's name change — to NARAL Pro-Choice America — seems to reflect a squeamishness about using the word abortion, although the group's leaders deny that was the reason for the change.

Within the next two to three years, if the increasingly conservative Supreme Court overturns *Roe v. Wade*, abortion's legality would again be determined by state law as it was before the landmark 1973 decision. "We will have to take the case to the states and convince people on the basis of its merits, not constitutional rights," says Kissling of Catholics for a Free Choice, "and it will depend on our ability to convince them that we take it seriously."

In a widely debated article published in winter 2004-2005, Kissling argued, "The pro-choice movement will be far more trusted if it openly acknowledges that the abortion decision involves weighing multiple values and that one of those values is fetal life."⁵⁷ While long-time feminists came down hard on her, Kissling says, "For younger feminists, the question of abortion as a complex issue or a sad issue seems less troublesome."

Documentary filmmaker Baumgardner agrees. "There's a lot more interest in listening to what women and men having abortion experiences say. You can know it's the right thing and know it's a sacrifice of some kind, too."

Leaders in the abortion-rights movement insist they *do* acknowledge this reality and have pushed for greater access to contraception in order to make abortions rarer. "For each woman, it is a morally complex issue," says NARAL Pro-Choice America President Keenan.

As for the current political situation, Keenan said her organization has seen an increase in membership in the last three to four years, with inter-generational responses rising since the South Dakota ban. "The sleeping majority here has watched these politicians overstep several times," she says. Now, "people are very upset that pharmacists can deny them prescriptions for contraception."

For her part, columnist Pollitt says, "We'd all love to move on from this issue, but I don't see how that is possible; the other side doesn't want compromise." There's a certain complacency among middle-class pro-choicers, she suggests, while low-income women — those who have to sleep in their cars overnight to get service in states with only one abortion clinic — are rarely heard from. "The people most affected by restrictions placed on abortions so far are those women who are not politically active," says Pollitt.

Pro-choice leaders predict that the majority of Americans will become more politicized as they realize that extremists want to outlaw not only abortion but

also birth control. For example, when South Dakota's legislature outlawed some forms of contraception, says Keenan, the governor refused to sign the law because right-wing groups didn't think they could prevail in the Supreme Court.

"They're starting to show their hand," says Smeal, of the Moral Majority. And Keenan interprets Bush's lukewarm response to the South Dakota ban as "code for 'Put the brakes on.'" ■

OUTLOOK

Personal Politics

Judging from all the Web sites run by young feminists and mothers, a vibrant new women's movement appears to be sprouting. But as Calman at the International Center for Research on Women points out, "A Web site is not a movement."

Mother's Movement Online founder Tucker agrees that for the kinds of family-work issues she supports the movement is "very much at the consciousness-raising stage." A major problem, she says, is the fact that issues most affecting women today don't fit neatly into past categories: "Is it feminist? Is it labor?"

Today, young women are most likely to experience gender discrimination in isolation, such as when trying to negotiate a part-time job that keeps them on the career track but leaves time for child raising. But some young feminists say they don't measure a movement's success in the number of women that join an organization like NOW or respond to urgent e-mail blasts. "Going into that office with as much information as you can get is exactly the way movements are built," maintains Baumgardner, co-author of *Grass Roots: A Field Guide for Feminist Activism*. "That *is* grass roots; it's every individ-

ual root in the grass; it's the work of individuals; it's not relating to a big parent organization."

Amy Nassisi, a San Mateo, Calif., mother, recently formed a group to do just that. Her Flexibility Alliance will disseminate profiles of women who managed to negotiate flexible work arrangements — something she herself didn't manage to do when her daughter was born. "I could have made a much more successful proposal to my boss had I had these profiles to show him," she says, "and that would have made him feel more comfortable."

But other activists say women will have to get more involved in politics at a higher level if they want to reshape society's attitude toward women's role. Women currently compose less than 15 percent of Congress. Sixty-five percent of women between ages 18 and 24 did not even vote in the 2000 presidential election, compared to 65 percent of women over 44 who did, according to Momsrising.org co-founder Rowe-Finkbeiner.

The 1970s feminists started their movement around kitchen tables with the slogan "the personal is political." Third Wave's Richards believes "the opposite has to happen with this generation; we have to look at politics to see how it affects our lives." The new slogan should be, "The political is personal." ■

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⁷ Heather Boushey, "Are Women Opting Out? Debunking the Myth," Center for Economic Policy Research, December 2005, p. 5; www.cepr.net.

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¹⁵ Cathy E. Minehan, "An Introduction," *Regional Review*, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, First Quarter 2005, p. 2.

¹⁶ Joan C. Williams and Nancy Segal, "Beyond the Maternal Wall: Relief for Family Caregivers Who are Discriminated Against on the Job," *Harvard Women's Law Journal*, Vol. 26, 2003, p. 130.

¹⁷ Kate O'Beirne, *Women who Make the World Worse and How their Radical Feminist Assault is Ruining Our Schools, Families, Military, and Sports* (2006), p. 23.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

¹⁹ For further information see Sarah Glazer, "Helping Welfare Mothers to Stay Home," p. 314, in "Mothers' Movement," *CQ Researcher*, April 4, 2003, pp. 297-320.

²⁰ Judith Warner, "The Parent Trap," *The New York Times*, Feb. 8, 2006, p. A21.

²¹ Suzanne Bianchi, *et al.*, "Maternal Employment and Family Caregiving," Dec. 9, 2005, Figure 1 (unpublished paper).

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²⁵ David Brooks, "The Year of Domesticity," *The New York Times*, Jan. 1, 2006, p. WK8.

²⁶ See Meghan O'Rourke, "Desperate Feminist Wives: Why Wanting Equality Makes Women Unhappy," *Slate*, March 7, 2006.

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About the Author

Sarah Glazer, a New York freelancer, is a regular contributor to the *CQ Researcher*. Her articles on health, education and social-policy issues have appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post*, *The Public Interest* and *Gender and Work*, a book of essays. Her recent *CQ Researcher* reports include "Increase in Autism" and "Gender and Learning." She graduated from the University of Chicago with a B.A. in American history.

³³ Unless otherwise noted, information in this section is from Janet Zollinger Giele, *Two Paths to Women's Equality: Temperance, Suffrage and the Origins of Modern Feminism* (1985), pp. 179, 183.

³⁴ Ann Crittenden, *The Price of Motherhood* (2001), p. 86.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

³⁶ For background, see "Equal Rights Amendment," *Editorial Research Reports*, April 4, 1946, available at *CQ Researcher Plus Archive*, CQ Electronic Library, <http://library.cqpress.com>.

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⁴⁵ Giele, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

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⁴⁸ NOW and the Feminist Majority say they do not keep membership statistics by age.

⁴⁹ See www.nationalpartnership.org.

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