

Psychology at the Intersection of Work and Family

Recommendations for Employers, Working Families, and Policymakers

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Demographic data show that major changes have been occurring in the everyday lives of families over the last generation, with the majority of mothers of young children in the workforce and an increasing number of men and women assuming caregiving responsibilities for older relatives. Thus, the 2 primary identities of most adults, defined by their multiple family and work roles, need to be coordinated in ways that promote positive family outcomes, returns on investments for employers, and societal values. Despite changes in the workforce, the world of work is still largely organized for a family model that is increasingly rare—one with a stay-at-home caregiver. Recommendations based on psychological and other social science research are offered to align the needs of working families and employers.

Keywords: working families, maternal employment, work-stress, fathers, work policies

I started my doctoral program in 1976 with a two-and-a-half-year-old daughter, a five-year-old son, an employed spouse, and a mountain of debt from school loans. According to data from the Census Bureau (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000), about one third of women with children under the age of six worked outside the home at that time, a number that probably underestimated the number of employed women because it did not include those who worked informally for others or those who worked in family businesses and did not report their employment to avoid paying taxes or to prevent detection by immigration or other authorities.

It is now a generation later, and my daughter, who now has her own five-month-old daughter, is about to start law school. An almost silent social revolution has taken place in the intervening generation. In 2002, 66% of married women with a child under two years of age were employed and 60% of married women with a child under one year of age were employed (Trei, 2002). Consider, for comparison, the generation that came before me. In my parents' generation, 18% of mothers with children under six worked outside the home. These numbers tell a story about important changes in the everyday lives of families and in the composition of the workforce. In 1976 I had no idea how dual-earner professional couples would both find jobs in the same city or how families and employers would respond when one child in a family gets chicken pox and is sick for a week and then the other child in the family gets

chicken pox and is sick for the next week, and so on. Twenty-five years and one generation later, a substantial number of adults are still trying to figure out how to integrate their sometimes conflicting and sometimes facilitating identities—that is, their multiple roles as workers and family members (parents, grandparents, sons, daughters, aunts, uncles, etc.).

In response to the changing demographics of families and the workforce, I formed an American Psychological Association (APA) Presidential Task Force during my term as president of APA in 2004 to review the social science research literature and to make recommendations for employers, public policies, schools and communities, and working families (see www.apa.org/work-family). All recommendations from the task force are supported with research cited in the Work-Family Best Evidence Data Base that contains three to six references (with abstracts), so that readers may be assured that every recommendation is

Editor's note. Diane F. Halpern was president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in 2004. This article is based on her presidential address, delivered in Honolulu, Hawaii at APA's 112th Annual Convention on July 31, 2004.

Author's note. Portions of this article are based on "Public Policy, Work, and Families: The Report of the APA Presidential Initiative on Work and Families" available in its entirety online at www.apa.org/work-family.

I express my sincere thanks to the APA Presidential Initiative on Work and Families task force members/contributors: Tammy D. Allen, University of South Florida; Eileen Applebaum, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey; Kathleen Christensen, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation; Stephan Desrochers, University of Maine at Farmington; Beth Donaghey, Vanderbilt University; Carol Evans, Working Mother Media; Rhea K. Farberman, APA; Stewart D. Friedman, University of Pennsylvania; Ellen Galinsky, Families and Work Institute; Barbara Gault, Institute for Women's Policy Research; Adele Gottfried, California State University, Northridge; Leslie Hammer, Portland State University; Jody Heymann, Harvard School of Public Health; E. Jeffrey Hill, Brigham Young University School of Family Life and IBM Global Workforce Diversity; Florence W. Kaslow, Florida Couples and Family Institute; Gwendolyn P. Keita, APA; Donna M. Klein, Corporate Voices for Working Families; Karen Kornbluh, New America Foundation; Sara Link, Goldman Sachs; Dianne Maranto, APA; Bruce McEwen, Rockefeller University; Patricia Raskin, Columbia University; Heidi Riggio, California State University, Los Angeles; Harvey Sterns, University of Akron; Sherylle Tan, Claremont McKenna College; Melba Vasquez, Vasquez & Associates Mental Health Service; and Sheldon Zedeck, University of California, Berkeley.

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backed by a body of research that is periodically updated and is available online (see <http://berger.claremontmckenna.edu>). The task force began with a broad range of questions: What sorts of business policies can provide returns on investments and help working families meet their obligations? What advice can the social science research literature offer to working families who are deciding about work options, schedules, and care arrangements for family members? How can psychologists use the empirical data to inform public policies, schools, and community organizations? This article is based on some of the findings of the Presidential Initiative on Work and Families, including the report of the task force (Halpern, 2004b).

Families Are Changing

The two-parent, single-wage-earner family that was idolized in 1960s sitcoms is becoming a statistical rarity in the real world, despite its longevity in the imaginary world of black and white TV (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Because of the dominance of TV in popular culture, most readers who grew up in the United States, or those who watch cable TV, are probably familiar with the fictional TV world where “father knew best” and the “Beav’s” mother cleaned house in a pearl necklace and shirtwaist dress—a world with a working dad, a stay-at-home mom, and 2.2 cute kids. In reality, poor women have always worked, rich mothers have always had child care, and many women from all socioeconomic levels, with and without children, have worked in informal arrangements that have not been captured in official tallies. Thus, despite what may be an overestimate in the change in the employment status of women, the increase in the number of mothers in the workforce, especially mothers of young children, is one of

the largest social changes in the last half of the 20th century.

Occurring with this silent social revolution are other major demographic changes in the United States, most notably, the graying of America. The aging of the population has a rippling effect that extends beyond the older workers who are phasing into retirement, because it also affects younger and healthier adults who are caring for older, infirm relatives. A significant proportion of the workforce is already caring for older adults, and that number is expected to increase. Forty-five to 50% of working adults expect to assume significant caretaking responsibilities for aging relatives within the next five years, and many others are already caring for family members with disabilities. Employers who have been subtly discriminating against women with young children may find their plan backfiring, as older workers, male and female, need to care for aging relatives. Caregiving responsibilities among adults are not always along traditional gendered lines—that is, it is not always women who are taking care of older adults. In a recent study, Chesley and Moen (in press) found that although women were more likely to provide consistent care, approximately 24% of the men sampled in their Ecology of Careers study (who met certain criteria, including being in a dual-earner marriage) reported that they had been caregivers during the two-year period in which the sampling was done. When the men in dual-earner couples provided caregiving for a relative, they reported increases in measures of personal growth. By contrast, the women in Chesney and Moen’s sample, who were also in dual-earner couples, reported increases in psychological stress. The authors found no evidence that the distress was reduced even when the women transitioned out of their role as caregivers.

There are several studies that suggest that clinical psychologists need to be aware of the many issues surrounding the stresses and benefits of family caregiving and other gender-related variables that come into play for working adult couples (Haddock & Bowling, 2001). It seems that the relational nature of adult caregiving, especially spousal caregiving, has different meanings and psychological consequences for adult women and men. It is also clear that the issue of “work and family” is no longer synonymous with “work and child care.” These are not “women’s issues” or “the problems of hiring young women.” Yet the same solutions for restructuring the workplace to meet the challenges of a workforce with child caregiving responsibilities would help to alleviate some of the stresses of workers who are faced with the difficulties of handling work responsibilities and caring for aging and infirm adults or for persons of any age with disabilities.

Contemporary families are more varied than in previous generations. There are too many types of families to try to name them all—for example, stepfamilies, same-sex parents and couples, grandparents raising second-generation children, child-free couples, singles, surrogate parents, foster care families, families with disabled parents and children, and all sorts of informal arrangements. Almost half of Americans are or will be in stepfamilies at some

point in their lives. Closely linked with stepparenting is the issue of cohabiting couples who are raising children together without the formal benefits of marriage. In 2000, there were 5.5 million unmarried couples who lived together in the United States, and these “cohabitators” represented 9% of all couples in the United States (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). Thus, attempts to understand the intersection of work and family life must take into account the diversity of family situations and recognize that any generalization from dual-earner families or any other single-family structure is likely to miss many important contextual variables that could be overshadowed by ethnicity, regional differences, socioeconomic status, religious beliefs, and many other family level variables.

On average, Americans are marrying at older ages, having fewer children, living longer, and obtaining more education. Attitudinal surveys have found that cohorts with the most education are increasingly more egalitarian in their beliefs about the roles of women and men (Caplow, Hicks, & Wattenberg, 2001). The best educated are spending more money on fewer children and devoting more years to care for them, and they are becoming parents after they have worked for several years. This pattern is in distinct contrast to that of their lower income counterparts, and this discrepancy is creating an ever-widening wage gap between the rich and the poor in the United States. This widening gap is creating two different Americas, divided by a middle class that is shrinking in size (Aspen Institute, 2003).

The new technological demands of the workplace and knowledge economy mean that every generation needs more education than the preceding one just to stay in the same place socioeconomically. Education has become the passport to the middle class, and increasingly some groups are not gaining entry. The better paying jobs require an advanced education and computer skills, which leaves workers who have low levels of education and few job skills with only low-wage job options. Lifelong learning has gone from slogan to necessity, which means that education is inextricably entwined with work and family issues. This may be the first generation in which children and grandchildren are teaching technological workplace skills to older family members. New models of intergenerational learning at home, school, and on the job are needed to capitalize on these informal learning arrangements, especially as technology continues to blur boundaries among work, home, and school.

Effects of Maternal Employment on Children

Given the large number of employed mothers and the general tendency to blame mothers for all of society’s ills (Caplan, 1990), the most important contemporary question in developmental psychology for many working mothers is, What is the effect of maternal employment on children? A recent review of the history of research on maternal employment and child development by Gottfried and her associates (Gottfried, 2005; Gottfried & Gottfried, in press)

is briefly summarized here. The explicit assumption has been, and to some extent still is, that maternal employment must be detrimental to children because it takes the mother away from her child, and psychological research was designed accordingly to detect the effects of maternal deprivation on children. The maternal deprivation hypothesis is a natural assumption derived from a traditional psychoanalytical perspective in which mothers are considered to be of “unparalleled importance to [the] child’s psychological development” (Gottfried & Gottfried, in press). Contrary to predictions of deleterious outcomes, maternal employment per se is not related to child outcomes. It is far too simplistic to look at whether a mother is employed or not employed and then search for relevant developmental effects on the children. Outcomes are dependent on the context of family circumstances, including the quality of child care, home environment, marital status, consistency of employment (with instability and transition being more negative), and other related variables.

There are two clear research findings that are important in understanding the relationship between parental employment and health and cognitive outcomes for children: (a) Poverty is uniformly harmful to children and (b) working parents—mothers and fathers—are not. In a study of the effect of income on the development of young children, Yeung, Linver, and Brooks-Gunn (2002) concluded that poor families cannot provide their children with the kinds of environments that promote cognitive development and that the stress of poverty is linked to parenting behaviors that increase the probability of behavioral problems in children. Thus, poverty operates in at least two ways to create negative outcomes for children; by working and bringing their family out of poverty, mothers and families are greatly contributing to their children’s development.

Even retrospective studies have shown that maternal employment has few, if any, negative effects on children. For example, in a recent study conducted under the auspices of the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, researchers examined the effect of maternal employment during a child’s first three years of life and at adolescence (Aughinbaugh, & Gittleman, 2003). The researchers were concerned with the effect of having a working mother early in childhood on adolescent risky behaviors, such as the use of alcohol and marijuana, smoking cigarettes, engaging in sexual intercourse, and the use of birth control for those adolescents who were having sexual intercourse. They found that maternal employment in the first three years of life had no effect on risky behaviors committed when the children became teenagers, and with the possible lone exception of alcohol use, maternal employment during adolescence also had no effect on the adolescents’ participation in risky behaviors.

Given that the majority of mothers of young children are in the workforce, they may be reassured by the research findings that children can develop equally well regardless of the employment status of their parents. The home environment is a far more important determinant of how children fare as they grow up, because caring parents sacrifice

their own personal time and find ways to adapt their schedules and their own needs to attend to their children's needs (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 2002). Research shows that having a mother who works outside the home is not harmful to children. Although well-publicized research reported a connection between nonmaternal day care and children's negative behavior (Belsky, 2001), the vast majority of children are doing fine, and most research shows that having a working mother may lead to positive outcomes for children, including increased academic achievement and fewer behavior problems, especially when the mother wants to work and has sufficient support at home and at work. There is an emerging consensus that effects are more likely to be negative when the work schedule of the caretaking parents (usually the mother) is erratic and unpredictable; the hours are long; and she faces other significant stressors, such as poor health, poverty, and little control over work-related events. In other words, children, families, and work suffer when the parent has few sources of support and stress is high. Thus, it is not work status per se but the entire system of stressors that cascades to produce negative outcomes. By contrast, quality interplay among child care, work, family, and society leads to positive long-term gains for children (Marshall, 2004).

The work status of a parent is not as critical a determinant for child development as having a supportive home environment and a warm, loving parent or other adult and avoiding the negative correlates and consequences of poverty. Instead of being apologetic for employed mothers, we can acknowledge the positive outcomes they provide. This can be done without denigrating those mothers who choose to stay at home with their children or who make other life choices or different choices at different stages of their life. There is no single best life choice for all people, and in reality, most adults do not have much choice about whether to work for pay because despite the positive benefits of paid employment, such as enhanced self-esteem and reduced depression (Barnett & Hyde, 2001), most in fact work to pay for rent, food, insurance, and other necessities.

The long-running "mommy wars" and games of mother blame are political and personal, but all participants and even the bystanders are damaged by the "friendly fire." It is time to call a truce to the war and end the blame games. There are critically important benefits associated with additional income for low-wage families, especially when the additional income moves a family out of poverty. In addition, data clearly show that there are benefits for adults whose mothers were employed when they were growing up. Young men and women who grew up with mothers who were employed outside the home have more positive attitudes toward dual-earner families and are more likely to believe that husbands and wives should have equal responsibility for household work (Riggio & Desrochers, 2005). More egalitarian attitudes and more active participation in housework are tangible benefits of growing up in a household in which the mother is employed outside the home. Although women's employment patterns continue to be more varied than men's and may include "stop-out" periods and more part-time work, maternal employment is a con-

temporary fact of life for the majority of mothers. Psychologists and others need to do a better job of communicating their research findings on the effects of maternal employment on children (as well as the assumptions that may underlie that research—paternal employment is not questioned, maternal employment will have an effect, etc.) to the general public so that parents and policymakers can make decisions that are informed by the best data.

Fathers' Involvement With Children

One in three children is born to a single mother; therefore, a significant number of children are raised without fathers in the home. Or considered another way, seven million mothers in the United States do not have a spouse to share the work of earning a livelihood and caring for children (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000). There are large numbers of children growing up with little or no involvement with their fathers, a fact that almost all social science research shows to be detrimental to child outcomes. Of course, well-adjusted children are raised in all sorts of family arrangements, and many single mothers raise wonderful children, but in general, research has shown that children raised without fathers are more likely to be raised in poverty and to have the negative outcomes associated with poverty (more crime, less school achievement) than children raised with supportive fathers (Dudley & Stone, 2001).

The role of fathers in children's lives is critically important, but it has often been overlooked. In dual-earner families, the news about fathers is mostly good. Fathers are spending more time caring for children than their own fathers did (although still less than the mothers do), especially when their spouses work. In fact, in married dual-earner families, 30% of fathers reported that their responsibility for child care is equal to or greater than that of their wives (Bond, Swanberg, & Galinsky, 1998). Survey results revealed that for children with two working parents, total time with parents has not shown the expected decrease over the last 25 years but instead has surprisingly increased by an average of one hour a day on work days—from 5.2 hours in 1977 to 6.2 hours in 2002 (Bond, Thompson, Galinsky, & Protas, 2002). Time with parents in dual-earner homes is now distributed more evenly (but still not equally) between mothers and fathers, and there are benefits to spending more time with Dad. Husbands in dual-earner households do more housework than their own fathers did, thus creating new role models for their children.

Unfortunately, the generally good news about fathers in dual-earner families is offset by bad news about fathers in single-parent families. More than 60% of poor children who live with their mothers and whose fathers live outside the home do not receive child support. The main reason why noncustodial fathers fail to pay child support is that they have low incomes themselves, limiting their ability to pay. Work-oriented programs designed to ensure that fathers are doing what they can to support their children financially are beneficial (Sorensen & Zibman, 2001). Job training and early childhood education classes for young men should be a top priority for fathers who are not paying

child support because they are unemployed or earning very low wages. There are a myriad of complex family issues when fathers are resistant to becoming involved in a positive way in the lives of their children. Psychologists perform important services by studying family relations and evaluating programs designed to promote the high-quality involvement of unemployed and low-income fathers.

Children with involved fathers experience better outcomes along multiple dimensions (Sylvester & Reich, 2000). They are less likely to exhibit behavioral problems, engage in risky behaviors (such as drug, alcohol, and cigarette use), or drop out of school, and they have better school attendance, higher college aspirations, and are more likely to become compassionate adults. A child's positive personal relationship with his or her father can have as great an influence (or a greater one) on child development as a maternal relationship (Rohner & Veneziano, 2001). Children also benefit from the additional income provided by working fathers, especially when the additional income moves the family out of poverty. Men show gains in reported life satisfaction and overall happiness when they are involved in the lives of their children. Fathers should be actively involved in the lives of their children. We need to communicate this important message to children and adolescents as they prepare for their adult roles and to new parents as they transition into their new roles so that young men understand that if they father children, they are making an important, lifelong commitment to the psychological well-being of their child.

Caring for Children and Older Persons

Child care and, increasingly, elder care are *the central issues* for working families. Low-wage workers cannot afford quality care unless it is subsidized. The savings to society by providing quality early childhood educational experiences to young children have been calculated by numerous groups, including the Children's Defense Fund (2005). The lack of available child care, especially care for sick children, is the main reason why women fail to stay off welfare—they cannot get the children to daycare before work starts, and if the child gets sick, they may lose their jobs. Child and elder care services need to be available at hours when working adults need them. This is not rocket science, but we are losing money and failing families at rocket speed because the needs of work and family have not been coordinated. The need for elder care over the next two to three decades is projected to rise exponentially with the graying of America, yet there have been few systematic preparations. Communities need to offer services for older adults now and plan to increase their capacity over time on the basis of local demographic projections.

Advocate for Universal Quality Preschool Programs Near Public Transportation

Early childhood education and preschool (for children up to five years of age) have substantial, persistent, long-term benefits for children, including large positive increases in

academic performance, better social relationships, better emotional and psychological well-being, and happier parents and families. The effects of quality early childhood education are surprisingly long-lasting:

High-quality, educational child care and preschool for low-income children by age 15 reduces special education placements and grade retentions by 50% compared to controls; by age 21, more than doubles the proportion attending 4-year college and reduces the percentage of teenage parents by 44%. (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p. iii)

Universal, high-quality, center-based child care is beneficial to all children, but children in poverty have the most to gain from these experiences. Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman has become a vocal advocate for "preschool for all" because it makes financial sense (Carneiro & Heckman, 2003). Study after study has shown strong, long-lasting, positive effects for children in center-based care, especially when the quality of care is high and the hours spent in care are not overly long. In the words of the leading researchers in this area: "A major policy implication of these findings is that universal, high-quality, center-based care seems likely to be beneficial to all types of participating children" (Hill, Waldfogel, & Brooks-Gunn, 2002, p. 622).

Advocate for After-School Programs

With so many adults at work, many youngsters are alone and unsupervised when the school bell rings at the end of the day. A large number of juvenile offenses occur during these afternoon hours, and recent studies show that working parents with unsupervised children worry about this situation (Barnett & Gareis, in press). The obvious solution is quality after-school programs that combine academic enrichment with physical activity and physical safety until parents retrieve their children after work. There is a considerable body of research that shows many positive outcomes for children and adolescents who participate in organized, high-quality after-school activities (Brooks & Mojica, 1995). These data demonstrate that compared with children and adolescents who do not participate in such activities, children who participate report less depression, greater psychological well-being, and more positive emotional experiences during the course of the school day; demonstrate greater academic achievement and social competency (including more positive peer relationships); are described more positively by teachers; and engage in less misconduct.

But there are contradictory data on the effectiveness of after-school programs as well. A recent large-scale study funded by the U.S. Department of Education (2003) failed to find any appreciable gains in academic achievement or in feelings of safety among children in after-school programs and no reduction in their involvement with drugs. In addition, it seems that the after-school programs reviewed by the Department of Education did not reduce the number of children who were unsupervised after school because participation was voluntary, and those children who participated were not the ones who were unsupervised when the after-school program was not available.

The controversy over these data leaves us with the recommendation that after-school programs are needed for young children who cannot be left unsupervised. Physical activity programs are needed because of the growing obesity problem, especially among inner-city adolescents. After-school sports activities offer opportunities to prevent and reduce obesity in children and adolescents. After-school programs also reduce parental stress, which peaks during the after-school hours. Recent studies suggest that parental after-school stress may reduce performance at work. Parents with school-age children reported that they were distressed during the after-school hours, with degree and frequency of distress varying as a function of the length of their commute home, the availability of their partner after school, and job flexibility (Barnett & Gareis, in press). For these reasons, it seems that after-school programs are important and defensible public policies. Better designed after-school programs should be better able to meet the multiple goals of increasing physical activity, keeping children safe, improving academic achievement, and reducing parents' stress.

Align School and Work Calendars

The long summer break in the school year was designed for agrarian societies, in which children were needed to pick the crops. This calendar is no longer functional, and the long summer break has been shown to be particularly disadvantageous to students in poverty because they have less exposure to academically stimulating experiences during the summer months. Compared with students from low socioeconomic status backgrounds who do not participate in summer learning programs, students from low-socioeconomic-status backgrounds who participate in summer programs do not show the increasing annual gaps in academic achievement relative to their richer peers (e.g., Entwisle & Alexander, 1992). Thus, there are many reasons to abandon the current school calendar to bring it in line with parents' work schedules.

The Work-Family Ecosystem

Given the dramatic changes in the demographics of the labor force, with a majority of mothers of young children working outside the home, it is surprising to find that the world of work is still largely organized for a family model that is increasingly rare—one with a stay-at-home caregiver. The Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, although amended many times, has remained the basis for U.S. employment law. It was written for a model of employment that was best suited for the typical working family in 1938. Readers may be surprised to learn that on the basis of this law, it is still legal to fire an employee for refusing to work overtime, even if the employee has to care for a child or sick relative and has no one else to care for that person. It is legal to pay part-time employees less than full-time employees per hour, even when they do exactly the same work and even if the part-time employee is more productive. For example, the fact that an employee who works at a job 30 hours a week is not entitled to 75% of the pay of

an employee who does exactly the same job 40 hours a week is embedded in a system that values full-time employment in a way that is disproportionately related to the hours worked. This mismatch between employment norms and contemporary families has created problems for those employers who have not capitalized on the strengths in the new workforce and for working families who are ill-fitted to older models of employment. U.S. labor law is biased toward single-wage-earner families.

The Working Poor

When children are young or care needs are high (e.g., there is a family member with a disability), employees who are caregivers—still mostly women—often want high-quality part-time and flexible work, which is rarely available (Hill, Martinson, & Ferris, 2004). This is especially a problem for working poor families who cannot afford to pay for care for a child or a sick family member. Low-wage workers face a set of problems different from those faced by middle- or high-wage earners, as they need to work longer hours to pay bills and often face joblessness, unemployment, and the constant threat that low-wage jobs will be sent to other countries where labor is even cheaper. According to the U.S. Bureau of the Census (2000) data, approximately one third of U.S. workers earn less than \$15,000 per year, and an additional 13% earn between that and \$25,000. Most low-wage earners have no health care, paid sick leave, or other benefits, so a sick child or even a flat tire can set off a financial crisis that can take months to recover from. When work and families are considered within an ecosystem that includes labor laws, caregivers with heavy responsibilities cannot earn a wage that would pay enough for child or elder care.

Poverty continues to be a high-risk factor for child development, and the prevalence of children in poverty is a major and growing concern in the United States. Research shows both short- and long-term negative consequences that include increased criminal behavior and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. By the time they reach adolescence, children who grow up in poverty are more likely to experience lower academic achievement and higher dropout rates, teenage pregnancy and childbearing, delinquent behavior, poverty, and welfare dependency. The longer children live in poverty, the poorer their cognitive development and the worse their social and emotional well-being. Programs that keep families with children above the poverty level are fiscally conservative because every consequence of poverty has financial costs to society—for example, welfare dependence, criminal behavior, jail time, and other direct expenses. Children in poor families lag behind on important measures of well-being, including repeating a grade, being suspended or expelled from school, having poorer health, and having less positive attitudes toward their community (Heymann, 2000).

It is not just those whom we tend to identify as the working poor who are at risk when there are few societal supports for working families. Many middle-class families are living precariously close to the edge financially, which creates stress on the entire family system. Because most

dual-earner families need two salaries to make mortgage payments and other regular living expenses, there is no fallback if a family member needs care (e.g., if someone becomes seriously ill) and one of the earners, usually the woman, has to stop working. The consequence for dual-earner families of having no fallback in case of illness or other life problem is a record number of bankruptcies; more American families are filing for bankruptcy every year than are filing for divorce (Warren & Tyagi, 2003)! The cause for the unprecedented number of family bankruptcies is not consumer greed but families' purchasing of homes in neighborhoods with "good public schools" for their children. The mortgages for homes in these areas require a dual income, and when someone becomes ill and there is a need for a caregiver, a predictable chain of events is set in motion that ends with bankruptcy. It is a simple story that is being repeated in record numbers.

Public Policies to Support Working Families

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993 (FMLA) provides job security for employees who need to take up to 12 weeks of leave to care for an ill family member or a newborn or newly adopted child. But FMLA is of very limited help because it only applies to a small percentage of workers, the working poor cannot afford to take unpaid leave, and the poor are most likely to have ill family members. Ill family members who have no one to care for them miss medical appointments, often resulting in increased health care costs, prolonged illness, and ultimately the loss of employment for the caregiver (with unemployment costs and possible welfare costs) and untold stress to an already overstressed family. In addition to the serious psychological strain of being both poor and unable to care for sick relatives, there are financial costs to the current system that forces workers to choose between helping a sick child recover or losing their job. Several studies have documented the relationship between psychological support and quicker recovery from illness and reduced perceptions of pain. For example, when parents are permitted to care for their seriously ill or injured children, the children recover more quickly and leave the hospital more quickly, and children receiving treatment for burns report less pain (George & Hancock, 1993; Taylor & O'Connor, 1989). Long-term costs of health care and psychological costs to families are likely to be reduced with paid family and medical leave.

Data collected by the U.S. Department of Labor (1996) show that caretakers in working families often lose their jobs when another family member becomes seriously ill, a situation that could be prevented if paid or partially paid leave were available. Paid family leave programs exist in Europe and South America and can be funded through a variety of methods, including employee contributions to disability insurance funds. Preliminary data from California's paid insurance leave program show numerous positive benefits to caregivers and care receivers from this employee-funded program (Berger Institute for Work, Family, & Children, 2005).

The United States is alone among affluent countries in not requiring a minimum number of sick days and vacation days (Heymann, Earle, Simmons, Breslow, & Kuehnhoff, 2004), and it is recommended as a good business practice to offer a minimum number of sick days and vacation days for all employees as a buffer against the negative health effects associated with overtime and as a means of promoting workplace health and employees' commitment to their employer. Employees with sick leave are less likely to come to work when they are sick and thus will not spread disease to other employees. Statistical models that account for reduced productivity from employees who come to work when they are ill—a condition called "presenteeism"—suggest that paid sick leave is good business (National Partnership for Women & Families, 2004)

Gender Still Matters

There is the persistent myth that at least in dual-earner households, mothers work because of their addiction to consumerism, and consequently they ignore their children, who suffer lifelong insecurities because of their career-obsessed working mother. In fact, the data support the opposite of these commonly held myths, showing few effects of maternal employment on children and supporting the fact that most women work to pay necessary household bills. Women, on average, have complex patterns of work, with interruptions in their work lives as they stop and start work to care for family members. The interruptions in women's work lives translate into substantial reductions in lifetime earnings. In a recent analysis of the gender gap in wages, researchers concluded that discrimination against women has not been eliminated and that the cost to women of wage discrimination ranges "from 62% when all workers are included to 36% when the comparison is restricted to persistent full-time workers" (Rose & Hartmann, 2004, p. 21).

The male-female differential in lifetime earnings is not entirely a gender gap, as most researchers had formerly believed; instead, it might be better labeled a "mommy gap," because the gap is the largest between those women with children and those without children. Even in families where there is a spouse, the unequal division of household work has been slow to change, with the result that women still do more of the housework and child care, even when spouses work approximately the same number of hours and the women earn more money than the men (Bond et al., 2002). Child care is still mainly women's work, and when men care for children, they are more likely to "help out" and less likely to assume the executive functions of knowing what needs to be done and when it needs to be done.

Although most women with significant care responsibilities (e.g., child care or elder care) would like quality part-time employment, it is almost impossible to find a part-time job that pays proportionally for time worked (e.g., 50% pay for 50% work; Wenger, 2003). The gap between the highly educated elite and unskilled workers is a growing chasm, with many working families living precariously close to the edge.

Women, Men, and Job Segregation

Statistics show that the number of women and of men in the workforce is nearly equal (Bond et al., 2002). This growth is not limited to expansion in jobs that were traditionally women's jobs. Women are catching up and passing the participation of men in many (but not all) fields that traditionally comprised men. Women today have more formal education and are more likely to hold managerial positions than men, although many jobs are still segregated by gender, especially at the top. For instance, clerical work is over 90% female, whereas engineering is still predominantly male. Other job categories, such as law and accounting, are beginning to shift from primarily male to primarily female. There are still very few women in the top leadership positions in the corporate world and in governments throughout the world. Most of the jobs that require manual labor, such as construction, mining, and truck driving (with loading and unloading), are predominately filled by men. The sex segregation of many professional and white-collar job categories will be changing in the near future, as over 60% of all college graduates are women, and women now comprise half of medical school and law school graduates and over 75% of veterinary school graduates (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000).

Explanations for Job Segregation

The number and percentage of female professors in the sciences remain low. The president of Harvard University, Lawrence Summers, caused a firestorm of controversy in his presentation at a conference titled "Diversifying the Science and Engineering Workforce" (Summers, 2005). His controversial remarks concerned his explanations for the underrepresentation of women in high-end science professions. Simply put, Summers reviewed the literature on cognitive abilities and found that some standardized tests show greater variability for males than for females, which means that there are more males at both the low- and the high-abilities ends of the distributions of several tests (see Halpern, 2000, 2004a, for reviews). He then concluded that there were too few women at the highest abilities end of the distribution to fill high-level academic science positions. Summers also mentioned socialization or discrimination as accounting for a portion of the variance, but his long leap from variability in test scores to employment statistics while ignoring the massive psychological literature on implicit stereotyping (using stereotypes without conscious awareness; Banaji, & Hardin, 1996), stereotype threat (depression of scores by members of a group on some ability tests when group membership is salient and one's group is expected to perform poorly; Steele, 1997), the fact that women do more housework and child care than men, the peculiar nature of academic tenure, and other possible hypotheses shows the usual bias in how gender segregation in the workplace is explained.

There are numerous flaws in Summers's hasty explanation (and overgeneralization from his anecdote about his daughters' play behavior and their rejection of trucks as a play toy) of why the sciences remain sex-segregated that

can be extended to similar arguments regarding the sex-segregation of other jobs. First, the sciences are not "unitary"—that is, they can be broken into multiple subcategories of biological or life sciences and physical sciences and then into units that correspond to courses that include biology, chemistry, physics, and sometimes psychology, ecology, and others. Approximately 50% of medical school graduates and 75% of veterinary school graduates are now women, and women are obtaining 63% of all doctorates in health science and 44% of all doctorates in biological and life sciences—so women are succeeding in science. The percentages for women are lower in other areas of science—17% of all doctorates in engineering and 29% in mathematics, for example. There are disparities among subdisciplines in the sciences, so perhaps the question is why are there differences among the subdisciplines of the sciences? Why is no one asking about the underrepresentation of men in those subdisciplines where men are underrepresented?

Test data about variability usually come from large "captive" groups such as schoolchildren, applicants for college and graduate school, the military, and prison populations. Consider, for example, the conclusions from the Third International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS; National Center for Education Statistics, 2002a, 2002b), which is based on data from students in 33 countries in fourth and eighth grades and in the final year of secondary school. The TIMSS provides a good overview of findings because it involves children in multiple grades in many countries. TIMSS data show that gender differences widen at the upper grades and that by the last year of secondary school, boys have significantly higher achievement than girls in both math and science in almost every country tested. Boys outperform girls in earth science, physics, and chemistry but not in life science or environmental science. These are interesting findings because they favor boys, especially in light girls' success in high school, where they achieve higher grades and more awards overall, have a higher college-bound rate in many of the same countries, and achieve better grades in the same subjects that these tests, on which they are getting lower scores, measure. How can these two types of data be reconciled? Are the standardized test scores telling us something different than the classroom assessments and high school awards?

Success in the sciences depends on many skills, including language and memory skills; girls and women excel in many (but not all) language skills, especially writing. If Summers had continued to look at the testing data, he would have found extremely large effect sizes favoring girls throughout school on writing tests and on many types of memory tests (see Halpern, 2000, 2004a, in press-a, for reviews). It is common to think about sex differences in cognition in terms of a dichotomy and to ask if they are due to factors inherent in the biology of maleness or femaleness or if they are due to differential sex-related experiences and expectations. In fact, it is almost impossible to get away from some variation on the age-old question of nature versus nurture. Most journals require

that authors report “percentage of explained variance” using the statistical model of main effects and interactions “explaining” the variance in the measured outcome. The statistical model that is used in conceptual causal research designs is so deeply ingrained that even researchers have come to think of percentage of explained variance due to biological and socialization variables as the only way to answer nature–nurture questions. But nature and nurture do not just interact, they mutually influence each other in reciprocal ways; there are no main effects because there is no nature without an environment. Nature needs nurture—they are not independent variables. There is no “true” single number attributable to nature or nurture, although researchers often act as though they are seeking the holy grail of nature and nurture and as though if experimenters were very clever, they could find three single numbers that represent the percentage of variance explained by nature, nurture, and their interaction.

Psychologists need to provide alternative theories to the tired, old nature–nurture dichotomies as explanations for the sex-segregation of job categories. The default assumptions, as seen in President Summers’s (2005) remarks, are based on faulty premises about the separability of biological and environmental/social variables. A psychobiosocial model offers a better alternative to the nature–nurture dichotomy or nature–nurture continuum (Halpern, 2000). Each individual is predisposed by his or her biology to learn some skills more readily than others, and everyone selects experiences in ways that are biased by prior learning histories, opportunities afforded in their environments, and beliefs about appropriate behaviors for females and males. Similarly, many stereotypes about male and female differences reflect group differences; by learning and endorsing them, individuals may also be selecting environments that increase or decrease these differences. Experiences change neural structures, which in turn alter how individuals respond, and so on. Learning, for example, is a biological, social, and environmental event. Brain structures reflect learning and experience and change into very old age, thus blurring the nature–nurture distinction beyond usefulness for most purposes.

Gendered Workplaces

Jobs can be disproportionately male or female for different reasons. For example, it is likely that there are few female piano movers in New York City because women, on average, have less upper body strength than males. Other highly sex-segregated jobs are more readily explained by the fact that women do the bulk of the caretaking responsibilities in society (child care, sick care, and elder care) and therefore often work “around” these responsibilities. Consider, for example, how this alternative hypothesis may be used to explain the underrepresentation of women in high-level science professions. Summers (2005) noted that in addition to the greater variability among men in science and mathematics abilities, women might also be missing from science because they would be dissuaded by the fact that science is an 80-hour a week job. He could have added the following: Academia is one of the few places where young

talent has to prove itself at a young age in order to keep its job. If graduate school is followed by postdoctoral work (a path followed by many in the sciences) and then six years at the assistant professor level, the young academic will be approximately 36 years old before applying for tenure (assuming everything has gone smoothly), and if denied tenure, she or he will be fired (“not renewed”) and have to explain why tenure was denied to hiring committees at some less prestigious college.

There are relatively few women in full professor positions in any disciplines, especially at research institutions. Wilson (2004) recently reported in *The Chronicle of Higher Education* that in the United States, women comprise approximately 22% of full professors in academic areas combined. This is a surprisingly low number given the fact that women have received more college degrees than men every year since 1982, with the gap widening every year; so the low percentage is not a pipeline problem, and it is not a science problem. It helps to look at the base rates for women in full professor positions to see exactly what the problem is. There are fewer women in academic positions in mathematics, engineering, and the sciences than in other disciplines, but the percentages decline across all disciplines as the research requirements of the university increase, so it is not only a science problem.

For women, tenure clocks and biological clocks run in the same time zone, and although maternal and paternal leaves are available at most universities, there are also subtle and not-so-subtle pressures against taking advantage of them. The conditions of academic life are particularly difficult for any woman who has caregiving responsibilities such as child care. This is a more likely and proximal reason for the underrepresentation of women in academic science, with its additional requirements for laboratory hours—as opposed to the explanation based on fewer numbers of women at the highest tails of math and science standardized tests. Whenever a politically sensitive question is posed, such as the reason for the underrepresentation of women in academic science, it is important to think critically about unstated assumptions, rival hypotheses, more proximal causal explanations, base rates, and the strength of the evidence (Halpern, 2003). Of course, reasonable people may disagree, but use of these sorts of thinking skills will require a deeper level of analysis, and an examination of evidence will allow a more reasoned analysis than hasty responses based on incomplete information.

Work and Stress and Health

Work stress occurs when there is conflict either between two aspects of one’s job, such as finishing a large amount of work with unrealistic demands for speed or accuracy, or when job demands conflict with the demands of other roles and responsibilities, such as being at work when the employee needs to be at home with a sick parent or spouse. There are strong indicators that stressed individuals are more prone to a wide variety of illnesses, even the common cold. In a study that used random assignment of participants to conditions to establish strong causal links, Cohen

et al. (1998) assigned healthy volunteers to different levels of exposure to the virus that causes colds. Using a prospective experimental design, they found that volunteers who reported the highest levels of chronic or long-term stress had worse cold symptoms and higher viral counts than those volunteers who reported less stress. They also found that interpersonal and work-related stressors (they used the terms *under-* and *overemployment*) were mostly responsible for these results. Surprisingly, other important health practices such as smoking, maintaining a poor diet, and lack of exercise had very small effects on the incidence of colds when compared with stress. The entire field of psychoneuroendocrinology has been growing rapidly as more is learned about the way in which the immune system responds to psychological variables such as stress. We now know that when the underlying physiological basis of the stress response is activated too often or too intensely, the function of the immune system is impaired, increasing the probability and severity of ill health (Herbert & Cohen, 1993; McEwen & Lasley, 2002).

The stress of a job does not depend on the nature of the job as much as it depends on whether workers believe that they have the ability to control the stressful aspects of the job. The leading theoretical model in identifying those aspects of work that are stressful is the job demand control model (Karasek, 1979; Karasek & Theorell, 1990), which emphasizes the importance of “decision latitude”—the ability to make work-related decisions. When employees can make decisions related to the way in which they work, they are able to devise coping strategies that can mitigate the effects of stress.

Consider, for example, a five-year, prospective study of the health care costs for 105 nurses at a large medical facility (Ganster, Fox, & Dwyer, 2001). The objective workload for these nurses varied considerably from a relative “light” workload to a high workload. The nurses described the extent to which they were able to control the demands of their job, for example, by having the authority to make decisions about patient care. The degree of stress was operationalized with measures of cortisol, the “stress” hormone that is secreted by endocrine glands (in this case, adrenal glands) in response to perceived stress. Cortisol levels did not vary with objective measures of workload; instead, they varied in a linear fashion with the degree to which the nurses believed that they could exert control during stressful situations. The combination of high workloads and little control showed stress increases in cortisol, whereas the same high levels of workload coupled with the ability to control one’s work showed little or no elevation in cortisol levels compared with low-workload situations. Other researchers have also concluded that the ability to control events at work is an important determinant of health. The importance of being able to exert control over work-related events was corroborated in a recent study with male patrol officers. Researchers found that diastolic and arterial pressure were significantly higher when the patrol officers had little control over their work (Bishop et al., 2003).

Unfortunately, it is still difficult to get many employers and working families to take stress seriously. Ironically, they refuse to get “stressed out about stress.” Work-related stress together with consequent stresses in the home result in a number of physiological and behavioral consequences that take a toll on the body and brain. Some of the negative consequences include sleep deprivation, increased consumption of comfort foods, elevated blood pressure, and increased levels of metabolic hormones that contribute to fat deposits. Research shows that stress alters immune system functioning, increases susceptibility to cold viruses, and increases healing time for wounds. It also increases the prevalence of mental and behavioral health problems, such as anxiety, depression, and alcohol abuse. Reducing stress is a good business practice. Stress management programs can also help employees feel better (with shorter and less severe colds, better long-term prognoses for serious health consequences, and fewer missed days of work; McEwen & Lasley, 2002).

The High Cost of Stress

There are numerous effects of chronically high levels of stress on productivity and worker health that are often overlooked. Consider the costly problem of absence from work. Of course, not every employee who takes sick leave is too ill to work. The decision to miss a day of work is also determined by attitudinal and social factors (Kristensen, 1991). Sometimes, calling in “sick” is a way in which employees deal with the somatic symptoms of stress—the feelings that are associated with burnout (Maslach, 2005). These decisions are not the same as malingering: The employee may feel vague body aches and the physical symptoms of depression and exhaustion that accompany prolonged stress. In Australia, where workers are able to take paid work leave for stress, researchers found that workers who took paid sick leave for stress-related health problems had used twice the number of days of sick leave in the year prior to the claim for stress leave than similar workers who did not take stress-related leave. One interpretation of these data is that the high number of days of sick leave showed a worsening problem for highly stressed workers (Dollard, Winefield, & Winefield, 1999).

Another cost of stress that is often overlooked when employers make “return-on-investment” decisions about work policies and benefits is the high cost of employee turnover. Often, employees who are leaving their jobs will reduce their productivity as they prepare to leave. In addition, the cost of hiring and training new employees can be very high. Hiring well may be the most important decision that employers make, and “bad hires” can create high psychic and financial costs, even when the employee is relatively low in an organization’s hierarchy (e.g., the cost of a misfiled document or crashed computer can be high). Yet employers often do not consider the benefits of providing incentives (other than money) to retain good employees. Workers with many family responsibilities often find that family concerns interfere with their work and that what they most need is a work arrangement that would

allow them to handle family concerns and perform their job at a high level.

Recent research I have conducted (Halpern, in press-b) has shown that for a large national sample of working adults, the greater the number of work options related to flexible time arrangements available to employees (e.g., employee can take time off from work to care for a sick child; employee can choose start and stop times for work), the fewer days of work the employees reported missing in the previous three months; the less likely they were to come to work late or leave early; the more committed they were to their employer; the harder they worked, especially when they had to meet deadlines; and the fewer symptoms of stress they experienced. These findings convert "soft" psychological data into return-on-investment dollars. It is difficult to estimate savings to any particular employer because the employees in this study had a wide range of jobs. If incidental absences, defined as unscheduled absences from work of one-to-five days (Business & Health Institute, 2004) cost employers 4.4% of their payroll per year, that translates to \$1,760 for an employee earning \$40,000 a year. In addition, there are indirect costs for lower production and/or decreased customer satisfaction, depending on what job that employee is not performing when absent. Any employer can do the math to determine what it would mean if that figure were reduced by one fourth by the introduction of time-flexible work policies that would also increase employee commitment and have other beneficial effects (i.e., \$440 savings per year for this hypothetical employee making \$40,000 per year). These findings make a strong business case that employers cannot ignore.

Organizations that implement family-friendly programs, such as telecommuting, job sharing, and flexible start and stop times, can expect increased employee productivity and commitment, reduced turnover intentions and absenteeism, and reduced employee work-related strain. Organizations that offer attractive work conditions and family supportive cultures have an edge in attracting and retaining desirable employees. Support for these strong conclusions comes from a recent study of family-friendly companies that showed that companies that win awards for their family-friendly policies provided higher returns on investment than other industry-matched companies (Cascio & Young, 2005).

Family-Friendly Work Policies

One way to provide more control to workers is to institute work policies they can use to help them manage work and family obligations without having to choose between the two. For example, the conflicting demands of work and family (both work interfering with family life and family interfering with work) can be reduced by giving employees some flexibility in their work hours, so they can care for family members (e.g., meet with teachers, take a sick spouse to the doctor) without missing time from work. If workers have the option of working reduced hours or can take a family-related leave without losing their job, there should be less worker turnover and other tangible, though

frequently overlooked, benefits to the employer, such as increased loyalty to one's employer. Often employers balk at the idea of family-friendly work policies because they are concerned with the financial costs of flexibility, or they cannot imagine how a more flexible work environment will be beneficial to their business. By rejecting the idea of worker flexibility because they assume it will increase costs, employers are not considering the cost associated with stressful working conditions and the time lost because the employee has no options but to take time from work for family obligations.

Creating Win-Win Policies That Benefit Families and Employers

Family and work are primary concerns to all of us. Work and family can offer mutual benefits with positive and reinforcing effects that create win-win situations for families and employers. Sound and humane policies can both reflect our values as a society and be financially responsible. Psychologists who work at the intersection of work and family are offering new models of work-life interaction that provide returns on investments for employers and work policies that employees can use to manage their work and family obligations without having to choose between the two. In addition, such work policies help working families reduce stress, care for each other, and enhance physical and psychological health.

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