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Work and Families

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Looking Forward

1. How has married women's work changed over the past half-century?
2. How has the amount of housework and childcare done by husbands and wives changed over the past half-century?
3. How does our society treat the labor of caring for others?
4. How do sociologists think about power and authority within marriage?
5. What are some of the strains working parents can experience?
6. How is the workplace responding to the needs of working parents?

"After I started earning money," a billing clerk who was married to a forklift operator told a sociologist, "my husband showed me more respect" (Hochschild, 1989). She was not alone. A woman who earned less than her husband for years noticed a sudden difference when she took a high-paying job. One evening she told her husband she was tired, and he replied, "Well, you work as hard as I do." He had never said that before, she told a reporter (Goldstein, 2000). "A little light went off in my head: 'Oh, now I make what you do, I work as hard as you do,' " she said. Unasked, her husband started to do the laundry. "I'd say, 'I need to vacuum today' and the next thing I know, he'd be doing the vacuuming."

Another woman who earned far less than her husband complained to interviewers:

> *Gordon still has to have the last word on everything. We get annoyed with each other over that, but when I start to push back, he reminds me just who supports me and the children. He doesn't always bring that up, but if I start to win an argument or make more sense about something we should do, I think he gets frustrated and so he gives me his big final line which is something like, "If you're so smart, why don't you earn more money?" or how dumb I am 'cause if I had to go out and support myself I'd be a big fizzle. (Blumstein & Schwartz, 1983)*

As these women's comments show, many Americans still believe that paid work is important but that unpaid work—including the childcare, cooking, cleaning, and emotional support that is provided, mostly by women—is less important. In fact, as we will see, unpaid work in the home isn't even counted as work in official government statistics. That's why a husband might think that his wife works as hard as he does only if she makes as much money as he does. Or why he might think that his paid work supports his children but her unpaid work does not. Or why he might think that he should have the last word on all decisions unless his wife earns a comparable amount of money.

Some people still think that it's "natural" to divide a family's work so that husbands do paid work outside the home and wives do unpaid work in the home. But that conception of the division of labor—the so-called breadwinner–homemaker family—didn't arise until the mid-nineteenth century and peaked in the mid-twentieth century. [➥ p. 64] It was based on the assumption that wives would be available to do unpaid work. Since the mid-twentieth century, tens of millions of married women have taken paying jobs outside the home. Moreover, the number of single parents, most of them women, has increased greatly. These changes have undermined the old system in which wives did almost all of the housework and childcare for free. Most married couples and single parents must now pay someone

else to do part of this work or rely on kin, such as grandmothers, for unpaid help. And as they pay for childcare, house cleaning, restaurant meals, and other services, they are suddenly seeing the value of the unpaid work wives used to provide. They are coming to appreciate not just how much it costs to replace wives' unpaid work but also how important this caring work is to maintaining a family. In this chapter, we will examine how families deal with the crowded schedules that often result when both parents (or the lone parent present) work outside the home. We will also examine the ways in which business and government are responding to these developments. And we will step back to consider, more generally, the meaning and importance of the work of caring for others.

The transformation from the breadwinner–homemaker model to a new, twenty-first-century model isn't finished. Even though wives commonly work outside the home, many husbands still expect them to do most of the housework and childcare. As this chapter will show, husbands are doing a larger portion of these tasks than was the case a few decades ago, but wives still do the lion's share. In part, this imbalance reflects wives' lower earnings, which are associated with having less power in their marriages (England & Farkas, 1986). That's why a woman might report that after she started earning money, her husband suddenly showed her more respect. To be sure, lower earnings aren't the only reason why wives typically have less power in their marriages. Both wives and husbands may have been socialized to expect that husbands should be the head of the household, the person who makes the final decisions. Nevertheless, earnings and employment are important determinants of the relations between wives and husbands. In this chapter, then, we will also explore differences in power and authority between wives and husbands and the consequences of those differences for daily life.

From Single-Earner to Dual-Earner Marriages

In the early twentieth century, few white wives worked outside the home; but many earned money by taking in boarders and lodgers or doing piecework. [➥ p. 50] However, by the mid-twentieth century, white wives had largely withdrawn from these informal sources of income. They had withdrawn because of increases in men's earnings and because of reduced demand for home services such as lodging. Teenage and young adult children stayed in school longer and worked fewer hours, often keeping for personal use most of what they did earn. The two-parent family usually had only one paid worker—the husband. The 1950s were probably the high point of the single-earner, two-parent family in the United States. [➥ p. 64] Many commentators refer to this breadwinner–homemaker family as the "traditional" family, but the history of women's work demonstrates how atypical the single-earner family was.

MOTHERS ENTER THE LABOR FORCE

Figure 8.1 shows the low levels of married women's work outside the home at the middle of the twentieth century and the great changes since then. The two lines show the percentage of married women with children who were in the labor force for every year since 1948. Government statistical agencies consider

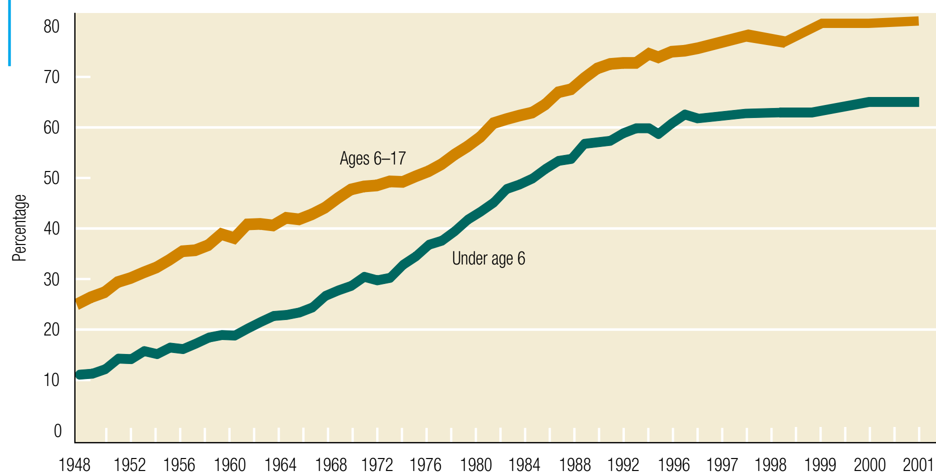

FIGURE 8.1
Labor force participation rates of married women with children under age 18, by age of youngest child, 1948–2001. (*Sources:* U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [1988]; and U.S. Bureau of the Census, Statistical Abstract of the United States, various years.)

someone to be in the labor force if he or she is working for pay outside the home or looking for such work. In 1948, only about one-fourth of married women whose youngest children were at least six years old (and therefore in school) were in the labor force, as were only about one-tenth of married women with children under age six.

At first, the rate of participation increased faster among those whose children were in school. Because women began childbearing at relatively younger ages in the 1950s and early 1960s and rarely had more than three or four children, they were still at a prime working age when all their children reached school age. With school to use as a childcare center and less childrearing effort necessary at home, many women with school-aged children reentered the labor force. Since the 1970s, the rate increased faster among those with at least one preschool-aged child. As a result of these changes, 78 percent of all married women with school-aged children, and 63 percent of those with preschool-aged children, were in the labor force in 2001, although a majority were working part-time (Cohen & Bianchi, 1999; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003t).

BEHIND THE RISE

Several factors contributed to the increase in married women's labor force participation. During the twentieth century, the service sector of the economy expanded greatly. The **service sector** consists of the workers who provide personal services such as education, health care, communication, restaurant meals, legal representation, entertainment, and so forth. Many of the jobs in the service sector had come to be stereotyped as women's work; these jobs usually required some education but paid less than men's work. Examples include secretary, nurse, and elementary school teacher. As the demand for these kinds of jobs increased, wages increased (although they remained lower than men's wages) and more married women were drawn into the labor force (Oppenheimer, 1970).

service sector workers who provide personal services such as education, health care, communication, restaurant meals, legal representation, entertainment, and so forth

In addition, as the population shifted from farms to cities, each generation (except for the parents of the baby boomers) had fewer children. There was no longer a need for lots of child labor to help on the farm; moreover, the rising wages of women in the labor force meant that women who stayed home were

The movement of married women into the paid work force is one of the most important changes in family life.

passing up more and more income (Butz & Ward, 1979). As a result, parents' preferred strategy was to have fewer children and to invest more resources in each—to pay for college education or job training courses, for example. This strategy reduced the number of years in which young children would be present in the home and therefore freed married women sooner from childcare, the major responsibility that had kept them out of the labor force. Moreover, the decline in the wages of men without college educations since the early 1970s [➥ p. 118] has motivated many wives to take paying jobs. Finally, the high divorce rate of the past several decades made it increasingly risky for married women to leave the labor force and let their job skills deteriorate. Given the low amount of child support payments that most divorced women receive (see Chapter 12), they need to be able to rely on their earning power.

A PROFOUND CHANGE

This great movement of married women into the labor force is one of the most important changes in American family life in the past century. It has profoundly altered women's and men's lives. It has affected the balance of power between women and men, as will be discussed in this chapter. It has been instrumental in the shift from the companionship marriage to the independent marriage, as described in the previous chapter. It has provided the backdrop for debates on issues such as abortion, about which women whose identity is bound up in home and childrearing tend to disagree with women who value working outside the home (see Chapter 14.). To be sure, the change has been less pronounced for women from poor or minority backgrounds, who have always had a greater need to work. For example, census statistics show that in 1975, when only 35 percent of white married women with preschool-aged children were in the labor force, 55 percent of comparable African American women were. Still, labor force participation has increased sharply among African American women as well: By

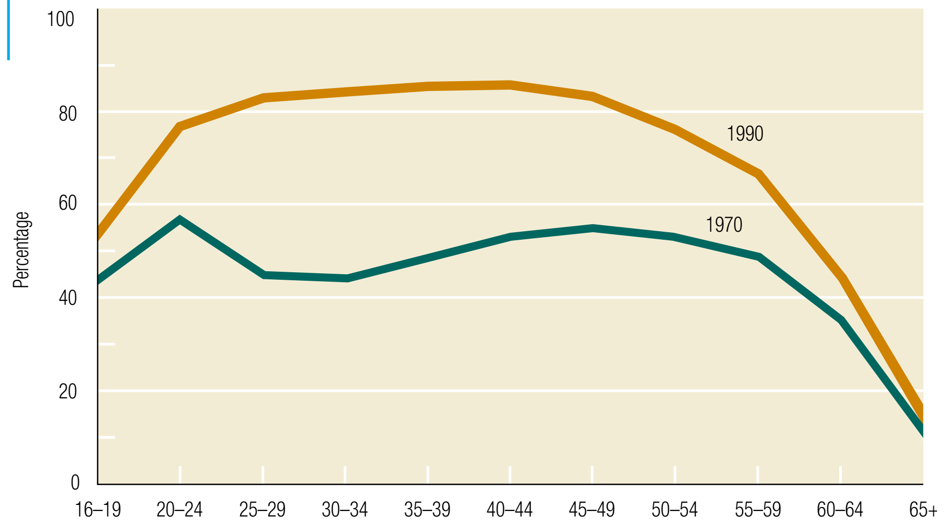

FIGURE 8.2
Labor force participation rates for U.S. women by age, 1970 and 1990. (*Sources:* Bianchi & Spain [1986], Figure 5.1; U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics [1991].)

2000, 72 percent of married African American women with pre-school-aged children were in the labor force (compared with 62 percent of whites) (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003a.)

THE CURRENT SITUATION

By the beginning of the twenty-first century, it was common for married women to remain at work outside the home from young adulthood to retirement. Moreover, the post-1960 rise in divorce and childbearing outside marriage created a large number of unmarried mothers who needed to provide their own incomes. This increasingly continuous labor force participation can be seen more clearly in Figure 8.2. For two time points 20 years apart, 1970 and 1990, the figure displays the percentage of women who were participating in the labor force, according to the women's ages. In 1970, the percentage of women in the labor force was higher for women in their early twenties than for teenagers; but then it dropped among women in their mid-twenties and early thirties, which are the most common years for having small children at home. The percentage then rose again to a second peak among women in their forties, whose children tend to be older. Therefore, the second peak reflects women who returned to the labor force after their children entered school. This double-peaked pattern typifies a society in which many women enter the labor force before marriage, drop out while raising young children, and then enter again. Yet by 1990 the dip between the peaks had disappeared; rather, the graph has a single, high plateau for women between about 25 and 50, reflecting women's higher and more-continuous levels of work outside the home throughout the prime working years of adulthood.

Despite women's increased attachment to the labor force and rising wages, it is still the case that they earn substantially less, on average, than men. From 1960 to about 1980, the average woman who worked full-time, year round, earned

"Bring Your Daughter to Work Day" allows mothers to interest their daughters in jobs and careers.

about 60 cents for each dollar earned by a comparable man.[1] To be sure, women have worked outside the home less, on average, than men have during their adult lives, so they have accrued less seniority, on-the-job training, and so forth. Yet differences in job experience appear to account for only about one-fourth to one-half of the gap (England & Farkas, 1986). A substantial proportion reflects a more complex process involving employer discrimination and the resultant way that parents socialize their daughters. (See *Families and Public Policy:* The Earnings Gap on p. 98)

Since 1980, however, women's average earnings have increased faster than men's, reaching 77 cents for each dollar a man earned in 2001 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003l). Women's earnings rose relative to men's in the 1980s and 1990s because some women workers were doing better economically and some men were doing worse. As for women doing better, demographers Daphne Spain and Suzanne Bianchi note that in the 1980s, women born during the baby boom were finishing school and entering the labor force. Conversely, the mothers of the baby boomers were exiting the labor force to retire. Since the mothers had married at early ages and had children soon after marrying, they had received less education than their daughters and spent less time working outside the home prior to having children. As a result, their earning potential had been limited. In contrast, their daughters had received more education, postponed marriage and childbearing, and spent more time in the labor force before having children—all of which had increased their earning potential. Well-educated women moved into professional occupations in unprecedented numbers: Women's share of law school degrees rose from 5 percent in 1970 to 46 percent in 2000, and their share of medical school degrees rose from 8 percent to 43 percent during the

[1]This figure represents the ratio of women's median earnings to men's median earnings, for year-round, full-time workers.

same period (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003t). So in the 1980s and 1990s, as the baby boom daughters replaced their mothers in the labor force, the average earnings of college-educated women increased (Spain & Bianchi, 1996; U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003t).

Yet that is only half the story. Earnings did not rise much for baby boom daughters without college educations, most of whom were clerical and service workers such as secretaries, bank tellers, or cafeteria workers. The men they tended to marry—baby boom sons without a college education—saw their incomes decline as skilled blue-collar jobs became scarce. Therefore, the ratio of women's earnings to men's earnings rose among the less-well-educated not because women were earning substantially more but rather because men were earning substantially less. The rising ratio demonstrates how important wives' earnings have become in maintaining the standard of living of working-class and lower-class married couples (Bianchi & Spain, 1996).

Among African Americans, the ratio of women's earnings to men's earnings has long been higher than among whites. In the first half of the twentieth century, discrimination severely limited job opportunities for both black women and men, but black women were hired as household workers for white families—jobs that may have been demeaning but were at least available and steady. In 1940, 60 percent of all black women in the labor force were private household workers. Beginning in the 1960s—a decade of civil rights legislation and economic prosperity—employment opportunities for African Americans improved. The improvement, however, was greater for black women, who took advantage of the expanding opportunities in service sector occupations, than for black men. By 1990, just 2 percent of black women were household workers (Bianchi, 1995). What is more, young black women were earning virtually as much, on average, as young white women. Because black men's economic progress (like the progress of less-well-educated white men) lagged behind, the median earnings of black women rose to 87 cents for every dollar earned by black men in 1999, compared with 75 cents for every dollar among whites (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2002).

Quick Review

- The percentage of married women who work outside the home increased greatly during the last half of the twentieth century.
- The expansion of the service sector of the economy was a factor in this increase in paid work outside the home.
- The drop in the number of children per family also was a factor.
- Currently, most married women are in the labor force almost continuously from their twenties through their fifties.

Care Work and Marital Power

We have seen that the role of women in the paid labor market has changed dramatically over the past half-century. Change has also occurred, although less dramatically, in housework and childcare. Let us view the trends in housework over the past few decades and then consider a new perspective—care work studies—that has arisen in response to the trends.

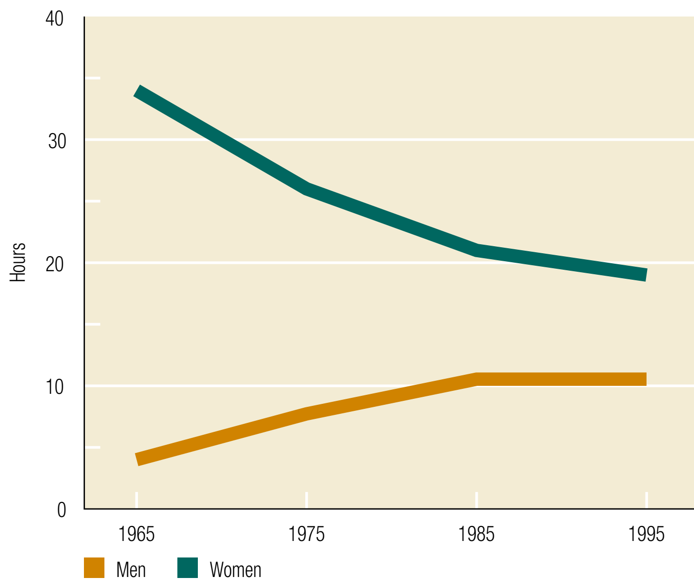

FIGURE 8.3
Average weekly time spent doing housework for married men and women, aged 25 to 64, 1965 to 1995. (*Source:* Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, and Robinson, 2000.)

WHO DOES THE HOUSEWORK?

Figure 8.3 presents the results of studies done in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1995 in which national samples of adults were asked to keep diaries of the amount of time they spent on various activities during a week (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000). The figure displays the average weekly hours spent on housework by married women and married men. (Major categories included cooking, meal cleanup, cleaning, laundry, outdoor chores, repairs, and paying bills.) The green line shows that over the 30-year period, the average time spent by married women dropped substantially, from 33.9 hours to 19.4 hours. As the orange line shows, during the same period, the average time spent by married men increased from 4.7 to 10.4 hours. Overall, these trends suggest the following conclusions:

- The total amount of housework done by married couples has declined, because women have reduced the time they spend doing housework more than men have increased theirs. Married couples have replaced some of the housework they used to do by purchasing services, such as restaurant meals or housecleaning. They may also have become accustomed to slightly dirtier homes and slightly more wrinkled clothing than married couples of the past.
- The relative amount of time married women and men spend on housework has become less unequal. In 1965, women's average hours of housework were seven times greater than men's; by 1995, they were two times greater. Again, this trend is due more to women reducing the time they spend on housework than to men increasing theirs.

In sum, if the question is who does the housework, the answer is that women still do more than men, although men do relatively more than in the past—and that increasingly they pay *other people* to do it. Daily life, for many dual-earner couples depends on day care providers, cleaning services, and McDonald's.

RETHINKING CARING WORK

It's clear that society can no longer rely on the unpaid labor of stay-at-home wives and mothers to provide the care that family members need. In this sense, the movement of women into the labor force has created a "crisis in care" (Glenn, 2000). The crisis has also spawned a growing body of social research, theory, and advocacy on the topic of caring. In this new literature, "care work" has emerged as the central concept—one might even speak of a care work movement (Stone, 2000). Some authors conceive of care work very broadly, but I will propose a narrower definition consistent with this book's focus on families. Let us define **care work** as face-to-face activity in which one person meets the needs of another person who cannot fully care for her- or himself. The person who does the care work is the caregiver; and the person who gets the care is the care-receiver. Within families, children, the frail elderly, and the ill or disabled are the obvious care receivers. Caring for healthy adults is a gray area: One could argue that wives and husbands perform care work by providing emotional support to each other and that wives provide further care by shielding their husbands from having to do half of the work at home. Many writers would include these activities, too, as care work.

care work face-to-face activity in which one person meets the needs of another who cannot fully care for her- or himself

Breaking the Work/Family Boundary The writers in the care work movement put forth at least four principles. First, they argue that the separation between what goes on in families and what goes on in the world of work is artificial and should be abolished. As the suffix "work" in care work suggests, these authors maintain that what caregivers do should be thought of as work. This seems obvious when one thinks about Rowena Bautista, hired to care for an American family's children while her remittances, in turn, paid someone to care for her own children in a Filipino village. [➥ p. 144] It may be obvious when one thinks about the many workers in childcare centers and nursing homes (see Chapter 10). But it wasn't obvious a half-century ago, when much of the care work in families was undertaken by wives in their own homes. Stay-at-home wives did the work of meeting the needs of other family members for daily sustenance, clothing, a clean and healthy home environment, and an esthetically pleasing home. Yet their contributions were—and, to some extent, still are—hidden. For example, when the U.S. government computes the total value of the goods and services bought and sold in the nation, the gross domestic product, or GDP, it ignores unpaid care work. The care an adult daughter provides to an elderly parent doesn't count. But if the same daughter hires a home health-care worker to tend to her parent, the workers' wages are added to the GDP (Folbre, 2001).

Care Work as a Public Responsibility Second, care work, it is argued, should be considered a public as well as a private responsibility. In the past, caring for children and the elderly has not been recognized as a socially important contribution. For instance, workers can accrue eligibility for Social Security retirement benefits only through paid work. Unpaid work does not apply. A full-time housewife builds eligibility for Social Security benefits only through her husband's paid work—suggesting that the work she does is purely a private, family matter (see Chapter 14). But children can be considered public goods [➥ p. 11] because when they grow up, they will do socially useful work that will benefit parents and nonparents alike. For example, they will pay the taxes that will allow Social Secu-

American society has relied on stay-at-home wives to perform much of the care of infirm elderly parents.

rity benefits to be paid (Folbre, 2001). So in rearing children, parents do work that will benefit others. In the terms of this book, the care work movement suggests that we view caring labor not just through the lens of the private family but also through the lens of the public family. To be sure, care work provides private, emotional satisfaction for family members, but it also provides a publicly useful service.

Valuing Caring Labor Third, caring labor, the writers maintain, is often underpaid, undervalued, and even demeaned relative to other kinds of work (Tronto, 1993). Recall the women quoted at the beginning of this chapter who received more respect from their husbands when they worked for pay than when they did care work at home. Care is often considered "women's work," a phrase that often implies unpaid or low-paid work of marginal importance. Women constitute the vast majority of paid caregivers: 97 percent of childcare workers and 79 percent of health aides, for example (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003t). Moreover, they are disproportionately drawn from the less advantaged racial-ethnic groups—such as immigrant Hispanic and Asian women like Rowena Bautista. Some researchers have found that, even after taking into account gender, race–ethnicity, and occupational characteristics, individuals who do paid care work earn less than other workers (England and Folbre, 1999). The care work movement urges that caregivers receive higher pay and greater respect.

Toward an Ethic of Care Fourth, some writers urge the development of an "ethic of care" (Tronto, 1993) in American society. They argue that Americans overvalue individualism and autonomy and undervalue interdependence and caring. Americans are not just autonomous, they contend, but also interdependent. Therefore, everyone needs care on some level (Glenn, 2000a). As the old morality in which housewives were the guardians of caring has faded, the writers maintain, a newer morality of interdependence and mutual caring must

replace it. Currently, women and economically disadvantaged individuals seem to value an ethic of care more than other Americans. For example, Michèle Lamont (2000) interviewed both white and African American working-class men. The white men, she wrote, evinced a "disciplined self," in which hard work and responsibility—showing up at work each day to earn a paycheck for one's family—are of paramount importance. In contrast, many of the African American men evinced more of a "caring self," in which solidarity with the less fortunate and generosity to those in need are central. An ethic of care would seek to balance these orientations to the world—to temper autonomy with interdependence, to augment personal responsibility with care for others. It is an attractive vision, but it isn't clear that it can successfully take root in late modern culture.

Quick Review

- Women have greatly reduced the hours of housework they do, while men have increased their housework hours somewhat.
- The movement of wives into the paid workforce limits their ability to provide unpaid caring work in the home.
- The resulting "crisis in care" has focused attention on care work, the face-to-face caregiving that used to be done in families by wives who weren't working for wages.
- From the care-work perspective, the caring that goes on in families should be considered as "work" whether or not the caregivers are paid.
- Caring labor is often undervalued; it is also done disproportionately by women and members of minority racial-ethnic groups.
- Some writers urge that American society adopt an "ethic of care."

MARITAL POWER AND AUTHORITY

The Meaning of Power The increased labor force participation of married women and the growth of woman's incomes relative to men's might be expected to increase wives' power in marriages. A large research literature exists on marital power, in which the word "power" is used loosely in two different senses. These parallel the distinction that sociologists make between two ways in which a person or group of people can dominate others: power and authority (Gerth & Mills, 1946). **Power** is the ability to force a person to do something even against his or her will. It is the "possibility of imposing one's will upon the behavior of other persons" (Bendix, 1960), whether or not one actually exercises this power. For example, in some societies a man can take a second wife even if his first wife objects.

power the ability to force a person to do something even against his or her will.

Sometimes widespread cultural beliefs and values lead some people to accept the domination of others. When a group of people acknowledges the right of others to supervise and control their behavior, sociologists say that those in command are in **authority.** In distinguishing between power and authority, the key words are "acknowledged" or "accepted." I have authority over an aspect of your life if you acknowledge and accept it. The great sociologist Max Weber wrote of "patriarchalism" (most people now use the term *patriarchy*) [➥ p. 96]—meaning a social system based on the domination of husbands and fathers over wives and children—in so-called traditional societies. Here, wrote Weber, the right of the

authority the acknowledged right of someone to supervise and control others' behavior

A wife's investment in raising her children is valuable to her husband but not to other prospective husbands, should she divorce.

husband to be dominant is supported by long-standing, widely held norms and values that both women and men accept. Therefore, Weber asserted, the patriarch rules through "traditional authority." A farm wife might accept the authority of her husband as part of the natural and correct order of society. But male authority isn't just a preindustrial phenomenon. When Adlai Stevenson told the Smith graduates in 1955 that their place in politics was to influence men through the role of housewife [➥ p. 103], he was repeating a widespread cultural belief that even many educated women themselves agreed with at the time. Many women in the audience that day must have accepted Stevenson's statement as part of the natural order of family life.

In practice, however, it is often difficult to distinguish between power and authority. Your power over me may be latent—under the surface, hidden—most of the time, but it may be real nonetheless. For instance, if you have power over me, I may refrain from doing something I know you don't like—which means that you will obtain the results you want without having to flex a muscle or withhold a penny (Komter, 1989). If a wife knows her husband adamantly opposes her working outside the home and if she fears his anger, she may not even raise the issue of taking a job. An observer might not notice the wife's latent desire to work outside the home and the husband's power over her.

Moreover, persons in power may grant limited authority to their subordinates. I would argue that this often occurs in family life. During the nineteenth century, men accepted—even promoted—the authority of wives over moral and domestic matters. Yet wives' access to opportunities in the emerging world of paid work was limited. Today, wives often have substantial authority in the home because husbands—who do less domestic work—accept their wives' authority in this sphere. Still, most husbands retain substantial power, based on their greater earning power, and they still retain substantial authority, based on widely held, though changing, beliefs about what is proper behavior for women and men.

Marital Power and Wage Work A number of writers have proposed that greater power accrues to family members who work for wages than to those who produce primarily for consumption at home. This proposition is, in fact, the core of Friedrich Engels's analysis, more than a century ago, of the source of inequality between women and men; and related propositions have been stated frequently by others since then. Whereas men are compensated with money for their work, women's valuable work of raising children, which creates the next generation of the labor force, is unpaid. Under socialism, Engels wrote, childcare would be performed by public agencies and all women would work outside the home. Once this happened, Engels (and presumably his collaborator Karl Marx, who wrote nothing directly on the subject) believed, male domination would fade away: "The supremacy of the man in marriage is the simple consequence of his economic supremacy, and with the abolition of the latter will disappear of itself" (Engels, 1972). (Socialist nations have not, however, eliminated male domination.)

In nearly all societies, wives' ability to work for wages is limited because they must also carry out household and childrearing tasks. England and Farkas (1986) have argued that the investments of time and effort that a wife typically makes in the home—raising the children, providing emotional support to her husband, keeping in touch with the husband's relatives, and so forth—cannot easily be transferred to a new marriage. Rather, they are **relationship specific investments,** efforts that are valuable only in a person's current relationship. That is to say, if a wife initiates a divorce, keeps custody of the children (as is usually the case), and wishes to remarry, she will likely find that the children—in whom she has invested much time and effort—lower her attractiveness to prospective husbands. Her efforts to nurture and support her first husband and her ties to his family also won't do her any good in the marriage market. If she doesn't wish to remarry, her income will probably be lower than before she divorced. Husbands, in contrast, tend to invest time and effort in their jobs, accruing, if they are fortunate, seniority, promotions, and wage and salary increases. These job investments can more easily be transferred to another marriage, because prospective wives will value the increased earnings (England & Farkas, 1986).

relationship-specific investment time spent on activities such as childrearing that are valuable only in a person's current relationship

Even when mothers work for pay, they typically do not earn as much as women without children. In fact, the more children a woman has, the lower are her wages, on average, compared to women without children (Waldfogel, 1997; Budig & England, 2001; Avellar & Smock, 2003). Some researchers have called this gap the "motherhood penalty" or "family penalty." Part of the gap reflects the lesser work experience and education of mothers, relative to nonmothers. But a gap of about 4 percent per child still exists after differences in job experience, education, and other factors are taken into account. The reason for the so-called penalty is not clear. It is possible, some authors suggest, that mothers may be less productive on the job because of the distractions, responsibilities, and energy demands of childrearing. It is also possible that employers discriminate against mothers (possibly paying them less or promoting them less often).

Overall, husbands' investments *outside* the home make them more attractive to alternative partners, should they divorce and wish to remarry, whereas wives' investments *inside* the home do not make them attractive to alternative partners. According to social exchange theory [➥ p. 23], if person A needs the income partner B provides and values being married, and if person A has fewer alternative sources of partnership (because her investments of time and effort aren't as

Historically, African American married women have worked outside the home more than white married women; but the percentage who work has increased further in recent decades.

transferable), then A is said to be dependent on B. The degree of dependency is greater the more A needs the income and the fewer her alternatives are—which implies, in this case, that wives with little job experience and lower earning potential are more dependent. And the more A is dependent on B, the theory states, the greater is B's power over A (Emerson, 1972). He can use his greater power to shape his family's daily life and to control key decisions.

Even when wives do work for pay, they may be required to turn over their income to their husbands or fathers. But where wives have control over earnings, so the argument goes, they have more power. Their earnings give them the stature to speak their grievances. (See *Families in Other Cultures:* "I Also Have Some Rights," on pp. 276–277)

A Stalled Revolution? The authors of the 1965–1995 study of who does the housework (Figure 8.3) also reported that employed women and men do less housework than those who are not employed. This finding is consistent with theories of marital power, as well as with the sheer lack of time available to employed parents. Several other findings, however, cannot be explained as easily. For example, other things being equal, the presence of children in a family

Families in Other Cultures

"I Also Have Some Rights"

Sometimes it is easier to recognize inequalities of power in a social setting different from one's own. Consider the relations between wives and husbands in poor Mexico City neighborhoods studied by Lourdes Benería and Martha Roldán (1987). Like nineteenth-century wives, married women in industrializing nations today often contribute to the family's income through means other than a job outside the home. Sociologists who study national development distinguish between the **formal sector** and the **informal sector** of a nation's economy. The formal sector consists of jobs that meet legal standards for minimum wages, are relatively long-lasting and secure, include fringe benefits such as contributions to Social Security or health insurance, often have possibilities for advancement, and are sometimes unionized. In contrast, the informal sector consists of temporary or casual jobs that sometimes offer illegal subminimum wages, have little security, little possibility for advancement, and no fringe benefits. In the United States an example of a formal sector job would be a computer programmer at a large corporation; an informal sector job would be a seamstress at an illegal sweatshop in the garment district in New York City. The distinction is useful even though, in practice, it is sometimes hard to draw a line between the two sectors.

In industrializing nations, the informal sector is far larger than in the United States and, in fact, is an important part of the way production is organized. Established firms in the formal sector often let out work to subcontractors, who hire workers on a temporary basis, sometimes in violation of laws about wages and working conditions. By subcontracting, firms save money because they pay lower costs, evade labor laws regarding fringe benefits and hours, and avoid the fixed costs of directly hiring more workers (such as constructing more space at the factory). Some of the subcontracts involve labor that can be done on a piecework basis at home, and married women today do much of it.

Precisely because it can be done at home, piecework is acceptable even to husbands who would not want their wives to work outside the home. It allows husbands to feel that they are still the main earners in the family and yet to obtain the benefits of a higher family income. It allows wives to combine working for pay with the care of younger children, which is almost always seen as their responsibility. What is more, older children can help with the piecework, thus increasing the family's income even more. Thus, piecework by wives fits with the dominant ideology about what husbands and wives should do in many industrializing nations.

Doña Goya was a 33-year-old married woman interviewed by Benería and Roldán. As a teenager, she labored at times as a childcare worker and domestic for several families. After she married, she stopped paid work and she and her husband—who was steadily employed as a factory worker—moved in with her parents. Like most working-class families in

formal sector the part of a nation's economy that consists of jobs that meet legal standards for minimum wages, are relatively long-lasting and secure, include fringe benefits such as contributions to Social Security or health insurance, often have possibilities for advancement, and are sometimes unionized

informal sector the part of a nation's economy that consists of temporary or casual jobs that sometimes offer illegal subminimum wages and that have little security, little possibility for advancement, and no fringe benefits

increases housework more for women than for men. And marriage seems to increase women's housework more than it does men's. Perhaps marriage and childbearing encourage some couples to adopt traditional gender roles.

Figure 8.3 showed that men did not increase their housework hours from 1985 to 1995. Married women still do twice as much housework as men. The slow pace of change among men in dual-earner families has puzzled and disappointed many observers. Arguing that the current period is a transitional phase in American family life, Arlie Russell Hochschild wrote of a "stalled revolution," in which wives have moved into the labor force but husbands have not yet adjusted. The result, she asserted, is that employed wives work a "second shift" of household tasks and childcare. In addition to the burden this situation imposes on wives, she wrote, the stalled revolution may hurt men, whose wives "cannot afford the luxury of unambivalent love for their husbands" (Hochschild, 1989).

Yet recent evidence suggests that men may be doing more housework and childcare than before. Certainly, men's involvement at home is becoming more culturally acceptable. In 1979 and 1989, national samples of men were asked the question "Would you respect a man more, less, or about the same if he decided

their neighborhood, they accepted the idea that men should be the main earners of the family and women should be the main caregivers. After having six children, Doña Goya began to take in washing and to work as a domestic in the neighborhood. After her 10th child, she began to do piecework at home, assembling toys with the help of 8 of her 10 children. She also continued to work as a laundress and domestic. Her assembly work was brought to her home by a middle person who had obtained a subcontract from a toy company. Whereas her husband worked in the formal sector, albeit for wages that were insufficient to support a family, Doña Goya and her children supplemented the family's income by working in the informal sector and by unpaid childcare and household work.

This division of labor between formal sector employment for married men and informal sector employment for married women is common in Mexico City, state the authors of the study. Because formal sector employment is more secure, pays more, and has more benefits, this division virtually ensures that most married women will remain economically dependent on their husbands. Benería and Roldán found that husbands exercised control at a number of points in the process of spending income. Many husbands, first of all, gave their wives allowances without telling them how much their wages were. Second, husbands often kept back some money for personal spending. The wives were expected to meet all of the family's expenses without asking for further contributions. And in all cases, the wives contributed their entire earnings to the family pot.

Still, in those cases in which women contributed a substantial proportion of the household's income, they did report more power over family decision making. Thus, a Mexico City woman said that, because of her relatively large earnings, "I obey and respect him [her husband], but I feel I also have some rights." Most women like her, Benería and Roldán found, had won the right to answer back when their husbands demanded that they do something and to make their views known to their husbands, as long as they did not embarrass their husbands publicly. These may seem like minor victories, but for the women involved, they were significant changes that bolstered their self-esteem and offered some protection from abuses of power by their husbands.

Ask Yourself

1. When you first went to work, did you notice a change in your relationship with your parents or spouse? Did you gain more respect?
2. Are the money and increased power married women gain by performing part-time or temporary work worthwhile, given the benefits and job security they are denied? Are married women who work part-time exploited?

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to stay home and take care of the children while his wife worked?" In the 10-year period between surveys the proportion of men who said they would respect a man *more* increased from 6 to 17 percent, while the proportion who said they would respect a man *less* decreased from 39 to 19 percent (Pagnini & Rindfuss, 1993). At the start of the twenty-first century, a substantial change in husbands' and wives' housework and childcare may be underway.

Quick Review

- Sociologists distinguish between two ways a person or group can dominate others: power and authority.
- Wives have less power in marriage in part because they invest in activities such as raising children that are valuable only to their current husband, not to other potential spouses.
- Mothers tend to earn less than childless women—about 4 percent less per child.
- Men's increase in housework has slowed, suggesting that they may not have fully adjusted to the movement of women into the paid labor force.

Overload and Spillover between Paid Work and Family Life

role overload the state of having too many roles with conflicting demands

The growth of dual-earner families and employed single parents has raised concerns that parents may be performing too many roles with conflicting demands—a condition that is sometimes called **role overload.** The roles these adults play can include worker, spouse, parent, and sometimes caregiver to other relatives. A 1997 survey of employed women and men found that 85 percent lived with family members and had daily responsibilities at home. Forty-six percent had children under age 18 at home, and 13 percent were providing care to an elderly or other adult relative (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). Clearly, most employed adults have to juggle the demands of home and work.

However, research has *not* found a clear relationship between the number of roles a person must manage and the degree of distress she or he experiences (Thoits, 1992). In fact, there is some evidence that people with multiple roles (including nonfamily roles such as being involved in the activities of a religious organization) may in some cases have better mental health than people with fewer roles (Thoits, 1986; Barnett & Hyde, 2001). People with multiple roles may be able to compensate for stress in one by success in another. Multiple roles may also increase one's social network and therefore provide more opportunities for social support (Barnett & Hyde, 2001). It may be that multiple roles increase a person's sense of meaning and purpose in life and therefore improve mental health. Or it may be that mentally healthier people join more organizations, are more likely to marry, and have busier lives. In any case, paid work and family roles may sometimes enhance each other rather than conflict (Galinsky, 2001).

OVERWORKED AND UNDERWORKED AMERICANS

Some observers have suggested that balancing work and family has become more difficult for Americans because they are working longer hours. This was the thesis of the best-selling book *The Overworked American* (Schor, 1992). Yet a closer look reveals that while some Americans are overworked, others are underworked. Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson (2004) compared Census data from 1970 and 2000 and found two very different trends. People with professional and managerial jobs were indeed working longer hours in 2000 than in 1970. Most of these people received weekly salaries that remained the same no matter how many hours they worked. Consequently, employers had an incentive to pressure them to work longer hours, especially given the downsizing of the workforce in many firms. In contrast, people in other occupations were working fewer hours in 2000 than in 1970. These workers tended to receive hourly wages, which meant their employers had to pay them more for every extra hour worked. Instead of encouraging these sales and these service workers to work longer hours, employers have tended to hire more part-time workers. Often part-time workers are not eligible for fringe benefits such as health insurance, which provides further savings to employers. In sum, the labor market seems to be moving in opposite directions at the top and bottom, toward longer hours among the college-educated and shorter hours among the less-well-educated.

Still, workers can *feel* overloaded, even if they are not working longer hours than they used to. Today, fewer families include a wife who devotes all her time

to housework and childcare. More families now feel the faster pace of combining paid employment with raising children. But again, people's feelings about this trend may differ according to their education and occupation. More than half the college graduates in a 1992 survey of employed women and men said they would prefer to work fewer hours than they currently worked. Yet less than one-third of those without a high school degree said they would prefer to work fewer hours (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). At the top of the labor market, workers are feeling overloaded but economically secure; at the lower end, they are feeling underemployed and economically insecure.

SPILLOVER

Another motif in the research literature is that stressful events in one part of a person's daily life often spill over into other parts of her or his life. **Spillover** can occur whether or not the person experiences role overload. In other words, a bad day at even an enjoyable job can cause a parent to come home and behave angrily toward his or her children. In the 1997 survey of employed women and men, 26 percent of employees said they had not been in a good mood at home because of their work over the past three months; and 28 percent said they did not have enough energy for their families and other important people (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg 1998). In an influential article in the late 1970s, Joseph Pleck argued that spillover involving work and family operates in opposite directions for employed men and employed women. The demands of family life—a school vacation, an ill child—are permitted to intrude into women's jobs more than into men's jobs, he wrote, because supervisors and coworkers expect that when a family emergency arises, mothers rather than fathers will be called upon to deal with it. In contrast, according to Pleck, the stresses of work are permitted to intrude on family life more for men than for women. Because men's jobs are often seen as more demanding and more central to the family's well-being than are women's jobs, it is more acceptable, for example, for husbands to miss school concerts because of business trips than it is for employed wives to do so (Pleck, 1977).

spillover the fact that stressful events in one part of a person's daily life often spill over into other parts of her or his life

It may also be more acceptable for husbands to come home from work irritable or preoccupied than it is for wives. Wives are often cast in a more supportive role, even though their daily lives may be stressful. One woman talked about her husband to two researchers:

> *He takes a lot of crap [at his job]. He gets very few rewards for what he does, and people are not very facilitating there. So it's up to me when he comes home to try and fill that need and make him feel good about himself. And yet, I am not getting any reverse back. (Pearlin & McCall, 1990)*

Wives may serve to buffer husbands from further stress at home more than husbands do for them. One woman in the same study said that when she sees her husband come home troubled, she tells her children, "Dad has a lot on his mind. If you want to ask him for something, wait until later" (Pearlin & McCall, 1990).

Psychologists Nicole A. Roberts and Robert W. Levenson (2001) studied the effects of stress on the marriages of 19 male police officers who, at the end of each workday for a month, completed questionnaires about their level of job stress. Once per week the officers and their wives came to a university laboratory, where they were wired to machines that monitored their physiological responses. They

The stresses of work can spill over to the home lives of married couples.

were then told to discuss the day's activities. On days when the police officers reported more job stress, they showed heightened arousal in their autonomic nervous system—the "fight or flight" response that people may feel if surprised by something unpleasant. They also displayed less positive emotion and more negative emotion in their conversations with their wives. These reactions—the arousal, the greater negative emotion in conversations—have been shown to be correlated with marital distress and divorce in other studies conducted by the authors and their collaborators.

Men also appear more likely to withdraw from their families in reaction to a stressful day at work. One author suggests that the male professionals he studied view displays of stress at home as signs of failure in meeting work responsibilities. Men may instead act weary, which is more acceptable because it can be seen as a sign of hard work, or they may tune out their wives and children. But worries are hard to hide, and withdrawal can lead to irritability and anger, as in this case:

> *A situation that is perfectly normal and next to nothing—something happens with a kid—I may go into a tailspin over it. I might boil up or boil over. Norma will then fly up and say, "You are not treating them fairly." And then it will come out that at that particular point I was up to my eyebrows with the damned business and I just wasn't relaying that. In fact, I was keeping it in. (Weiss, 1990)*

For many blue-collar workers, other causes of stress may be low pay, dirty or dangerous work, or dehumanizing treatment by supervisors. Blue-collar men, some studies show, bring their troubles home in ways similar to middle-class men who have had a bad day at the office. Tired and irritable, blue-collar men sometimes withdraw from their wives and children in the evenings (Mortimer & London, 1984). Low-wage jobs also increase a couple's need for a second income. Consequently, a higher proportion of working-class wives than middle-class wives work outside the home (although the difference is narrowing).

Among the better-educated, work weeks are indeed long. Overall, the percentage of Americans who work very long weeks (50 hours or more) is higher than in Canada and eight European countries, including the United Kingdom (Britain), France, and Germany (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). And dual-earner couples in the United States work a higher number of total hours than do couples in these countries. Yet despite the number of parents working long hours, fewer preschool children are in publicly financed childcare in the United States than in most of these countries. So although more parents work long hours in the United States, public support for childcare is relatively low.

SHIFT WORK AND CHILDCARE

One surprisingly common way in which dual-earner couples manage childcare is to work different shifts. In one study, one-third of all dual-earner couples with preschool-aged children had at least one spouse working an evening, night, or rotating shift (Presser, 1999). Husbands who were home when their wives were working did more cooking, cleaning, and washing than husbands who were never home when their wives were working (Presser, 1994). The increase in nonday-shift and weekend work isn't due solely to couples' childcare needs. The growth of the service sector of the economy is also responsible. Nevertheless, when asked why they were working evening or night shifts, a majority of married women in a Census Bureau survey said the main reason was that their hours made it easier to care for their children or other relatives (Presser, 1989).

In fact, it appears that wives and husbands in many of these split-shift couples are sharing the childcare (Presser, 1989). How best to care for the children of employed parents is a topic that will be discussed in later chapters. Some observers view staggered-shift parent care as a good solution to the childcare problem. Other things being equal, parents arguably provide better care in most instances than nonrelatives. But split-shift childcare sharing is not without its difficulties. Employed wives, who still tend to accommodate their working hours to their spouse's needs more than their husbands do, may be forced to turn down better jobs or work fewer hours so that they can be available when their husbands aren't home. Couples working different shifts may have little time for each other, and their marriages may suffer. In a national sample of recently married couples with children who were followed for five years, divorce was six times more likely among husbands who worked a night schedule rather than a day schedule (Presser, 2000). One repair worker told Lillian Rubin:

> *I usually get home about forty-five minutes or so before my wife has to leave for work, so we try to take a few minutes just to make contact. But it's hard with the kids and all. Most days the whole time gets spent with taking care of business—you know, who did what, what the kids need, what's for supper, what bill collector was hassling her while I was gone—all the damn garbage of living. It makes me nuts. (Rubin, 1994)*

Single parents, of course, do not have the luxury of relying on a spouse to provide care, regardless of when they work. Yet never-married, separated, or divorced mothers are even more likely to work nonday, weekend, or rotating shifts than married mothers, perhaps because of their more limited education or work experience (Presser, 1989). With few commercial childcare providers offering evening, night, or weekend care, single mothers must often rely on their own

mothers or other relatives. Here again, one could argue that, as caregivers, grandmothers are superior to nonrelatives. Many of the grandmothers, however, are themselves working or are caring for their own aging parents (see Chapter 10); providing care may be a strain on them. Some single mothers, with no one to rely on, attempt to care for their children themselves while working. Nationally, 8 percent of all preschool-aged children with employed mothers were cared for by the mothers themselves. For example, a mother might earn money by caring for the children of several other employed mothers as well as her own children. Employed single parents are sometimes successful in constructing new support networks made up of kin and friends. Still, it seems likely that overload and spillover are a greater problem for employed single parents than for employed married parents.

UNEMPLOYMENT

Most of the studies of spillover between work and family assume that adults in the family who want to work outside the home can find and keep a job. Yet unemployment also creates stress. Research dating back to the Great Depression suggests that unemployment is more likely to cause marital problems among couples whose marriages were already shaky before the husband or wife lost a job (Komarovsky, 1971). More recently, a Boston area study of 82 families in which the husband had recently lost his job found that spouses who rated their marriages as satisfactory prior to the job loss were less anxious and depressed afterward (Liem & Liem, 1990). The Boston study, an Iowa study of 76 rural families, and a few others like them provide some insight into the process by which job loss leads to family problems. At the first interview, the unemployed husbands in the Boston study were more depressed and anxious than a matching group of employed husbands, but their wives were not more depressed or anxious than the wives of employed husbands. Four months later, however, the wives were experiencing more depression and anxiety. The authors speculate that many husbands become upset soon after the job loss and begin to act irritably and angrily toward their wives and children. Most wives are not as upset initially, but as their financial concerns grow and their husbands' behavior worsens, they often develop psychological symptoms. The Iowa study showed similarly that economic strain leads husbands to behave in a hostile way toward their wives—as well as to reduce their warm, supportive behavior. The husbands' hostility and lack of warmth, in turn, lead wives to feel less positively about their marriages. If the wives then respond with hostile behavior, their husbands' satisfaction with the marriage also declines (Conger et al., 1990).

On the whole, the available studies suggest that it is not as much the absence of supportive behavior as the presence of angry, irritable, hostile behavior that triggers these declines in the quality of the marriage. The results are consistent with laboratory observations that cycles of negative behavior from husband to wife and back are central to escalating marital conflict (Gottman, 1979). The studies also suggest that spouses with fewer prior psychological problems and more social support from kin and friends are more likely to weather the storm of unemployment. Finally, working-class and middle-class families show similar distress when a parent loses his or her job, despite their differing economic circumstances. Working-class families, who typically have few financial reserves, experience the more immediate economic consequences, but they report receiving

more support from kin and friends than do middle-class families. Among the latter group, losing a job, as has happened to executives during the recent waves of corporate "downsizing," means losing status and social identity (Liem & Liem, 1990).

TOWARD A RESPONSIVE WORKPLACE?

To judge by the concerns of workers and, increasingly, of corporate managers, the strict separation of paid work and family life is indeed breaking down. When employed women and men in the 1992 survey who had been at their current jobs for less than five years were asked how important various factors were in their original decisions to take their jobs, 60 percent said that the job's effect on personal and family life was very important and 46 percent said that family-supportive policies at the job were important. In contrast, only 35 percent said that wages and salary were important. Moreover, one-quarter to one-third of those without access to flexible working hours said they would switch jobs or sacrifice advancement in their companies to obtain flexible hours. About half without access to time off to care for sick relatives said they would trade salary or other benefits to obtain it (Galinsky, Bond, & Friedman, 1993). Clearly, family responsibilities are on the minds of many workers. Congress has been paying more attention, too. (See *Families and Public Policy:* Putting Work–Family Issues on the Agenda, on pp. 284–285.)

During the 1980s and 1990s, corporations began to address these concerns. They did so largely out of self-interest. The Census Bureau estimates that 62 percent of the new entrants to the labor force between 1998 and 2006 will be women, many of whom will have family responsibilities (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1999b). Employers who wish to recruit and retain good workers realize that they must make their jobs attractive to people who are caring for children—and to the growing number who are caring for elderly parents. Most large firms now have some personnel policies to help employees with family responsibilities (Glass & Estes, 1997). Small firms are much less likely to offer family-friendly policies for several reasons:

- They typically do not invest as much time and money training new workers, so they don't have as much to lose if employees quit because of family-related problems.
- They don't have the volume of workers necessary to make services such as on-site childcare cost-effective.
- Because of their lower sales revenues, they cannot pass along the costs of the policies to consumers as easily as large firms can.

Consequently, a two-tiered class system is developing: Larger firms, which tend to have better-paying, steadier jobs and better-educated workforces, offer better policies to help workers achieve balance between the demands of work and family; smaller firms, which tend to have lower-paying, less-steady jobs and less-well-educated workforces, provide less help. So middle-class, well-educated managers and professionals and better-paid blue-collar factory workers are much more likely to be offered assistance with family demands than are less-advantaged workers (Deitch & Huffman, 2001).

Even among large firms, much of the assistance is limited, such as establishing information and referral offices to match parents with childcare openings. Cash benefits are usually limited to salary reduction plans that allow workers not to

Families and Public Policy

Putting Work–Family Issues on the Agenda

Half a century ago, the breadwinner–homemaker family was at its peak. Few married women with young children worked outside the home, and few members of Congress favored assistance for employed mothers. But today several laws provide benefits for working parents, and Congress seems poised to pass more legislation. When and how did this change?

Sociologist Paul Burstein and his colleagues examined this question by counting the number of members of Congress who sponsored (officially supported) various kinds of work–family bills between 1945 and 1990 (Burstein & Bricher, 1997; Burstein, Bricher, & Einwohner, 1995; and Burstein & Wierzbicki, 2000).

The results are presented in the figure, which shows the number of sponsors for three different types of legislation over the 45-year period. Though most of the bills did not become law, their content is informative. The first type, "separate spheres" bills, contained proposals that would support families in which the husband worked outside the home and the wife did not. An example was legislation that would have limited the number of hours women could work, to protect their ability to be good mothers. Unthinkable today, such bills were commonplace in the first half of the twentieth century. The black line in the chart shows a modest but steady number of sponsors for these bills throughout the 1945–1990 period.

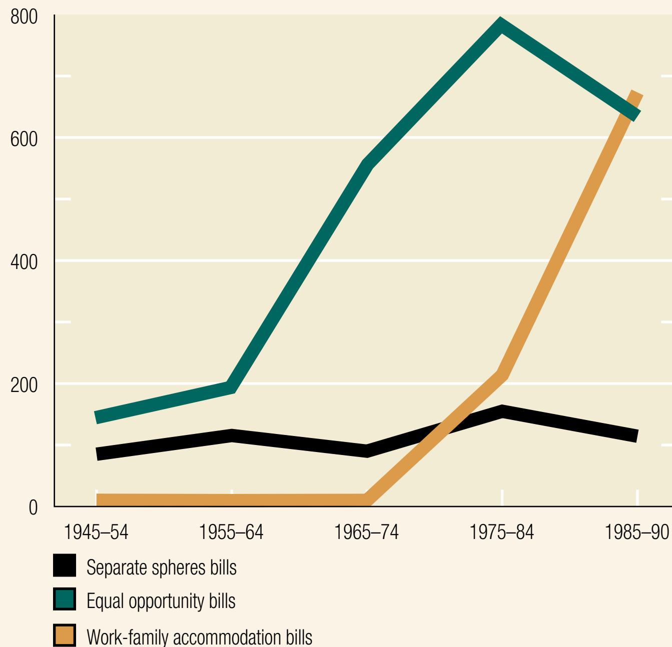
The second type of legislation, "Equal opportunity" bills, was based on the premise that working women were entitled to the same opportunities as working men. For instance, they might require employers to pay equal wages to women and men doing the same job. Such an idea might seem obvious, but before the 1960s many employers paid women less than men, on the theory that men were the main earners for their families and so deserved more than women. The green line in the figure shows a modest number of sponsors for equal-opportunity bills until the mid-1960s, after which sponsorships rose sharply. Not coincidentally, the mid-1960s were the era of the civil rights movement and the birth of the modern feminist movement.

Most recently, legislators have supported "work–family accommodation," including an income tax credit for child care expenses. These bills attempt to help parents combine paid work with childrearing. The red line in the figure shows that sponsorship of this type of bill was rare through most of the period, but rose dramatically during the 1970s and 1980s. Had the study continued into the 1990s, it undoubtedly would have shown further growth. In 1993, for example, Congress passed the Family and Medical Leave Act, which allows workers to take time off to care for newborns and seriously ill children or to handle other family medical emergencies.

pay taxes on the part of their earnings (up to a limit) they spend on childcare. Yet these plans are of more value to higher-paid employees—who can afford to have the extra earnings withheld from their paychecks by their employers and who pay a greater percentage of their incomes in taxes—than to working-class employees.

flextime a policy that allows employees to choose, within limits, when they will begin and end their working hours

One of the most common, and most widely used, employee benefits is **flextime,** a policy that allows employees to choose, within limits, when they will begin and end their working hours. For example, a company might allow its employees to begin work anytime between 7:00 and 9:00 A.M. and to leave anytime from 3:00 to 5:00 P.M., as long as they work eight hours. Studies suggest that this is the family-friendly policy workers use the most (Galinsky, 1992; Hochschild, 1997). In the 1997 survey, 45 percent of employees said they could choose, within a range of hours, when they began and ended their workdays (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1998). Again, middle-class employees benefit more than working-class employees: The more prestigious the occupational category, the more likely workers are to have flextime (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2003t). Employed parents use flextime to match their work schedules to the school or day care schedules of their children. Flextime doesn't necessarily increase the



Sponsorship of Work-Family Legislation, 1945–1970. (*Source:* Burstein, Bricher, & Einwohner, 1995.)

Why have work–family accommodation bills been proposed only recently? Not until the 1980s did a majority of married mothers of young children take jobs outside the home (see Figure 8.1). In other words, not until that time did members of Congress face a large constituency of working parents clamoring for help in accommodating their children as well as their jobs.

Ask Yourself

1. Do you know any couples who are trying to raise a family while both of them work full time? If so, what is their major problem? Could a change in public policy help to solve it?
2. Should American workers receive paid parental leaves, like workers in some European countries?

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amount of time parents can spend with their children, but it does allow them to avoid stressful conflicts between childcare and job responsibilities.

To be able to spend more time with their children, especially when they are infants or when they are sick, employed parents need other options. One of these is **parental leave,** time off from work to care for a child, with a guarantee that the employee can have her or his job back when she or he returns. Many employers have been reluctant to grant parental leave automatically because they have feared it would hurt their productivity and cost too much. Most Western European nations require corporations to provide parental leave; yet in this regard, as in many family policies, the United States lags behind. Sweden has the most generous plan: 15 months of leave at partial pay (Moss & Deven, 1999). A modest parental leave bill was enacted by Congress and signed by President Clinton as one of his first acts in office in 1993. It required companies with 50 or more employees to offer unpaid leaves of up to 12 weeks to employees with newborn babies or seriously ill children or other relatives. Employers must allow employees to return to their jobs at the end of the leave. In 2002, California became the first state to require employees to provide parental leave with partial pay (Broder, 2002).

parental leave time off from work to care for a child

Most Western European governments provide parental leave with partial pay to care for newborn or seriously-ill children. In all U.S. states except California, only unpaid leave is offered.

Other innovations are as yet less common. These include part-time work with fringe benefits and job sharing. Whether significant numbers of part-time jobs with fringe benefits will be created remains to be seen. In job sharing, two people split the time and duties of a full-time position usually held by one person. Unlike part-time positions, which are often in low-status occupations, shared jobs presumably can be on a higher level—and therefore more appealing. The small number of existing shared jobs tend to be in such professions as teaching, psychology, and social work. Few have been created in for-profit corporations (Kamerman & Kahn, 1987).

Overall, there has been progress in making the workplace more responsive to workers' family needs. The least progress, however, has occurred in occupations that don't pay well. Yet workers in low-paying jobs need assistance *more* than those who are better paid. For instance, a 1990 survey showed that, among mothers who were paying for care and had a child under age 5, those earning less than $15,000 spend 23 percent of their incomes for childcare, whereas mothers earning more than $35,000 spent just 7 percent of their incomes for childcare (Hofferth, 1992). Another study showed that the cost of childcare keeps some low-income women from taking jobs (Baum, 2002). Future changes in the nature of work could widen the gap between poor and nonpoor. Visionaries write that as the economy turns to information processing rather than manufacturing, computer-assisted communication could allow large numbers of workers to do their jobs from home.[2] Such a shift, it is proposed, could make it easier for family care-

[2]Galinsky (1992), for example, writers of the "anytime anyplace office."

takers to mesh the demands of family and job. About one-fourth of workers in the 1997 survey said they were regularly allowed to work at home. Yet changes such as these are easier to imagine in professional and clerical jobs than in lower-paying part-time service jobs such as janitors and waiters. It may be more of a challenge, therefore, to provide a responsive workplace for workers at the low end of the occupational distribution than at the high end.

Corporate efforts, although increasing and important, are unlikely to meet the demands of employees for assistance in caring for children and the elderly. To the extent that they do, they will benefit middle-class employees and those in large firms more than working-class employees or those in small firms. These conclusions led advocates of the so-called **responsive workplace**—meaning a work setting in which job conditions are designed to allow employees to meet their family responsibilities more easily—to urge that corporate initiatives be supplemented by government assistance targeted at low-income workers. In the 1990s, pressure from working parents prompted Congress to enact legislation providing childcare assistance, beginning with a 1990 bill. The 1996 welfare reform law (see Chapter 14) also included childcare assistance funds for parents who left the welfare rolls to take jobs. But in the early 2000s, little further assistance has been forthcoming.

responsive workplace a work setting in which job conditions are designed to allow employees to meet their family responsibilities more easily

Quick Review

- Inspite of some concerns, having multiple roles (parent, spouse, paid employee) does not seem to reduce mental health.
- A greater percentage of American workers, and American dual-earner couples, put in very long work weeks than do workers in most other developed nations.
- The stress of one's paid job can spill over into one's family life and cause family conflict.
- Workers in large firms receive more benefits to help them balance their family and paid work lives.

Looking Back

1. **How has married women's work changed over the past half-century?** In the second half of the twentieth century, married women entered the labor force in large numbers. A majority of married women with young children are now employed outside the home. The rise of the service sector and the long-term decline in fertility are two important reasons for women's increase in labor force participation. Women still earn less money than men, in part because they have less labor market experience, but also because employers tend to pay women less than they pay men for comparable work. Women's earnings rose relative to men's in the 1980s and 1990s, because well-educated women workers were faring better and less-well-educated men were faring worse than they had in the past.

2. **How has the amount of housework and childcare done by husbands and wives changed over the past half-century?** Wives have greatly reduced the amount of housework they do, while husbands have increased theirs. As a result, the relative amount of housework done by husbands and wives has become less unequal, although wives still do twice as much as husbands. Overall, the total amount of housework being done has declined; couples are buying more services, such as restaurant meals, than they used to.

3. **How does our society treat the labor of caring for others?** Much of the caring labor in families was provided by wives in the home. It was not considered "work" because it was unpaid and consisted of caring for people. As women have moved into the paid labor force, the value of the caring they provided has become evident and has proven difficult to replace. Some authors suggests that we must place a higher value on caring labor—paid and unpaid.

4. **How do sociologists think about power and authority within marriage?** By power, sociologists mean the ability to force someone to take an action against her or his will; by authority, they mean the acknowledged right to supervise other people or to act on their behalf. The kinds of work women and men do are related to wives' and husbands' authority and power in the family. In general, working for pay outside the home increases a person's power in the family; therefore, wives who work outside the home tend to have relatively more family power.

5. **What are some of the strains working parents can experience?** Working parents may suffer from overload due to their multiple roles as workers, parents, caregivers, and spouses. Difficulties at work can spill over into their home lives, leading to their emotional withdrawal from the family or to irritable, angry exchanges. One increasingly common way for dual-earner couples to manage childcare is to work split shifts, a practice that provides children with parental care but can strain a marriage to the point of divorce.

6. **How is the workplace responding to the needs of working parents?** Workers are concerned about meshing their jobs with their family responsibilities, and corporations and government are responding. Large corporations are increasingly providing limited assistance such as childcare information and referral offices and flexible hours. So far, these and other reforms have benefited middle-class workers and employees of large corporations more than low-paid workers and employees of small corporations. In response to worker demands, government childcare assistance has increased.

Study Questions

1. How has the life of the typical married woman changed since the middle of the twentieth century?
2. Why have the earnings of women risen relative to the earnings of men since 1980?
3. Why has caring labor been undervalued relative to other kinds of work?
4. What does an "ethic of care" mean?
5. What are the bases of men's power and authority over women in marriage?
6. Why do women seemingly pay a "motherhood penalty" in lost wages relative to childless women?
7. Why do some Americans feel overworked while others feel underworked?
8. Why do middle-class workers typically receive more family-related benefits than workers who earn less?

Key Terms

authority 272
care work 270
flextime 284
formal sector 276
informal sector 276
parental leave 285
power 272
relationship-specific investment 274
responsive workplace 287
role overload 278
service sector 264
spillover 279

Thinking about Families

Public Family	Private Family
Are benefits such as family leave or tax credits for childcare unfair to workers without children?	**Might couples' feelings toward each other be different if they shared the housework and childcare equally?**

Families on the Internet www.mhhe.com/cherlin

Note: While all the URLs listed were current as of the printing of this book, these sites often change. Please check our web site (http://www.mhhe.com/cherlin) for updates.

To get a sense of the concerns of working parents, go to one of the web pages designed especially for parents by a major search engine, such as www.excite.com/guide/family/parenting/working_parents. There you will find links to information sources, on-line magazines, advice, message forums, and the like. After examining some of the links, list the topics that seem most important.

Shift work (evening, night, weekend, or rotating work schedules) has become such a common strategy for handling work and childcare that at least one web site is devoted to it: www.shiftworker.com. What are the particular challenges this site focuses on?

Dealing with the family issues of employees has become a speciality for some managers. A clearinghouse for information on work–family issues and problems is www.workfamily.com. Read the tip of the month, scan the list of important studies, and explore other features of this site. If you were an employer using this site, what would you learn about managing workers with work–family conflicts?

An advocacy group on care work, www.takecarenet.org, seeks to link academic researchers and practitioners of care with policy-makers and the media. It provides links to a number of useful sites on issues such as paid family leave and early education and child care.