

Chapter 4: Opting Out or Being Pushed?

If we look around today's society we will see many stay at home mothers, soccer moms, and mothers who are trying to do it all but are struggling to keep their head above water. Who are the women behind the SUVs--and successful men? How did they get to the point of "opting out" of a career for a life at home? Attending to why many successful women each year leave the workforce in order to stay home is important because we don't fully understand why women are making this decision, and what this trend means. This chapter addresses three perspectives on the "opt out revolution," Lisa Belkin's 2003 *New York Times Magazine* article that kicked off a furor about why so many of the best and brightest women are deciding to stay home, Pamela Stone's 2007 study, *Opting out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home*, which concludes that high-achieving women are driven out of the workforce by the demands of their jobs and the refusal of their supervisors to accommodate their home lives, and Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson's 2004 study of family-friendly policies in the larger context of workplace hostility to working women in their book, *The Time Divide: Work, family, and gender inequality*.

1. Lisa Belkin, "The Opt-Out Revolution," *New York Times Magazine*, October 26, 2003

The scene in this cozy Atlanta living room would -- at first glance -- warm an early feminist's heart. Gathered by the fireplace one recent evening, sipping wine and nibbling cheese, are the members of a book club, each of them a beneficiary of all that feminists of 30-odd years ago held dear.

The eight women in the room have each earned a degree from Princeton, which was a citadel of everything male until the first co-educated class entered in 1969. And after Princeton, the women of this book club went on to do other things that women once were not expected to do. They received law degrees from Harvard and Columbia. They chose husbands who could keep up with them, not simply support them. They waited to have children because work was too exciting. They put on power suits and marched off to take on the world.

Yes, if an early feminist could peer into this scene, she would feel triumphant about the future. Until, of course, any one of these polished and purposeful women opened her mouth.

"I don't want to be on the fast track leading to a partnership at a prestigious law firm," says Katherine Brokaw, who left that track in order to stay home with her three children. "Some people define that as success. I don't."

"I don't want to be famous; I don't want to conquer the world; I don't want that kind of life," says Sarah McArthur Amsbary, who was a theater artist and teacher and earned her master's degree in English, then stepped out of the work force when her daughter was born. "Maternity provides an escape hatch that paternity does not. Having a baby provides a graceful and convenient exit."

... this was not the way it was supposed to be. Women -- specifically, educated professional women -- were supposed to achieve like men. Once the barriers came down, once the playing field was leveled, they were supposed to march toward the future and take rightful ownership of the universe, or at the very least, ownership of their half. The women's movement was largely about grabbing a fair share of power -- making equal money, standing at the helm in the macho realms of business and government and law. It was about running the world.

"We thought there would be a woman president by now," says Marie Wilson, director of the Ms. Foundation for Women and president of the White House Project, who has been fighting to increase the representation of women in work and politics since 1975. "We expected that women would be leading half the companies in this country, that there would be parity on boards." Instead, Wilson has just finished a book that includes an examination, in her words, of "how far we haven't come," titled "Closing the Leadership Gap: Why Women Can and Must Help Run the World."

Arguably, the barriers of 40 years ago are down. Fifty percent of the undergraduate class of 2003 at Yale was female; this year's graduating class at Berkeley Law School was 63 percent women; Harvard was 46 percent; Columbia was 51. Nearly 47 percent of medical students are women, as are 50 percent of undergraduate business majors (though, interestingly, about 30 percent of M.B.A. candidates). They are recruited by top firms in all fields. They start strong out of the gate.

And then, suddenly, they stop. Despite all those women graduating from law school, they comprise only 16 percent of partners in law firms. Although men and women enter corporate training programs in equal numbers, just 16 percent of corporate officers are women, and only eight companies in the Fortune 500 have female C.E.O.'s. Of 435 members of the House of Representatives, 62 are women; there are 14 women in the 100-member Senate.

Measured against the way things once were, this is certainly progress. But measured against the way things were expected to be, this is a revolution stalled. During the 90's, the talk was about the glass ceiling, about women who were turned away at the threshold of power simply because they were women. The talk of this new decade is less about the obstacles faced by women than it is about the obstacles faced by mothers. As Joan C. Williams, director of the Program on WorkLife Law at American University, wrote in the Harvard Women's Law Journal last spring, "Many women never get near" that glass ceiling, because "they are stopped long before by the maternal wall."

Look, for example, at the Stanford class of '81. Fifty-seven percent of mothers in that class spent at least a year at home caring for their infant children in the first decade after graduation. One out of four have stayed home three or more years. Look at Harvard Business School. A survey of women from the classes of 1981, 1985 and 1991 found that only 38 percent were working full time. Look at professional women in surveys across the board. Between one-quarter and one-third are out of the work force, depending on the study and the profession. Look at the United States Census, which shows that the number of children being cared for by stay-at-home moms has increased nearly 13 percent in less than a decade. At the same time, the percentage of new mothers who go back to work fell from 59 percent in 1998 to 55 percent in 2000.

Look, too, at the mothers who have not left completely but have scaled down or redefined their roles in the crucial career-building years (25 to 44). Two-thirds of those mothers work fewer than 40 hours a week -- in other words, part time. Only 5 percent work 50 or more hours weekly. Women leave the workplace to strike out on their own at equally telling rates; the number of businesses owned or co-owned by women jumped 11 percent since 1997, nearly twice the rate of businesses in general.

Look at how all these numbers compare with those of men. Of white men with M.B.A.'s, 95 percent are working full time, but for white women with M.B.A.'s, that number drops to 67 percent. (Interestingly, the numbers for African-American women are closer to those for white men than to those for white women.)

And look at the women of this Atlanta book club. A roomful of Princeton women each trained as well as any man. Of the 10 members, half are not working at all; one is in business with her husband; one works part time; two freelance; and the only one with a full-time job has no children. ... to the women of the book club ... is to sense that something more is happening here. It's not just that the workplace has failed women. It is also that women are rejecting the workplace. I say this with the full understanding that there are ambitious, achieving women out there who are the emotional and professional equals of any man, and that there are also women who stayed the course, climbed the work ladder without pause and were thwarted by lingering double standards and chauvinism. I also say this knowing that to suggest that women work differently than men -- that they leave more easily and find other parts of life more fulfilling -- is a dangerous and loaded statement.

And lastly, I am very aware that, for the moment, this is true mostly of elite, successful women who can afford real choice -- who have partners with substantial salaries and health insurance -- making it easy to dismiss them as exceptions. To that I would argue that these are the very women who were supposed to be the professional equals of men right now, so the fact that so many are choosing otherwise is explosive.

As these women look up at the "top," they are increasingly deciding that they don't want to do what it takes to get there. Women today have the equal right to make the same bargain that men have made for centuries -- to take time from their family in pursuit of success. Instead, women are redefining success. And in doing so, they are redefining work. ...

There is nothing wrong with money or power. But they come at a high price. And lately when women talk about success they use words like satisfaction, balance and sanity. That's why a recent survey by the research firm Catalyst found that 26 percent of women at the cusp of the most senior levels of management don't want the promotion. And it's why Fortune magazine found that of the 108 women who have appeared on its list of the top 50 most powerful women over the years, at least 20 have chosen to leave their high-powered jobs, most voluntarily, for lives that are less intense and more fulfilling. ...

Why don't women run the world? Maybe it's because they don't want to. Attitudes cluster in place and time. This is particularly true of a college campus, where one-quarter of the student population turns over every year. Undergraduates tend to think that the school they find is the one that always was, with no knowledge of the worldview of those even a few short years before. Looked at that way, the women of the Atlanta book club are a panoramic snapshot of change.

Sally Sears, the oldest of the group, entered Princeton in the fall of 1971. Women had been fully admitted two years earlier, and the school was still very much a boys club. Sears had gone to a small public school in Alabama and entered college "very conscious of being a representative of women and a representative of the South." As she describes it, the air was electric with feminism. "Margaret Mead came to talk one night, and I was stunned by how penetrating her questions were about what it was like to be the first women," she says. "I thought, my God, she's thinking of us as Samoans."

Upon graduation in 1975, Sears felt both entitled and obligated to make good. "The clear message was, 'You've been given the key to a kingdom that used to be denied to people like you,'" she says. "It never occurred to me that my choices would be proscribed. I could have anything I wanted." What she wanted, at first, was to be "a confirmed single person, childless, a world traveler." She spent a couple of years running The Childersburg Star, a small Alabama newspaper owned by her family, and then, in 1978, she took a job on the air at a television

station in Birmingham. That led to a job in Memphis, followed by a yearlong trip around the world, then another TV job in Dallas. By 1984 she was on the air in Atlanta, where she became a local celebrity and where she met Richard Belcher, a fellow reporter and now a local anchor. They were married in 1988, when Sears was 35.

Three years later, their son, Will, was born. Soldiers of feminism take only the shortest of maternity leaves, and as soon as Sears recovered from her C-section she was back at work. The O.J. Simpson trial was the first real test of what she calls "work plus love plus a child," because both she and her husband were sent out to California for the duration. "I got my mom and dad to bring Will out, and we all camped out at the New Otani Hotel for a few weeks," she says. "I was determined not to blink."

By the time Katherine Brokaw arrived on campus, seven years after Sears got there, women were no longer a curiosity. "I guess I knew I was a significant minority," Brokaw says, "but I never felt like I didn't belong there." Clearly she belonged there. She'd been scoring off the charts on tests since she started taking them, and by seventh grade she was a serious student of Latin and French. In high school she added ancient Greek and slam-dunked her SAT's. Two of the best classics departments in the country were at Princeton and Harvard; she was accepted to both and chose Princeton.

When Brokaw and her classmates spoke of the future, it was not about blazing paths, as Sears's generation had done, but it was certainly not about fitting work around motherhood either. "I always knew I wanted to get married and have children," she says, "but I was looking at careers in terms of what would I find intellectually stimulating and personally fulfilling." Brokaw thought briefly about pursuing a Ph.D. in classics. Worried that she would chafe within the ivory tower, she opted for law school instead. ... She began Columbia Law School in the fall of 1987. There she met a student at the business school, and they were married in 1990.

Success followed her to Columbia, in the form of a spot on a prestigious law journal, internships at New York's top law firms and a job offer from every firm to which she applied. She also nabbed a clerkship with a federal judge and then went on to become an associate at the firm of Davis Polk & Wardwell. After Brokaw had been at Davis Polk for a year, her husband was offered a position in Atlanta that was worth the move. The change was particularly appealing to Brokaw, because Atlanta offered her something that Manhattan could not -- an easy commute. "I could practice law in a top firm and still be only 10 minutes from home," she says. "It seemed like an ideal way to have children and a career."

Three years later she became pregnant for the first time and went into labor at the office at 9:30 one November night. During her three-month maternity leave she had access to the firm's e-mail system through her laptop and then went back to work full time, "which was always my intention." At first, she says, her new equation was "more manageable" than she had expected. She had a "wonderful nanny," and for a couple of months, her workload was relatively light. Her hours were regular; she took her breast pump to the office. But that didn't last. In mid-May she learned that a major case, on which she was the lead associate, had been moved up on the calendar by the presiding judge and would go to trial in mid-August. For the next three months Brokaw worked a crushing schedule, up to 15-hour days, seven days a week, while still nursing her daughter, who was not sleeping through the night. When the trial date came, she was exhausted but prepared. ...

That Sears and Brokaw were schooled in different generations is made clear by the different ways they gave up their jobs. Sears took nine years to quit. And she did so with great regret. "I would have hung in there, except the days kept getting longer and longer," she explains.

"My five-day 50-hour week was becoming a 60-hour week." As news reports could be transmitted farther and farther from the "mother ship," she found herself an hour or two from home when the nightly news was done. "Will was growing up, and I was driving home from a fire," she says. "I knew there would always be wrecks and fires, but there wouldn't always be his childhood."

First she tried to reduce her schedule. "The station would not give me a part-time contract," she says. "They said it was all or nothing." So in August 2000, she walked away from her six-figure income and became a homeroom mom at her son's school. "It was wrenching for me to leave Channel 2," she says. "I miss being the lioness in the newsroom -- to walk through and have the interns say, 'There she goes.' It kills me that I'm not contributing to my 401(k) anymore. I do feel somehow that I let the cause down."

Brokaw, while torn about leaving, did so without nearly as much guilt or angst as Sears. She did not think for a moment that she had failed the movement, though she did wonder whether she had failed herself. Even while she was preparing for her trial she raised the possibility of a part-time schedule. She wrote a proposal that was circulated among the partners, and some back-and-forth had begun about, among other things, whether reduced hours would count as time toward partnership.

"Every once in a while I would raise my head from the grind of getting this case ready and I would say, 'Where are we with my proposal?'" she remembers. "Finally, when the case was pulled from the calendar, I did a lot of soul-searching. My life, my home life and my new family life were at the mercy of other people's whims. ... My partners had chosen not to place my request on high-enough priority."

One night she and her husband sat down, and he asked, "What is the ultimate goal?" "In theory," she answered, "the goal is to become a partner." "Does your life get better or worse if you become a partner?" "Well, financially it gets better, but in terms of my actual life, it gets worse." And that is when Brokaw quit. She now cares full time for that eldest daughter, as well as the two children who followed. "I wish it had been possible to be the kind of parent I want to be and continue with my legal career," she says, "but I wore myself out trying to do both jobs well."

... a 70's feminist peering in the window [at today's professionals deciding to quit their jobs and be full time mothers] would be confused at best and depressed at worst. But unmapped roads are not, de facto, dead ends. Is this a movement that failed, or one reborn? What does this evolving spectrum of demands and choices tell us about women? And what does it mean for the future?

Katherine Brokaw and I were classmates. We did not know one another well at school, but the Princeton she describes was the one that I knew too. We were told we could be anything then, which we took to mean we could do everything, and all of it at the same time. We felt powerful and privileged when it came to being women (and, let's face it, only during freshman year did we learn to actually call ourselves women). Any generalization is dangerous, but for the most part we didn't feel the same obligation to succeed as the women before us, nor were we bordering on blase, like those who would follow.

I rarely thought about combining life and work while I was at Princeton. In fact I never remember using the two words together in the same sentence. The only choice I thought I had to make was between journalism and law. Having chosen the former, I set my sights on the highest goal I could think of -- becoming editor of this newspaper, perhaps, or at least editor of this magazine -- and figured the path would be upward and linear. Then I got down to work. I

enjoyed the work -- loved the work -- but life got in the way. My first readjustments were practical; while a national correspondent in Houston I learned you can't hop on a plane every morning to explore the wilds of Texas while leaving a nursing baby back home.

Quickly, though, my choices became more philosophical. My second son was born while I was back in New York, working as a metro reporter. I decided to leave that full-time job in the newsroom for a more flexible freelance life writing from home, and I must admit that it was not a change I made only because my children needed me. It's more accurate to say I was no longer willing to work as hard -- commuting, navigating office politics, having my schedule be at the whim of the news, balancing all that with the needs of a family -- for a prize I was learning I didn't really want.

I will never run this paper. But I will write for it, into old age, I hope, and that piece of the work is enough for me. Much of the writing I do now is in the form of a biweekly column for *The Times* about life and work. Over the years I have written more than 100,000 words and received more than 10,000 e-mail messages from readers on the subject. It's not a scientific sample, but it is a continuing conversation, and a surprising amount of the talk is not about how the workplace is unfair to women, but about how the relationship between work and life is different for women than for men. ...

When I talk to Jeannie Tarkenton, another member of the book club, biology comes up.... "I think some of us are swinging to a place where we enjoy, and can admit we enjoy, the stereotypical role of female/mother/caregiver," Tarkenton says. "I think we were born with those feelings." Tarkenton graduated in 1992 and worked first in publishing and then on the start-up of the Atlanta Girls' School, until she had her first child in 2000. She went back and worked three days a week, until her second child was born last year. "I didn't want to work that hard," she says of her decision to quit completely. "Women today, if we think about feminism at all, we see it as a battle fought for 'the choice.' For us, the freedom to choose work if we want to work is the feminist strain in our lives."

When [she] blames biology, [she does] so apologetically, and I find the tone as interesting as the words. Any parent can tell you that children are hard-wired from birth: this one is shy, this one is outgoing; this one is laid-back; this one is intense. They were born that way. And any student of the animal kingdom will tell you that males and females of a species act differently. Male baboons leave their mothers; female baboons stay close for life. The female kangaroo is oblivious to her young; the male seahorse carries fertilized eggs to term. Susan Allport, a naturalist, writes in her book *"A Natural History of Parenting,"* "Males provide direct childcare in less than 5 percent of mammalian species, but in over 90 percent of bird species both male and female tend to their young."

In other words, we accept that humans are born with certain traits, and we accept that other species have innate differences between the sexes. What we are loath to do is extend that acceptance to humans. Partly that's because absolute scientific evidence one way or the other is impossible to collect. But mostly it is because so much of recent history (the civil rights movement, the women's movement) is an attempt to prove that biology is not destiny. To suggest otherwise is to resurrect an argument that can be -- and has been -- dangerously misused.

"I am so conflicted on this," says Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, an anthropologist and author of *"Mother Nature: A History of Mothers, Infants and Natural Selection."* Female primates, she says, are "competitive" in that they seek status within their social order. So it would follow that women strive for status too. But there is an important qualifier. When primates compete, they do so in ways that increase the survival chances of their offspring. In other words, they do it for

their children. "At this moment in Western civilization," Hrdy says, "seeking clout in a male world does not correlate with child well-being. Today, striving for status usually means leaving your children with an au pair who's just there for a year, or in inadequate day care. So it's not that women aren't competitive; it's just that they don't want to compete along the lines that are not compatible with their other goals.

"I'm very interested in my family and my environment and my work, not in forging ahead and climbing a power structure," Hrdy explains by way of personal illustration. "That is one of the inherent differences between the sexes." Then she warns, "But to turn that into dogma -- women are caring, men are not, or men should have power, women should not, that's dangerous and false." ...

Since [a weekly playgroup began meeting in San Francisco], and even in the months since I first spent an afternoon with them this summer, [women's] capsule descriptions have changed. Van Hooser, still home full time with Jack, is now pregnant with her second child. Anne Kresse (Stanford '91, U.C.L.A. '98), who had been working four days a week as a senior marketing manager and spending one day with Jackson, switched to three days, then just last month, quit completely. She's pregnant again, too. Courtney Klinge, on the other hand (Colgate '88, Harvard '95), had stayed home for a year and a half with her daughters, Eliana and Paulina, but last month she went back to work three days a week.

All that coming and going, they say, is the entire point. "This is not permanent," Kresse says. "It's not black and white; it's gray. You're working. Then you're not working. Then maybe you're working part time or consulting. Then you go back. This is a chapter, not the whole book." Van Hooser says: "I am not a housewife. Is there still any such thing? I am doing what is right for me at the moment, not necessarily what is right for me forever."

Talk to any professional woman who made this choice, and this is what she will say. She is not her mother or her grandmother. She has made a temporary decision for just a few years, not a permanent decision for the rest of her life. She has not lost her skills, just put them on hold. "I'm calling this my 'maternity leave,'" Sears says. "As long as I have the chit on the table that says 'This is not forever,' then I feel O.K. about it."

[On the other hand,] at the moment, it is unclear what women like these will be able to go back to. This is the hot button of the work-life debate at the moment, a question on which the future of women and work might well hinge. For all the change happening in the office, the challenge of returning workers -- those who opted out completely, and those who ratcheted back -- is barely even starting to be addressed. If that workplace can reabsorb those who left into a career they find fulfilling, then stepping out may in fact be the answer to the frustrations of this generation. If not, then their ability to balance life and work will be no different than their mothers', after all. ...

There are ... trends working in these women's favor. One legacy of the dot-com era is that nonlinear career tracks are more accepted and employers are less put off by a resume with gaps and zigzags. Second, a labor shortage is looming in the coming decade, just as this cohort of women may well be planning to re-enter the work force.

On the other hand, the current economy is hardly welcoming to re-entrants, and the traditional workplace structure does not include a Welcome Back mat. "As a society we have become very good at building offramps," says Sylvia Ann Hewlett, who caused a stir last year with her book, "Creating a Life," which postulated that the more successful the woman the less likely she was to marry or have children. "But we are seriously lacking onramps." ...

Hewlett's preliminary research [on the hidden brain drain] makes her pessimistic about what today's women will face when they want to return to work. At any given time, she says, "two-thirds of all women who quit their career to raise children" are "seeking to re-enter professional life and finding it exceedingly difficult. These women may think they can get back in," she said, when I told her of what I had been hearing in San Francisco and Atlanta and on my own suburban street, where half the women with children at home are not working and where the jobs they quit include law partner and investment banker. "But my data show that it's harder than they anticipate. ..."

...Some are already preparing for re-entry by working part time. Sally Sears is one. The same television station that refused to give her a part-time contract in 2000 has started calling her in for periodic projects: a week of work during the summer while her son was at camp; five days straight when the Legislature opened its session. "The benefit to them is they get a seasoned, savvy reporter to grab the ball and run," she says. "And the benefit to me -- I get to say no."

Brokaw was asked back, too, but she declined -- for now. In the years since she left, her law firm has allowed several litigators to work a shorter week, and she has watched them struggle. One of those litigators, a member of the book club who would not let me use her name, asks: "How do you litigate part time? It's supposed to be 10 to 5 -- at a law firm, that's part time - - but lately I've been working until 4 a.m. because I have a project due. It's the type of job where if something's due, you work until it's done."

... Princeton University president Shirley Tilghman ... wonders how to educate women to enter this shades-of-gray world and how to create an environment for her own staff that encourages a balanced life....

"My fantasy is a world where there are two kinds of people -- ones who like to stay home and care for children and ones who like to go out and have a career," she says. "In this fantasy, one of these kinds can only marry the other." But the way it seems to work now is that ambitious women seem to be attracted to ambitious men. Then when they have children together, "someone has to become less ambitious." And right now, it tends to be the woman who makes that choice.

Sarah McArthur Amsbary of the Atlanta [book] group ... has concluded ... that the exodus of professional women from the workplace isn't really about motherhood at all. It is really about work. "There's a misconception that it's mostly a pull toward motherhood and her precious baby that drives a woman to quit her job, or apparently, her entire career," she says. "Not that the precious baby doesn't magnetize many of us. Mine certainly did. As often as not, though, a woman would have loved to maintain some version of a career, but that job wasn't cutting it anymore. Among women I know, quitting is driven as much from the job-dissatisfaction side as from the pull-to-motherhood side."

... biology gives women [a gift], she says. It provides pauses, in the form of pregnancy and childbirth, that men do not have. And as the workplace becomes more stressful and all-consuming, the exit door is more attractive. "Women get to look around every few years and say, 'Is this still what I want to be doing?'" she says. "Maybe they have higher standards for job satisfaction because there is always the option of being their child's primary caregiver. When a man gets that dissatisfied with his job, he has to stick it out."

This, I would argue, is why the workplace needs women. Not just because they are 50 percent of the talent pool, but for the very fact that they are more willing to leave than men. That, in turn, makes employers work harder to keep them. It is why the accounting firm Deloitte & Touche has more than doubled the number of employees on flexible work schedules over the past decade and more than quintupled the number of female partners and directors (to 567, from

97) in the same period. It is why I.B.M. employees can request up to 156 weeks of job-protected family time off. It is why Hamot Medical Center in Erie, Pa., hired a husband and wife to fill one neonatology job, with a shared salary and shared health insurance, then let them decide who stays home and who comes to the hospital on any given day. It is why, everywhere you look, workers are doing their work in untraditional ways.

Women started this conversation about life and work -- a conversation that is slowly coming to include men. Sanity, balance and a new definition of success, it seems, just might be contagious. And instead of women being forced to act like men, men are being freed to act like women. Because women are willing to leave, men are more willing to leave, too -- the number of married men who are full-time caregivers to their children has increased 18 percent. Because women are willing to leave, 46 percent of the employees taking parental leave at Ernst & Young last year were men.

Looked at that way, this is not the failure of a revolution, but the start of a new one. It is about a door opened but a crack by women that could usher in a new environment for us all.

Questions.

1. "As these women look up at the 'top,' they are increasingly deciding that they don't want to do what it takes to get there." What makes sense, then? Opting out, or redefining the route to the top, or expecting all parents to take a detour to the nursery, and being generous with policies that help them manage to do both, like flexible schedules, reduced hours, paid leaves and high quality affordable day care?
2. Belkin says that biology gives women a chance to pause and step back to ask, "is this really what I want to be doing?" But isn't the chance really given by relative privilege and wealth, rather than biology?
3. Are men likely to follow the lead of elite women who up and quit their jobs, and express their dissatisfaction with the meatgrinder demands of their jobs? Why do you think they will or won't do this?

2. Pamela Stone, *Opting out? Why Women Really Quit Careers and Head Home* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

Stone argues that men and women view their careers differently, reflecting differing gender expectations. Men are able to detach themselves from the family while women know that if they don't take responsibility for the children then no one will.

Common knowledge has it that women and men see traffic lights differently. When the light changes to yellow, women treat it as a caution to put on the brakes, men as a signal to floor it. With regard to their careers, children and family are the yellow light, women slow down and men speed up. The so-called 'clockwork of male careers' explains some of this gender difference. The trajectories of the professions, historically male-dominated, are structured according to the rhythms and timing of men's lives. The period of career establishment and growth corresponds to what are for women the prime child bearing and rearing years. ...

[Even though m]ost of these men, ... judging from the women's narratives, were neither unfeeling louts nor exploitive cads[, the] combination of husbands' unavailability, inability, and/or unwillingness ... to shoulder significant portions of caregiving and

family responsibilities weighed heavily on women's decisions to quit, because it often fell to them to pick up the pieces and the slack....

[M]en's absence from the home as they were away pursuing their careers, coupled with the preference for parental care, meant that women were the only parent available. Women readily stepped up to shoulder this obligation, and their sense of altruism trumped--or at least soothed--any resentment they might have felt about the asymmetry of the arrangement (Stone, 2007, 67-8, 71).

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Sociologist Sharon Hays describes the prevailing set of cultural beliefs about motherhood as an “ideology of intensive mothering” that “advises mothers to expend a tremendous amount of time, energy, and money in raising their children.” To be a good mother is to pay close attention to your children’s development, especially during early childhood, and to nurture that development at every stage of the child’s life as so to build his or her self-esteem, autonomy, and self-reliance.

As Hays shows, no mother, working or at home, whatever her class, race, or social position, is immune from the imperatives of this omnipresent ideology, whose standards are promulgated by a small group of childcare experts and widely disseminated. The rules apply to all mothers and the fundamental assumptions of intensive mothering appear to be accepted, if not implemented, across the board. They make the biggest impression, however, on middle-and upper-middle-class women such as the women in this study, who are particularly mindful of expert advice. These women also have the resources--educational, financial and otherwise--to mother as the experts mandate.

That they put experts’ prescriptions into practice is what another sociologist, Annette Lareau, found when she studied actual parenting behavior across families from a spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds and family types, with both working and at-home mother. Families of the middle and upper middle class parented according to a model she called “concerted cultivation” (most of the burden being borne by mothers, whether they had careers or not). As its name implies, concerted cultivation was marked by features that will probably sound all too familiar to many readers of this book: a hectic pace of organized activities scheduled by parents or their surrogates, a strong sense of parental obligation, and a child-centered life focused on meeting children’s developmental needs. This style of parenting, for all its demands on parents (read mothers), makes sense and literally pays off, Lareau argues, because “cultivated” children experience a smoother transition to adulthood and enjoy more enhanced life chances (Stone, 2007, 42-3).

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Unlike ... women ... who had difficulty putting their finger on just what it was that made parental care preferable, these women were very clear about the advantages they had over caregivers. As children got older, women perceived an increase in the scope and complexity of the needs and demands of older children relative to younger ones, which prompted doubts about the capacities of their paid caregivers and led to the unraveling of heretofore successful childcare arrangements among women who had no prior preference for parental care per se. As the more sophisticated social, emotional and

educational needs of older children superseded the simpler, more straightforward babysitting and physical care required for younger children, women reevaluated their childcare... Marina, the HMO manager, elaborated this viewpoint, and her comments provide an insight in to the activity-filled childhoods characteristic of families of the middle and upper-middle classes to which these women belonged, activities that require considerable planning and supervision:

There isn't a substitute, no matter how good the children. When they're little, the fact that someone else is doing stuff with them is fine. It wasn't the part that I loved anyway. But when they start asking you questions about values, you don't want to have your babysitter telling them... Our children come home, and they have all this homework to do, and piano lessons and this and this, and its all a complicated schedule. And, yes, you could get an au pair to do that, to balance it all, but they're not going to necessarily teach you how to think about math. Or help you come up with mnemonic devices to memorize all of the counties in Spain or whatever (Stone, 2007, 51).

The fact that many women leave work in order to educate their children is revealing. Many people assume that women are able to "do it all," because they know that their children are well cared for while they are away at work, and that their husbands buy into the importance of their role in childrearing and will help with some of the everyday jobs like homework, soccer practice and PTA meetings. But the education and childcare system assume an interested, engaged parent who will spend time with her children, answering their questions, helping them learn to think about moral dilemmas, making sure they get to lessons and practices, put time in everyday practicing their musical instrument, and the like. At the same time, bosses assume workers who will be on call to meet the needs of deadlines and clients well beyond a 40 hour week. This led many of the women Stone interviewed, as they bumped up against competing expectations, to decide that they couldn't juggle job and kids and would simply quit. This decision led many to cope with recalibrating their self image.

The challenges women confronted in their new lives at home revolved primarily around identity, theirs having shifted abruptly from working professional to stay-at-home mother... Losing a valued professional identity was only half of the problem. Women also had to deal with the double whammy of transitioning to a new role that many perceived to be highly devalued, and that they themselves sometimes struggled to value.

You know, the first question they always ask you is, "Well, what do you do? Where do you work?" And I say, "Well, I'm not working now. I'm staying home with my children." And it was like this wall of invisibility. You know, I remember reading *The Invisible Man* by Ralph Ellison [a book not about the invisible man of old-time horror movies, but about a black man's struggle to be recognized in the white, then segregationist, Jim Crow period prior to World War II]. And that was what came to mind. It was like all of a sudden I didn't exist. And that really upset me for a while, and it made me mad. And I was shocked. I thought, well I haven't changed. I'm the same person I was. You know, six months ago I

was working in the U.S. Attorney's office doing all this hot stuff. My name was in the *New York Times*, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Now I'm nobody. And it was just weird. It was, it was really strange. And people, just, they had nothing to talk to me about. You know, they couldn't relate.

Women cited the loss of their professional role as the major challenge confronting them in going home. More than half discussed the anguish they continued to feel about having lost a vital aspect of their identity and status in the world. Having made great investments in their careers and been successful in them, women came face to face with the extent to which they had depended on their work and their professional identities for a sense of value, self-worth, and external validation (Stone, 144-5).

Questions.

1. Women who leave their careers in order to raise children establish a new identity in being a mother. But what of the woman who was *pushed* out, and still considers herself to be a professional at heart? Think about your identity now: do you see yourself as a student? A daughter or a son? Girlfriend/boyfriend? How does this identity define who you will be in the future? What if you were asked or forced to change that identity?

Recognizing the disproportionate amount of responsibility for the home placed on women and the effects that it was having on their careers, Stone's study aimed to find out why women are leaving the work force to go home, the phenomenon dubbed "opting out" by writers like Lisa Belkin and Linda Hirshman.

Wanting to understand fully why professional women, the object of media scrutiny, leave careers to go home, I focused on white, married women with children, who had previously worked as professionals or managers and who were married to men who could support their being at home. They are not "Every woman," nor are they intended to be, because most households with children need both parents working; relative to the typical woman, my subjects are more highly educated and more affluent. Although none of the women I talked with was a public figure, they had enjoyed considerable career success. Given the centrality of "choice" to our understanding of women's decisions about work and family, I thought it was important to study women who, at least theoretically, had a choice, women who could entertain both alternatives--to continue in their careers or quit--and were able to exercise some element of discretion in making their decision, women for whom quitting would not incur extreme hardship. I also thought it was important to foreclose the explanation that women were quitting because they couldn't hack it or were otherwise incompetence--their quitting "to go home" a face-saving explanation for being let go or otherwise nudged out; hence my decision to recruit women for the study primarily from alumnae networks of several highly selective colleges and universities, women with impeccable education credential who had negated elite environments with competitive entry requirements (Stone, 2007, 15-16)

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In an era when the dual-earner household is the norm, it is a relatively elite group of couples that can entertain the notion of one partner (usually the wife) not working, even for a short time. Among this group, typically both professional, there are indications that women are still torn between the competing claims of career and family.... [Even so]

one in four white, college-educated, married professional women with children is at home (22 percent among mothers of children younger than eighteen, and 28 percent among mothers of pre-school age children.) The relative steadiness of this proportion over a period that's seen many other changes in women's education and employment behavior--some that might truly be labeled as "revolutionary," such as women's flocking to formerly male-dominated professions--does raise questions (Stone, 2007, 9).

The majority of these young mothers did not envision themselves leaving the labor force for their home. On average the women that leave are those that had dreams of being a lawyer, doctor, stock broker, CEO or another highly prestigious career and many times had achieved it before they turned in their briefcase for a minivan and business deals for homework.

...[a] study of female graduates of elite schools found that the majority (58 percent) worked without interrupting they careers, this means that just under half (42 percent) did not, an estimate that is confirmed by another study. This national survey of "highly qualified women," defined as those with an advanced degree or an undergraduate degree with honors, also reported that almost half (43 percent) who had children had left the workforce at some point in their careers, and cited their care giving responsibilities (for children and parents) as the number one reason behind their decision. The same study included a counterpart sample of men, only 24 percent of whom ever quit working. Their reasons for quitting? They were switching careers, getting more training, or starting their own business. Similarly, a national study of advanced-degree recipients found that ten years after graduation, women were roughly three times more likely than their male counterparts to be out of the labor force at this critical point of early-to-mid career transition and take-off. Virtually all men were working, and while the vast majority or women were too, 12 percent of female law school graduates, 11 percent of those with MDs and 8 percent of those with MBAs were not. Again, women overwhelmingly cited family responsibilities as the reason; men cited career advancement...

[However, c]areer breaks and periods out of the workforce are costly, especially in the professions. Individually, women bear these costs directly in the form of lost salary and blocked or slowed advancement. By one estimate, women's annual earnings fall by 30 percent (controlling for education and hours worked) when they are out of the labor force for two to three years, which is the average amount of time that high-achieving women are out according to a recent survey. Cumulatively, interruptions and the fewer years of work experience that go hand in hand with them account for a significant portion of the gendered gap in earnings and partly explain the relative absence of women in the upper reaches of most professions (Stone, 9-11).

The effects of an individual woman's decision to leave the work force could have on her own life, loss of skill, inability to advance, loss of income, and the like are clear. Not so obvious is the impact women's decisions to leave have on the women who *continue* to work. When women first began entering the work force it was assumed that their ascent to the top was just a matter of time and waiting for enough of their cohorts to make their mark on the professional world. Stone makes clear that collectively, women face many barriers in the workforce, whether they have children or not.

In the early days, when women were still new kids on the block, their ascent to the top of these fields was seen as just a matter of time, a problem that would be solved as

entering cohorts worked their way into and up the pipeline. Yet even as women's entry has persisted, their presence grown, and their time-in-rank lengthened, progress in closing the gender gap in earnings has slowed and the number of women at the top remains stubbornly and disproportionately few. In 2000, among fulltime, year-round workers, women earned only 72 cents for every dollar earned by a man. In the professions, the gender-based pay gap (expressed as the ratio of female to male median weekly earnings) is still considerable: 65 percent among financial managers, 67 percent among marketing and public relation managers, 72 percent among physicians, 73 percent among lawyers, 81 percent among editors and reporters, and 84 percent among computer programmers. Women comprise 15 percent of partners at law firms and roughly similar proportions of judgeships at the circuit and district court levels; they are only 6 percent of tenured faculty at law schools. Among top industrial firms and the Fortune 500 companies, only an estimated 3 to 5 percent of senior managers are women. In the academy women fare relatively better, but still account for only 25 percent of full professors (the highest regular professorial rank).

What's happened to all the women from entry level to top of the heap? Scholars call it the "leaky pipeline" problem, but such is the extent of women's disappearance that it might more aptly be labeled the black hole (or perhaps Bermuda Triangle) problem. Highly trained and qualified professional women are ascending into thin air rather than into high-paying positions of leadership and authority. Time out of the labor force to be at home is one of the reasons. Understanding why and how women come to be home is thus critical; to understanding larger issues about women's status and their professional achievements, both in their own right and relative to men's (Stone, 2007, 13).

The women that Stone studies are the nation's "best and the brightest" who theoretically would have been top competitors to be law firm partners, CEOs, tenured professors and other positions of authority and prestige, had they not made the decision to give up their career to head home. Stone shows that the decision for these women to give up the careers that their Ivy League educations prepared them for could not have been an easy one. They struggled with juggling kids and careers, they asked for help accommodating the demands of their jobs and schedules to their family responsibilities, and they encountered resistance.

If they cannot combine work and family successfully, who can? If they choose to step away from careers in which they have made huge investments of time and energy, what does it say to younger women ... as they contemplate their own future decisions about children and careers? What does it say to the prestigious schools where they have been educated and trained? What message does it send to the top-drawer firms that hire them? What does it signal to less privileged women, such as single mothers transitioning off welfare, who *must* work? (Stone, 2007, 14-15).

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... behind these women's decisions is not a return to traditionalism. It is not women who are traditional; rather it is the workplace, stuck in an anachronistic time warp that ignores the reality of the lives of high-achieving women such as the ones I studied, and resists and rebuffs their efforts to change it. The exits of highly talented women are the miners' canary--a frontline indication that something is seriously amiss in too many workplaces (Stone, 2007, 19).

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Even before they had advanced in their careers, often at the earliest stages in fact, and usually long before the decision to quit was made, women encountered warning signs alerting them that motherhood and careers were incompatible. On the one hand, as women with impressive credentials and training, they were welcomed into the workplace; on the other hand, as mothers (or potential mothers), they felt shut out. Although these warning signs were not the reasons women quit, they set up the mixed messages of the classic double bind and influenced the way women thought about the options before them (Stone, 2007, 115-116).

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As they navigated their careers through pregnancy and beyond, women told stories that signaled a kind of latent bias against mothers at their workplaces. Having retooled from education to law, Blair Riley landed a plum job with one of the most prestigious “white shoe” law firms in the country. Just before she was to begin working, she discovered—much to her surprise—that she was pregnant. She describes announcing this news to her new employer:

I called them up and said I was pregnant. And I could just hear them [and she mimics a long, silent pause on the other end]. I’m sure they thought “If we hired this woman over forty, she’s not going to get pregnant on us. That’s going to be the one advantage she’s got. We don’t have to give her a pregnancy leave.

The firm granted her leave without question, and she began working six months after giving birth, but her experience affords a flavor of the trepidation and uncertainty with which even these highly-trained and accomplished women broached their need for the pregnancy-related accommodations to which they were entitled and the fear they felt that their career commitment would be questioned by virtue of the simple fact that they were pregnant....

These and similar experiences sent women the message that pregnancy was to be handled like a dirty little secret. Just as there were no role models, neither were women able to openly discuss their impending motherhood.... This sweeping of motherhood under the carpet contributed to women’s conflict and uncertainty about whether or not to continue with their careers, and was one of the reasons that they often waited until the last minute to decide what to do (Stone, 2007, 117-8).

The majority of highly educated women do not spend the time, effort and money that it takes to get an advanced degree with the goal of leaving it all to go home and raise their children. Indeed, before they quit, the women that Stone studied were ideal workers, working sixty-hour workweeks and available 24/7. But they were unable to maintain their ideal worker status when they became mothers. They were no longer available whenever their bosses needed them or able to put in as many hours as was needed in order to get the job done, because they had a family at home that demanded their care and attention. Many of the women Stone interviewed indicated that no matter how hard they tried, they still couldn’t make it work. They cited lack of flexibility, intolerance of part-time work, and supervisors who were not family friendly as the most common reasons.

On average, these women worked a decade before they quit. They were experienced and savvy in sizing up their options, and saw the “choice” before them as between working forty plus hours or quitting. Lily Townsend, a senior associate at a leading law firm, talked about the prevailing understanding among her colleagues, which she had taken to heart in her decision to stay home rather than work part-time after her first child was born:

Overall, there was a belief among the women that any part-time arrangement was a problem--either sever or work full-time. Part-time had been tried but didn't work very long. In my area, transactional, if a deal is in the works, you've got to be on it 100 percent, it's hard to be part-time with transactional work. Clients, partners can't rely on you and you can't rely on yourself. Some women had tried part-time, working on transactions and then taking time off, but found it too disruptive to family life.

Over and about their sheer demand level, all-or-nothing jobs were further distinguished by women's inability to exercise control over their timing and scheduling. Thus Marina Isherwood, whose husband was a doctor with his own overloaded schedule, tried consulting for a short time after she had quit her job as an HMO administrator, only to drop that too because.

I discovered that if you're a consultant, you don't dictate time. What I ran into was that I had meetings with doctors. I had a meeting with a group of doctors at 7:30 in the morning. And how do I handle having a meeting at 7:30 in the morning when I'm supposed to have the kids? (Stone, 2007, 86)

Part-time workers are often expected to do their share of the work, plus pick up the slack where needed. Thus, many women found themselves doing “a job and a half” instead of half a job. Eventually the company asks women to take on more and more responsibilities because they are “part time,” ignoring the fact that the reason for their part-time status in the first place is because of obligations elsewhere (Stone, 2007, 89).

Unsurprisingly, a big part of the problem women encountered was due to the reluctance of their bosses or supervisors to permit them flexible work arrangements, producing a de facto “motherhood bar”:

Because women had to negotiate with their bosses privately and were effectively pleading for special favors in order to work part-time or otherwise flexibly, they were especially vulnerable to the turmoil of restructuring... The moral for women was that flexibility was only as good as your last manager... As recently as the 1950s, there were still states with so-called “marriage bars” in place, laws that required women (especially teachers) to resign upon getting married. Women's reasons for quitting today reveal that the time demands and inflexibility of professional occupations in combination with the gendered nature of parenting creates a kind of de facto motherhood bar. Put differently, being a woman in a man's world isn't the problem it used to be, being a mother is. From the reasons women give for quitting, it is easy to divine the existence of a motherhood bar based on workplace inflexibility. Virtually every woman (even one who always intended to stay home) cited as a major reason for quitting her inability to find a job that provided viable, meaningful,

and valued alternatives to full-time work (read forty-plus hour workweeks) (Stone, 2007, 99, 101).

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While I was immersed in the lives of high-achieving women who had interrupted, sometimes terminated, their careers, the vast majority of whom, despite their best effort, had in some sense been “unsuccessful” in imagining or orchestrating the integrated life they had hoped for, I received an e-mail from a complete stranger, a woman who had learned of my research through a mutual friend. The correspondent, whom I’ll call Marianne Hutchinson, was determined *not* to quit, yet struggling, as the women I’ve profiled had, to hold on to a substantial career and a family. She “want[ed] to be one of the women that survives in this corporate world to pave the way for other women.” Her story was shockingly (almost depressingly) familiar, similar to those I had been hearing, different only in its immediacy (because she was writing in real time, not speaking retrospectively) and (as yet) in its outcome:

I am a Director of [a division] a [Bigbank, a major national financial institution] and for the past year, have had a somewhat flexible work arrangement in which I telecommute a few times a month to get my daughter to school when my husband travels. The time spent at home amounts to 10-15 hours per month. The boss that sanctioned the situation is now gone and my new boss has said (in very unfriendly, almost abusive tones) absolutely, no way can I continue to do this. All of the excuses that he used were feeble and there had been no complaints about this arrangement from any of my internal customers or co-workers. In fact, 95 percent of my internal customers do not reside in the same office as I and must contact me by phone or email anyway. Well, I went straight to an attorney friend and she said the law does nothing to protect working mothers. So, I am at a loss about what to do; where to turn. I contacted a vaguely sympathetic Human Resources person, but am now afraid that if I make more fuss over this I will jeopardize my bonus and job security. The day after the uncomfortable conversation with my boss, *Working Mother* came out with an article about the “Top 100 Companies for Working Mothers.” Guess who was listed for the [tenth-plus] consecutive year? You got it, [Bigbank] (Stone, 2007, 218).

...many women faced situations similar to Marianne’s and tried to find a solution, to stay and fight. Like her, they struggled alone. With no formal resource or institutional cover, they often faced daunting opposition or, for those who “succeeded” in getting flexibility, won a Pyrrhic victory. Finding themselves marginalized and stigmatized, they disinvested in their careers and correspondingly upped their investments in family. Her letter is a reminder that the demand for flexibility and family accommodation made by women now at home is by no means unique to them, not are their demands for flexibility extravagant. High on working women’s wish list, running well ahead of concerns with salary, is the need for family-friendly accommodations....

What can be done to help a woman like Marianne stay on her chosen course, or alternatively, to enable women like those in my study to avoid having to exercise the reluctant and false choices of family over careers? As my study and so much other research shows, family-friendly policies often exist on the books only, idiosyncratically and unevenly implemented. Dispensed as special favors, they are not an ingrained part of workplace culture (Stone, 2007, 218-9).

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The current practices surrounding flexibility give too much discretion to managers, ensuring no organizational buy-in or accountability. Indeed women saw no penalty to bosses who refused their requests; the detriment redounded only to their careers. To the extent that women continue to be the biggest constituency for flexibility, their careers, and their potential to make a contribution, are compromised by this ad hoc approach and adversely impacted relative to men's. As so many experts in the field have concluded... flexibility cannot be tacked on, but has to be built in, requiring a fundamental reimagining and redesign of how work gets done. In some instances, flexibility and its implementation will require more teamwork, in others, more off-site work, in still others, some other adaptation, but the goal has to be to build a world of work that acknowledges women's (and men's) caregiving and family responsibilities—building work around life not life around work (Stone, 2007, 227-8).

Managers can decide not to grant women flexible or part time schedules, and furthermore, are likely to accept women's explanation that this is what they "choose" without attempting to dissuade them:

Women maintained the illusion of choice not only for themselves, but to others. Having gotten the message that motherhood and work were incompatible, they gave what was the socially acceptable response in tendering their resignation... Women's less than full disclosure was often tied to their desire to avoid conflict or bruised feelings with their boss or coworkers as well as not to burn bridges that they might want to cross in the future... Bosses and co-workers rarely challenged women's explanations. Instead, their response tended to confirm women's perceptions that work and family were incompatible... Few bosses attempted to convince women to stay or offered them inducements to do so, acting as if there *was* a firewall between women's work and family lives (Stone, 2007 128-130).

Stone concludes her study of high achieving women who decide to stay home:

There is no homeward-bound revolution in women's work behavior, but even if there were, high-achieving women at home are not its Pied Pipers... the so-called opt-out revolution, with its overtones of discretion and consumerism, is driven not by life-style preferences nor by changing aspirations, but by the inability of many highly accomplished women to surmount formidable obstacles; not by preference for a return to the good old days of traditional gender roles, but by the experience of little-changing

gendered realities. High-achieving women are not opting out of the workplace, they are being shut out.

Women at home—the vast majority of them anyway—do not want to choose between careers and kids. They make the choice—and come to believe they have to—on the basis of their lived and observed realities, not their deep-seated preferences for a mother-only existence....

While the kind of women I studied are often portrayed in the media as throwing over feminism, with its emphasis on women's ability to work, be economically independent, and make a productive contribution not only to their own family, but also to the larger society, in fact, their experiences reveal them to be true daughters of the feminist revolution and to show just how profound has been the impact of feminism and other societal changes reinforcing its messages, at least in reorienting educated women's aspirations and identities away from a purely domestic focus (Stone, 215-6).

Questions.

1. What does Stone take to be the biggest reasons why Ivy League educated women were deciding to quit their jobs and stay home to raise children? How does her study differ from Belkin's?
2. How relevant are studies that focus on the "best and the brightest" women for helping us understand the reasons why more ordinary middle class or blue collar women opt to continue to work or take time out of work to stay home with their children?
3. Where does change most need to occur: personal divisions of labor between spouses; fewer working hours; more flexibility in the workplace to accommodate childrearing responsibilities; or better family-friendly policies, like paid parental leaves and high quality child care?

3. Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson, *The Time Divide: Work, family, and gender inequality* (Cambridge, MA : Harvard University Press, 2004)

Jerry Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson's book, *The Time Divide*, in fact addresses several divides: the *work-family time bind*, but also the *occupational divide* between jobs that demand long days, and jobs that provide neither adequate time nor money to meet workers' needs; the *aspiration divide* between the time people devote to work and their ideal working time; a *parenting divide* that separates parents from other workers, leaving parents to face tight time squeezes with inadequate support, and "a *gender divide* that leaves women confronting the most acute dilemmas and paying the highest price for their efforts to reconcile family needs with work demands" (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 8). They are concerned with the tradeoffs facing working parents, and with issues of gender equality that face workers struggling to find adequate time and flexibility to manage work and family obligations.

Although men and women both want more work flexibility, Jacobs and Gerson find that women are more likely to cut back hours than are men when they have children at home, and highly committed women workers are less likely to enjoy flexibility than their male peers.

Having children makes a difference [to working time and commitment], especially for women. While having children at home makes relatively little difference in men's paid working time, it tends to pull women away from long workweeks.... The overall drop in working time among couples with children thus primarily reflects reduced

working time among mothers. In 2000, fathers with three or more children worked 0.7 hours per week more than did husbands without children, while mothers with three or more children worked 5.8 fewer hours per week than married women without children (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 47, 49).

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Among workers who have very long workweeks, however, men and women diverge in unanticipated ways. While men who work fifty or more hours per week report substantial increases in flexibility, women in this situation experience this rebound to a much smaller degree. For men, working relatively short or long workweeks bestows flexibility, leaving those in the middle relatively squeezed. For women, however, there is no such reward for working more hours. Women at the high end of the spectrum lack the autonomy and control that similarly situated men enjoy.

The lack of flexibility available to highly committed women workers signals difficulties for women (and their families) on several fronts. Most obviously, it implies that those workers most likely to be shouldering heavy burdens at work and at home are less likely to have the flexibility they need. Equally problematic, we suspect that committed working women's lack of control at work likely reflects a hidden consequence of the glass ceiling, which limits women's upward mobility. While men who put in many hours at work may enjoy the rewards of achieving positions of authority, women who do the same are less likely to attain sufficient status to control their schedules....

Economists, especially those who emphasize the role of human capital in labor-market processes, argue that men and women make contrasting work choices because they prefer a different balance between family and work (see, for example, Becker 1981). They contend that men prefer to maximize earnings and job success to support their families, while women with children are willing to sacrifice economic reward and upward mobility in order to invest more time in family pursuits. This argument implies that women, especially married mothers, are more likely to choose more flexible jobs while men, especially married fathers, are more likely to make work choices based on other criteria.

Is work flexibility linked to gender and family situation? The answer appears to be "no." When the simple association between family attributes and flexibility at work is examined, we find no link to such key indicators as being married and having children in the household. Moreover, having an employed spouse has no influence on either women's or men's own work flexibility, and neither does a spouse's number of work hours. For women, there is also no link between placing a higher importance on a husband's job and choosing flexible work. And men who place more importance on a wife's job are less, rather than more, likely to experience flexibility in their own jobs.

There is thus no support for the contention that women choose and men eschew flexible work in order to reproduce a gendered division of work in the home. Family obligations may increase the pressures on working parents, but neither mothers nor fathers enjoy more flexibility to meet these demands. And our research suggests that jobs in female-dominated occupational categories, such as clerical, sales, and health-care occupations, are generally less flexible than those in male-dominated occupations, especially in the professional sector.

Since few have the power to choose the conditions of their work based on their private needs, it should come as no surprise that family situation is not linked to work flexibility. Despite the rise in dual-earner and single-parent homes, employers, far more than workers, set the conditions under which parents combine work and family (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 102-3).

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Do those with more family obligations sort themselves into jobs with more scheduling flexibility? We were unable to find much evidence to support this common assumption. Among men, those with children at home and those whose wives held paid jobs reported having less control over their schedules than did other men. For women, marital and parental status were not statistically significant. This evidence reinforces the conclusion that those who need flexibility the most are often unable to find it....

Supportive supervisors and workplace cultures are another factor in job flexibility: those having supportive supervisors are more likely to have flexibility. Yet it is job autonomy—control over the content of one’s job—that provides the most powerful link with workplace flexibility. Job autonomy increases the percent of explained variance from 13 to 19 percent for men and from 11 to 18 percent for women. When autonomy is taken into account, the relative importance of such factors as workplace culture and supervisor support appears to diminish. However, all of these contextual factors are highly intertwined and tend to occur together as aspects of the overall work environment, and they have similar consequences for men and women in similar situations.

We stress the similarities in the influence of job attributes for men and women because there is a tendency to exaggerate the differences. Indeed, the focus on gender differences often leads people to forget the tremendous overlap in the experiences of men and women (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 103-5).

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Workplace structure and culture make an important difference in workers’ lives. Employers’ support for flexible work arrangements, especially in the form of understanding supervisors and a supportive workplace environment, give both women and men more control over how to balance work and family life. And while similar work conditions affect female and male workers in similar ways, men are more likely to obtain privileges at the workplace that give them more felicitous work circumstances.

Workplace conditions, especially flexibility over working hours, are as important to busy Americans as time spent working. Control over working hours is nevertheless only one part of a larger package of family-supportive policies that offer workers the chance to ease their work-family conflicts and gain more discretion about how to meet their multiple obligations. Other possible family-friendly options include job sharing, shorter workweeks, parental leaves, child-care services, and elder-care support.

Our findings reveal strong worker support for family-supportive work-place policies. A large proportion of workers who have these benefits use them (though it should be noted that many of these benefits are situation specific: not everyone needs them all of the time). In addition, a substantial proportion of those who do not have family benefits express a willingness to trade other benefits and even, in many cases, to

change jobs to receive them. Clearly, there is a high demand and perceived need for supportive workplace policies.

Even though workers want and often use family support policies, there remains the possibility that many are reluctant to take advantage of these options because they fear that doing so will entail costs and sanctions. Indeed, such options might be used more if they were perceived to be free of career- or job-threatening penalties. In other words, family-supportive workplace policies may be formally available but informally frowned upon (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 105-6).

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Professional women, especially those with young children, are the most likely to enjoy the option of part-time work and, to a lesser extent, job sharing. Compared to their female peers, professional men with young children are much less likely to have the option to work part-time... or to be willing to trade pay for the opportunity to work less.... Women appear to be more able to cut back on their careers, but this discrepancy in the options of men and women does not bode well for women's ability to gain equality.

Part-time work is a less popular option than flexible scheduling or working at home, because of the high immediate and long-term costs of working part-time... (Jacobs and Gerson, 107-108).

* * *

Clearly, the desire for family-supportive options among workers, especially among mothers and fathers with young children, is high. With the exception of benefits that entail high economic and other costs, such as part-time work, a large percentage of workers use family supportive benefits when they are available....

When given a genuine choice, both women and men, especially those with young children, prefer more flexibility at work and more time at home. When the option is available, a high proportion of workers take advantage of the opportunity to work at home and vary the length of their working day. Similarly, when flexible scheduling is not available, a remarkable number of women and men appear willing to make other work sacrifices to obtain it. In contrast to the notion that workers are pursuing personal gratification at work rather than meeting the needs of their families and children, this picture suggests instead that they are striving for more flexible and fluid options for integrating these no longer so separate spheres.

Despite the large and often unmet desire for family-supportive work arrangements, however, many workers may be fearful that taking advantage of family friendly policies will be costly. A relatively low interest in part-time work, for example, suggests that workers are reluctant to use options that might threaten their economic and career prospects. Thus, only 16 percent of workers would be willing to trade other benefits and only 11 percent would be willing to change jobs to have a part-time option. Among professionals with young children, the part-time option remains equally unattractive, with only 15 percent of women and 5 percent of men willing to change jobs.

Such options might be more popular if they were believed to be free of career- or job-threatening penalties. It is thus crucial to understand whether workers perceive family-friendly policies to be formally available but informally stigmatized....

The costs of choosing to work less than exceedingly long workweeks can be particularly acute for professional workers. In *The Part-Time Paradox*, Cynthia Epstein and her colleagues report, for example, that lawyers must endure both short-term disapproval and longer-term career sacrifices for challenging “time norms” that expect them to work far more than forty hours a week. They show how work organizations stigmatize those putting in less than very long working hours as “time deviants,” creating intractable double-binds for committed workers who also wish to be involved parents. In high-pressure occupations such as law, where eighty-plus hours a week is common, the once-standard forty-hour workweek has come to be defined as part-time....

[But] if [family supportive policies] target only women, they threaten to recreate earlier forms of gender inequality in a new form. “Mommy tracks,” for example, ask women to forgo upward mobility in order to combine motherhood and work (Schwartz 1989). Such policies force women to confront an unfair choice between motherhood and a career, while excluding men from the expectation that they have parental responsibilities. “Gender-neutral” family politics may appear less pernicious. But if they stigmatize parental involvement, both involved mothers and fathers are disadvantaged. It is a dubious social policy that rewards parents of either sex for subordinating family needs to work and career.

The economic costs of parenting remain sizable. Michele Budig and Paula England (2001) estimate that mothers are paid 7 percent less for every additional child they have. But this figure substantially understates the cost of parenting because it compares individuals who worked the same number of hours. The principal way that motherhood affects earnings is to reduce working time, including pushing mothers to withdraw from the labor force. Ann Crittenden (2001) is in the right ballpark when she suggests that the cost of becoming a mother in terms of lost lifetime earnings can easily exceed half a million dollars for a middle-income woman and well over a million dollars for a woman with a college degree. The economic losses to women in less rewarded jobs may be lower in absolute numbers, but they are surely as (or more) important to their families’ welfare.

In the best of all possible worlds, neither mothers nor fathers would be penalized for taking care of their children. And surely such a world would not exact a higher price from women than from men. Yet the evidence suggests that “family-friendly” does not necessarily mean either “women-friendly” or “parent-friendly.” Despite the heralding of policies to ease the plight of employed mothers, options that provide family support at the expense of career advancement exact significant costs to anyone who might choose them. In contrast, policies that not only provide for a fluid balance between family and work but also safeguard the work opportunities of the person who uses them are more than just family-friendly. By protecting the rights of employed women and acknowledging the needs of work-committed parents of either sex, such policies would be genuinely woman-friendly, parent-friendly, and child-friendly. The rise of family-supportive policies, however, has more often been conceived in terms of “mommy tracks” that penalize employed mothers and exclude fathers altogether (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004, 109-112).

...workers with supportive workplace cultures typically report having supportive supervisors as well, and for women, the link is especially strong...Yet family-friendly workplaces do not appear to provide the best opportunities to advance. Having a supportive workplace culture is thus negatively related to women’s perceptions for both

white and African-American women's chances for advancement.... women's perceptions of their own chances for advancement are negatively related to their beliefs that their workplaces are family-supportive....

Women and men alike thus tend to perceive that family-friendly workplace policies come with costly strings attached. Their concern about being forced to choose between family-supportive options and career building are probably well founded... At its core, a workplace that is "women-friendly" and "parent-friendly" also needs to support the careers of those who wish to invest time in the unpaid work of caring for their families even as they strive at work....

If women are more likely than men to cut back on time at work in the face of family contingencies, this fact reflects differences in the opportunities and constraints they face. The organization of economic and family life leaves women with greater pressures, and more options, to pull back from work. Although the gender gap in earnings has declined and a rising proportion of wives earn as much as or more than their husbands, ... [t]he more common situation, in which a husband earns more than the wife, encourages mothers to reduce their time at work and fathers to maximize their earnings by working more. Cultural pressures also continue to stress the caregiving obligations of mothers and the breadwinning responsibilities of fathers. Gender differences in the time spent at work and in parenting thus reflect the persistence of unequal opportunities even as the "aspiration gap" between women and men diminishes....

Since the problem of work-family conflict has institutional roots, the resolutions depend on institutional transformations. To provide genuine opportunities for committed workers to be involved parents, we need to focus on workplace organization and the structure of opportunities that parents (and those who wish to become parents) face. If we fail to see the social sources of personal dilemmas, we are left blaming ordinary women and men for conditions they did not create and cannot control (Jacobs and Gerson, 112-15).

Questions.

1. Jacobs and Gerson were unable to find much evidence that those with more family obligations sort themselves into jobs with more scheduling flexibility—yet they also state that women in high status, long-hours jobs (e.g., lawyers) have less flexibility than men, that mothers of three children are likely to reduce their hours significantly while fathers of three increase theirs, and that women most in need of flexibility are least able to access it. What explains these apparently contradictory findings?
2. Why are women workers likely to think that their chances for advancement will be harmed if they are employed in family-supportive workplaces? What could be done to mitigate this situation?
3. How do Jacobs and Gerson compare to Stone with regard to the story that women choose to opt out of full time work, vs. the story that they are forced out by inflexible work expectations? What do you think of these competing explanations?