

12 Work and Family Life

Conservative: Children's Needs and Parents' Careers

FAMILY RESEARCH COUNCIL, *Free to Be Family: Helping Mothers and Fathers Meet the Needs of the Next Generation of American Children* (Washington, DC: Family Research Council, 1992), pp. 49–51. Reproduced with the permission of the Family Research Council.

Most conservatives feel strongly that mothers should not be employed or pursue a career until the children are "well-launched." Otherwise, children might grow up with profound feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Instead of promoting day care, legislation should encourage mothers of infants and young children to stay at home by providing tax credits for nuclear families, a more fluid job market, fewer restrictions on home-based employment, and a reordering of work priorities over the life cycle.

Children go through different phases as they mature, each one with its own unique challenges. Therefore, families go through phases, too, as they confront each new hurdle and reward of their child's journey to adulthood. Families with children the same ages often feel like kindred spirits because the job of raising a child into an adult—though involving individualized needs—presents many universal difficulties and offers many common rewards.

Although there are certainly many different ways of categorizing the life of a child into phases, we have chosen to look at the challenges children face as they go through infancy, childhood, and adolescence.

CHILDREN'S NEEDS AND PARENTS' CAREERS

Most parents know intuitively what reams of child development research have

demonstrated—that young children need significant interaction with both parents and that maternal nurturance is particularly important during the early months and years of a child's life. (Paternal involvement becomes increasingly significant as children grow older.)

According to the late British psychoanalyst John Bowlby, "The young child's hunger for his mother's love and presence is as great as his hunger for food." Bowlby, who devoted much of his life's work to attachment theory, found that children form an intimate bond or attachment with their mother during the first three years of life, and that the strength and security of this bond greatly influence how children view themselves and how well they interact with others.

According to Bowlby, children with parents who are warm, nurturing, and accessible come to view themselves as worthy and lovable, while children with

parents who are rejecting, unresponsive, or neglectful typically struggle with profound feelings of insecurity and low self-esteem. Not only do insecurely attached children question whether others can be counted on to meet their deepest needs, but Bowlby says they question positive input offered by nonparents since it contradicts their own self-perceptions.¹

Another prominent psychologist, Mary Ainsworth, has used a laboratory experiment known as the Strange Situation (in which a child is initially separated and later reunited with his mother) to assess mother-child attachment. Ainsworth's research has determined that the second half of a baby's first year of life is an especially critical phase in the attachment process because this is when "clear-cut" attachment first blooms. During this phase, babies typically begin to approach, cling, and protest separations, as well as search for objects hidden from view and recall that an object continues to exist even though they cannot see, hear, feel, smell, or taste it. According to Ainsworth, this important phase in the attachment process continues well into the second and third years of life.²

In addition, Ainsworth has identified three different patterns of attachment: (1) securely attached infants, who are less troubled by separation from Mom than other children and more likely to respond positively to her return; (2) anxious-resistant babies, who are often emotionally torn by Mom's inconsistency and unpredictability; and (3) anxious-avoidant babies, who defensively avoid Mom because they have been deprived repeatedly of maternal affection.

According to a review of recent research on attachment by child psychologist Brenda Hunter, rising rates of maternal employment have resulted in a marked increase in anxious-avoidant babies since 1980: "When mothers resume employment for 20 or more hours per week, during the crucial first year of life, about 50 percent of the babies will be insecurely attached to mother and/or father," Hunter observes.

"The majority of these will be classified as anxious-avoidant."³

Moreover, a 1987 study by psychiatrist Peter Barglow found a mother's return to full-time employment during the child's first year increases the likelihood of anxious-avoidant attachment—even when the child is provided high quality nanny care in the home. Barglow concludes that babies placed in early non-maternal care may view the repeated, daily separations from Mom as rejection.⁴

Similarly, a much-publicized 1985 study by researchers Jay Belsky and Michael Rovine found that boys placed in infant day care for 20 or more hours per week developed insecure attachments to both parents.⁵ Likewise, a 1985 University of North Carolina study found that children in kindergarten and first grade who had entered high quality day care at 12 weeks of age were more likely to "hit, kick, and push other children" than those who had been cared for at home by their mothers. The UNC study found that children who had been placed in substitute care during the first 12 months of life were more physically and verbally abusive, less cooperative, and less tolerant of frustration.⁶

Given the wealth of research data raising concerns about substitute care in the early stages of a child's development, facilitating parent-child interaction should be the overriding goal of public policies designed to improve the well-being of America's preschool children. Unfortunately, surprisingly little attention has been given to meeting this goal.

PARENTAL PREFERENCE

Legislation introduced by Congressman Charlie Stenholm (D-TX) and Senator Orrin Hatch (R-UT) places greater priority on promoting extended parent-child interaction than on providing ironclad job security. The Family Protection Act of 1991 (H.R. 1270/S. 418) offers parents who quit their jobs to care for young children "parental

preference" in re-hiring by their previous employer. Such a policy, which is patterned loosely after a "veteran's preference" law that dates back to the late 1930s, would give workers an opportunity to return to paid work for their previous employer provided there is a job available for which they are qualified.

The Stenholm-Hatch Bill recognizes that infants need more than just 12 weeks of undistracted time with their parents. It recognizes that many mothers would be willing to sacrifice some job security in order to be home with their children for more than 12 weeks—especially if their future employability were not jeopardized seriously. As columnist Judy Mann points out, "One of the reasons mothers stay in the work force is they are afraid they won't be able to rebuild their careers if they stay home with young children."

Thus, the Family Protection Act strikes a balance between providing guaranteed job security (at a cost to time with children) and providing no job security (at a potential cost to future employability). It offers employees a guaranteed promise—a promise that their prior service with an employer will be recognized when they seek reemployment after taking extended time off to care for young children. For employed women interested in devoting more than just 12 weeks of full-time care to their young children, parental preference offers considerable "promise"—especially when linked to other legislative efforts (like increasing the Young Child Tax Credit) which make it more affordable for tax-paying families to devote more of their time to child-rearing responsibilities.

Such a linkage is important because employment policies designed to facilitate parental time with children are only as good as the family's ability to meet basic economic needs. Nevertheless, some critics sneer at the role of tax benefits in promoting family time, arguing that an \$1,800 per child tax credit or an \$8,200 per child tax exemption would not provide enough economic assistance to enable families to

permanently forego a second income. While it is true that pro-child tax relief may not enable every family to live on a single income, families at the economic margin would most certainly be affected. In addition, families unable to live on one income indefinitely would still benefit considerably from pro-child tax relief. For such families, dramatically increasing the Young Child Tax Credit and greatly expanding the dependent exemption might enable one or both parents to reduce their hours of paid employment to devote more time to children. Or it might "buy" them an extra month or six months or two years of job interruption after the birth or adoption of a child.

Some policy makers and day care advocates argue that most families who care for their own children do so because they lack access to "high-quality" center-based day care. But a 1989 University of Michigan study shows that most employed mothers opt for care by fathers or other family members out of preference rather than necessity.⁹ And Rep. George Miller (D-CA) acknowledged in *Mother Jones* magazine that socialized day care has no grass roots constituency:

I spent eight years in getting the child-care bill passed in Congress, and at its zenith, there was never a child-care movement in the country. There was a coalition of child advocacy groups, and a few large international unions that put up hundreds of thousands of dollars, and we created in the mind of the leadership of Congress that there was a child-care movement—but there was nobody riding me. And not one of my colleagues believed their election turned on it for a moment.⁹

THE FAMILY-FRIENDLY WORKPLACE: TIME OFF FOR GOOD PARENTING

Miller's confession—along with all of the research data on parental preferences—should give pause to government and business leaders being urged to increase day care services to children. Instead, policy-

makers should seek what Karl Zinsmeister calls a "more fluid, less rigid job market" that gives family-oriented workers significant discretion over when, where, and how many hours they work for pay.¹⁰ Specifically, policymakers should encourage flexible hours, part-time work, job sharing, and most especially home-based employment opportunities. Not only is homework one of the more promising work-family solutions, but it also has the potential to put a dent in rush-hour traffic congestion, daytime home burglaries, automotive air pollution, and gasoline consumption.

The first step toward making home-based employment a more viable option would be to loosen restrictions on the deductibility of home office expenses. Under current law, taxpayers cannot write off home office expenses unless home office space is used exclusively for income-producing activities. In other words, overhead expenses for a room that doubles as an office and a guest bedroom cannot be claimed. This exclusive-use rule is particularly burdensome to families with children because they frequently have greater demands on household space than unmarried adults living alone. Thus, Congress should consider dropping the exclusive-use test for parents.

In addition, government policies should encourage a reordering of priorities over the life cycle. In recent years, families in America have increasingly: (1) had both spouses employed full-time while children are young; and (2) had one or both spouses retire before age 65. Taken together, these two trends have created a peculiar "middle-aged bulge" in the allocation of work and family responsibilities over the life cycle.

Author Arlene Rossen Cardozo and lawyer Edith U. Fierst believe the solution to this curious arrangement is "sequencing"—seeking to "do it all" over the course of one's life, instead of all at once. Cardozo and Fierst point to former United Nations Ambassador Jeanne Kirkpatrick as an example of a "sequencer" who took time off from em-

ployment when children were young and then returned to her career after her kids were "well-launched."¹¹

Apart from facilitating full-time parental care of young children for extended periods of time, Congress should remove disincentives to old-age employment, or "twilighting." Specifically, Congress should eliminate the Social Security earnings test and allow "twilighters" to receive full benefits rather than have their benefits reduced in proportion to their income. At the same time, Congress should seek to reverse the growing trend toward early retirement by accelerating scheduled increases in the Social Security retirement age. Indeed, given the improving health and life expectancy of Americans, Congress should consider raising the retirement age beyond currently scheduled thresholds.

NOTES

1. John Bowlby, *Attachment* (New York: Basic Books, 1969), p. xii.
2. Mary D. S. Ainsworth, "Patterns of Infant-Mother Attachments: Antecedents and Effects on Development," *Bulletin of New York Academy of Medicine* 61: 771-791.
3. Brenda Hunter, "Will Parental Leave Work?" Paper presented at Conference of Eagle Forum Education and Legal Defense Fund, Washington, D.C., February 12, 1991.
4. Peter Bargiow et al., "Effects of Maternal Absence Due to Employment on the Quality of Infant Attachment in a Low-Risk Sample," *Child Development* 58 (1987): 945-54.
5. Jay Belsky and Michael Rovine, "Nonmaternal Care in the First Year of Life and the Security of the Infant-Parent Attachment," *Child Development* 56 (1985): 157-67.
6. Ron Haskins, "Public School Aggression among Children with Varying Day Care Experience," *Child Development* 56 (1985): 689-703.
7. Judy Mann, "Making Time for the Families," *The Washington Post*, January 9, 1991.
8. Karen Oppenheim Mason and Karen Kuhlthau, "Determinants of Child Care Ideals Among Mothers of Preschool-Aged Children," *Journal of Marriage and the Family* 51 (August 1989).

9. Douglas Foster and David Beers, "Clout," *Mother Jones* (May/June 1991): 36.
10. Karl Zinsmeister, "Brave New World: How Day-Care Harms Children," *Policy Review* (Washington, D.C.: The Heritage Foundation, Spring 1988).
11. See Edith U. Fierst, "Time Out for Motherhood," *The Washington Post*, May 14, 1989, p. C5; and also Linda Chion-Kenney, "Another Way to Have It All," *The Washington Post*, May 31, 1988; Cardozo is the author of *Sequencing*, published by Atheneum.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. If children form a bond with their full-time mothers during the first three years of life, how can we explain the close attachment between children and employed fathers? Between adoptive parents and children adopted after age three? Or the stay-at-home moms who abuse or murder their children?
2. This article points out that some studies have found an association between infant day care and behavioral problems of kindergartners and first graders. Are there other factors, besides day care, that might explain the behavioral problems?
3. What are the advantages and disadvantages of "sequencing"? Do you think that eliminating early retirement would encourage sequencing?

12 Work and Family Life

Liberal/Feminist: Ozzie and Harriet Are Dead

ROSALIND C. BARNETT AND CARYL RIVERS, *She Works, He Works: How Two-Income Families Are Happy, Healthy, and Thriving* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), pp. 1-7. © 1996 by Rosalind C. Barnett and Caryl Rivers. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.

*In contrast to conservatives and centrists, many liberals—including feminists—maintain that dual-earner families are necessary to maintain a family's economic well-being. Rosalind C. Barnett and Caryl Rivers, for example, argue that two-income families and their children are happier, healthier, and better rounded than the traditional families where the father is the breadwinner and the mother is a full-time homemaker.**

The new American family is alive and well.

Both partners are employed full time, and according to the latest research, the family they create is one in which all members are thriving: often happier, healthier, and more well-rounded than the family of the 1950s.

That's the message of this new, myth-shattering study of such couples, funded by a 1 million-dollar grant from the National Institutes of Mental Health. Our study shows that the full-time-employed, dual-earner couple is a success. It is an excellent fit with today's economic realities. The men and women are doing well, emotionally and physically, and the children are thriving. This is not to say that families don't face many problems; but on the whole, the news about the two-career couple today is very good indeed:

* Barnett and Rivers's research is based on interviews with a random sample of 300 middle-class and working-class married couples in two communities in the greater Boston area.

- The women are not experiencing the high depression and anxiety rates characteristic of women in the 1950s—and while they have busy lives and often feel stressed, they are in very good health overall.
- The men with whom they are partnered are not the distant, work-obsessed fathers of the 1950s, who often felt wistful about their lack of connection to their children; if they are fathers, they are closely involved with all aspects of their children's care.
- Both men and women report that their relationships with their children are close and warm, and they are generally satisfied with the jobs they are doing as parents.
- They know their children are facing the many pressures of a fast-moving, mobile society—drugs, violence, AIDS, and a competitive, uncertain job market in which the need to acquire skills means economic survival and creates pressures

to get into good schools and do well there. They worry about their children, but not obsessively.

- Because they have two full incomes that help buffer them against the terrible wrenches of a changing economy, they do not feel the gut-wrenching vulnerability of standing at the edge of a precipice, ready at any second to topple off the cliff if a company downsizes or relocates. The terrible anxiety of economic uncertainty that can cause so many tensions in families is eased by two incomes, and the health of two-earner couples is bolstered as a result.
- Two-income couples are most often pictured in the media as hard-charging yuppies, but in our sample, both partners seem very much invested in family life. While they often enjoy their jobs and get a health boost from being involved with productive work, they understand that the implicit contract Americans used to expect from their employers—lifetime security in exchange for loyal and productive service—is gone, perhaps forever. Both men and women are committed to working, and what happens on the job is critical to their health. Nonetheless, most see their families as the center of their emotional lives.

But all this good news is too often obscured by a veritable tide of gloom and doom about the modern family, and by a nostalgic longing for a past that no longer exists: the heyday of Ozzie and Harriet, the breadwinner father and the homemaker mom.

This book, we hope, will help to dull the nostalgic glow and bring a sense of reality and optimism to our view of the present. The two-earner couple that has become the norm today is a success story, and the adults and the children within it are thriving. We could do a lot more, as a society, to ensure their health and happiness if we stopped viewing the two-income family as a failed or aberrant life style. For that to happen, we have to see past the fog

of the 1950s and dim the wattage on the images from that era that engage us yet.

They dance through our heads—smiling, dashing off snappy one-liners, and solving problems in the blink of an eye—and it is hard to ignore them. Ozzie and Harriet Nelson, Ward and June Cleaver, and Carol and Mike Brady—with their seemingly limitless brood—are with us still. Even though it has been a long time since their first incarnations in the television sitcoms of the 1950s and 1960s, their images assault us in endless reruns on cable. At almost every hour of every day around the world, someone is watching Beaver struggle over problems with his math homework, or seeing David and Ricky Nelson bickering or Marcia Brady brooding about a date for the prom.

This omnipresence might only be a minor problem—like the advertising jingle that gets stuck in your head—until you realize how much politics, how many ponderous papers from how many think tanks, how much social policy, and how many personal decisions are based on a world that never existed in the first place.

For even as Ozzie and Harriet and their peers reigned supreme over the realm of television, the world they were supposed to reflect was slipping away—and that world was never as vast as we assumed. We tend to think that all mothers in those days were baking cookies in their shiny new kitchens, happily domestic. But studies show that by 1960, 19 percent of mothers with children under six were in the workforce, along with 31 percent of those with children between six and seventeen.¹ At the very time that the sitcom families were burrowing into our subconscious, their real-life counterparts were already starting to fossilize.

Today the so-called “traditional” family, with the breadwinner father and the stay-at-home mother, accounts for less than 3 percent of American families. The number of two-income couples has skyrocketed in the last decade from 20.5 million to about 31 million. By the mid-

1990s, about 60 percent of all married couples were two-earner couples. In 1990, 40 percent of families had full-time-employed husbands and wives, up from 32 percent in 1980, and that percentage is expected to climb.³ Figure 1 shows the dramatic way in which the face of the American workforce has changed.

The couples in our study were typical Americans, not some exotic breed. They were largely white and middle or working class; this book is not a picture of the urban poor or the underclass.

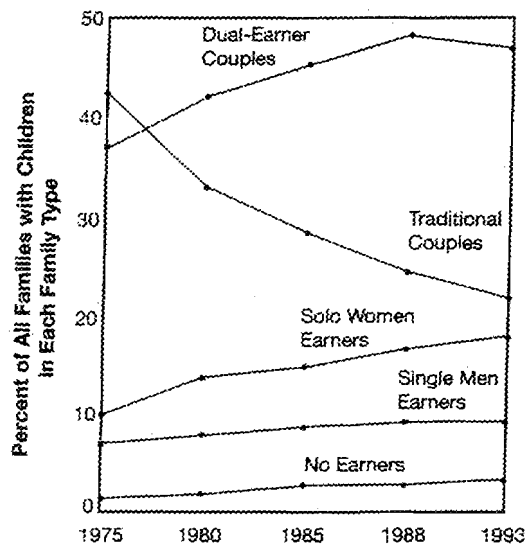
And while some critics may bemoan the fact that so many women are employed, the women in our study are helping to make life for their families, facing the uncertainty of the new global marketplace, free of white-knuckle worry. Because these families in our study have two full incomes, they are sheltered from some of the worst problems in American society today. They don't have to live in neighborhoods wracked by lethal violence; they can afford, for the most part, to live in areas that have schools where guns and metal detectors are

not part of the curriculum. They are not plunged into chaos or poverty if one partner loses a job; they do not have to depend on dwindling government services for food or shelter. In a time when the social safety net is rapidly shrinking, they are less likely to have to depend on it than other Americans. They have the flexibility to change career patterns, if need be. One partner can support the other if one has to go back to school or get new skills training or take a drop in income to enter a new field. They are less likely than single people or one-income families to drop out of the middle class and slip into near-poverty as the economy lurches from one extreme to another.

The dual-earner family offers economic stability, protection against financial disaster, and often offers both adults and children a close-knit, cooperative family style in which all members take an active part in keeping the household running. Men and women sometimes feel there isn't enough time in the day, that what drops off the map is personal and leisure time, and that they would trade job advancement for more time to manage their busy lives. But most would not trade their lifestyle for the Ozzie and Harriet one that gave women fewer opportunities—and today would give both partners much more economic vulnerability.

Is the two-earner lifestyle without problems? Of course not. No family style plays out on one vast flood plain of joy and light. But this book will puncture some of what has become the conventional wisdom about American families. We believe that we have to look at families today through a prism of data and reality, not through the lens of an exaggerated sunny past or the political prism of those who believe the only family values worth promoting are those of a brief, atypical era now past. Trying to examine today's issues through those outmoded lenses will bring us no solutions to current problems and no understanding of what is really happening inside the American family. In this book, we examine families as

FIGURE 1. The Increasing Responsibility of Women Workers for Family Financial Needs



SOURCE: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1993.

they actually are today. These are some of the findings of our study and other cutting-edge research, which we will examine in the chapters to come:

- Working women are in excellent health—far better than homemakers—and are not getting sick from stress or dying from heart disease.
- American couples are cooperating in both work and parenting in a style we call the collaborative couple—and feel good about themselves and their lives.
- Working mothers are not destroying their children—in fact, there is little difference on any of the indices of child development between children of working moms and those of at-home mothers.
- Fatherhood has become more central to the lives of men in dual-earner couples, and critical to their emotional health. More men are willing to trade raises and promotions to spend time with their families.
- Work is just as important to women's health and well-being as it is to men's.
- The so-called mommy track can be bad for a woman's health.
- Marriage is just as central to men's identity and sense of well-being as it is to women's.
- Gender-role differences are shrinking as men's and women's lives become more alike.
- Men and women find exactly the same aspects of their jobs satisfying or distressing.

We found, in fact, that working couples are coping well with many of the changes that have made the two-earner couple the American norm today. The couples themselves have proved much more flexible than America's corporate culture. The corporate world, stuck in the mentality of the 1950s, too often still operates on the notion that the American worker is a male with a wife at home to tend to all the family issues. Workers today—be they men or women—are often in a generational sand-

wich, facing problems with elderly parents and young children at the same time. The stress that such couples feel is often intensified by the rigidity of a corporate culture that for the most part refuses to adopt family-friendly policies that could do wonders for the bottom line as well as improve employees' quality of life. In this book, we'll argue forcefully that the outdated corporate culture has to change for the good of both the American family and American productivity.

If family issues continue to be seen as "women's-ghetto" problems, they will remain peripheral to the American workplace. Our research definitively shows that family issues are a major factor in men's health and productivity, and that failure to address them will have disastrous consequences not only for public health in this country but for our ability to effectively compete in world markets.

This book may be unsettling to some readers because the old ideas are so entrenched that we tend to believe them even while we are living the new realities of American life. Until fairly recently, men and women *did* lead very different lives. Men brought home the paycheck and delegated family responsibilities to their wives. Women saw to it that their husbands and children were happy and healthy. But life has changed with lightning speed. Today, *for the first time*, there is a generation of women whose lives parallel those of their husbands.

The authors of this book are examples of such women. We have each raised two children, now happy and healthy young adults. Juggling, to us, is more than a word; it's a life experience. We have been involved, all of our adult lives, with both the raising of children and with serious and sustained work in our careers. Like most women today, we have spent much of our lives in the workforce and have wrestled with balancing career and kids. Even though this lifestyle has become the norm today, we, as a nation, don't really know what it is like inside the new Amer-

ican family—because we haven't had time to look. Our book does just that. It documents new patterns in the lives of American men and women and the positive consequences for their health. Though the authors have written extensively in the past on the psychology of women, this book is addressed to men and women alike. We believe that the blame game ought to be retired to the dustbin of history. Women are not selfish careerists, destroying their children and their families and undermining society; nor are men brutish, uncaring, lazy slobs who are dead set against change and want women to wait on them hand and foot. The portrait that emerges from our study is one of men and women working together on both the work and home fronts to find personal challenge and satisfaction, to nurture each other, and, if they are parents, to raise children to be responsible citizens in a time of great change.

NOTES

1. U.S. Census figures, 1960.
2. U.S. Census figures, 1990.

CRITICAL THINKING QUESTIONS

1. What are some of the advantages and disadvantages of two-earner families for parents? For their children?
2. Barnett and Rivers's sample was based primarily on white families. Might their conclusions have been different if they had focused on families of color?
3. Barnett and Rivers state that "gender differences are shrinking as men's and women's lives become alike" and that "there is a generation of women whose lives parallel those of their husband." Are these conclusions consistent with the liberal/feminist articles on gender roles in Chapters 5 to 8?