Understanding Work and Family Through a Gender Lens[1]

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January, 2004

(forthcoming in *Journal of Community, Work, and Family*)

Since gender change is reshaping work and family life, a gender lens is needed to understand work-family links and transformations. A gender lens enriches the study of work and family issues by prodding researchers to transcend gender stereotypes, to see gender as an institution, to recognize the multifaceted nature of recent social change, and to acknowledge the strengths and needs of diverse family forms. A gender framework also helps researchers focus on the link between individuals and institutions, the dynamics of social and individual change, and the structural and cultural tensions created by inconsistent change. This framework is illustrated with selected findings from my research on young women's and men's experiences growing up in diverse families and their emerging strategies for integrating family and work.

A half century ago, when most women withdrew from paid work to rear children and men's breadwinner status went largely unquestioned, work and family life were largely conceived as "separate spheres."[2] In the closing decades of the 20th century, as women joined the labor force in ever mounting numbers and gender boundaries began to blur, "work and family" emerged

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[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the Sloan Work and Family Researchers Network panel on "Perspectives of Work-Family Issues and Work Hours," October 21-22, 2002. My thanks to Marcie Pitt- Catsouphes and Kathleen Christensen for convening this important panel and providing insightful suggestions for revisions. Thanks, also, to Rhona Rapoport and to three anonymous reviewers.

[2] In the mid-1950s, the paradigm of separate spheres gained ascendence when Talcott Parsons and Robert Bales (1955) argued that the breadwinner-homemaker family provided a way for women to specialize in the "expressive function" of domestic caretaking while men specialized in the "instrumental function" of supporting the household through paid work.

as a distinct field of study and the image of work-family conflict gradually but inexorably replaced long-held assumptions about "separate spheres" for women and men.[3]

While the rise of work-family conflicts is inextricably linked to the changing dynamics of gender, the study of work and family has not consistently incorporated a "gender lens."[4] Indeed, some of the most important contemporary research on changing work and family patterns appears to overlook the significance of gender change. A recent U.S. government-sponsored study of the effects of childcare on child development, for example, treats mothers as the only caregivers considered "primary," lumping fathers together with other paid and unpaid caretakers (NICHD Early Childcare Research Network, 2002).[5] By ignoring the changing role of fathers, this research design provides a vivid illustration of what can happen when gender is ignored or taken

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[3] Although working-class and poor women have always been employed outside the home in substantial numbers, the proportion of American women in the paid labor force only rose above 50 percent, which might be considered a "tipping point," in the 1970's. As the breadwinner-homemaker household began to erode as both a cultural ideal and a demographic reality, new paradigms emerged that focused on the links – and conflicts – between work institutions and family life as well as the ways work-family conflicts contributed to gender inequality. Epstein's 1970 study of the dilemmas facing professional women and Rapoport and Rapoport's 1976 study of dual-earner families were among the first to point to the mounting challenges emerging as women joined the workforce in increasing numbers. An early example of the newly emerging "work-family" paradigm, which focused on socially structured gender inequality, is Rosabeth Kanter's classic study, Men and Women of the Corporation (1977).

[4] The term "gender" has a long and complex history. Feminist sociologists, among others, generally use it to refer to the ways that inequalities and differences between women and men are institutionalized and socially and culturally constructed. The term serves as an alternative to the concept "sex," which more directly refers to biological domains, and "sex roles," which implies a functional analysis of "complementary" social roles. (See, for example, Stacey and Thorne, 1985.)

[5] Indeed, if gender equity issues were explicitly built into family research and social policy, as is commonly done in some European countries, then conceptions of family and child welfare could and would be considered in broader and more effective ways.

for granted in work-family research. Whether the omission is inadvertent or intended, the result is that misleading assumptions – such as "only women can be parental caretakers" – and hidden political agendas – such as "only women should be parental caretakers" – can be built into the analytical frameworks of influential research.

Since gender change is transforming work and family life, it is crucial to integrate gender in work-family research and analysis.[6] Not only does a gender lens enrich the study of work-family connections; it also provides a framework for developing more effective social policies to address the new time dilemmas considered in this volume. Below I discuss some of the ways that a gender lens can inform the study of work-family issues. To illustrate how it provides a framework for analyzing work and family change, I present some findings from my research on how young women and men are crafting work and family strategies as they confront basic gender transformations but persisting work-family conflicts.

Contributions of a Gender Lens: State of the Debate

Emerging frameworks in the study of gender can enrich the study of work and family in several ways. First, a sensitivity to gender prods work-family researchers to replace stereotypes with more complex and accurate descriptions of the lives of women, men, and children. Second, a gender lens helps researchers analyze gender as an institution rather than as an individual characteristic. Third, a gender focus draws attention to the multifaceted nature of change, including such benefits as declining inequality and expanding options, along with new work-family

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[6] For simplicity's sake, this paper uses the term "work" to refer to work performed for pay, even though unpaid domestic activities are surely a form of labor as well.

dilemmas and conflicts. And fourth, by focusing on how private choices are rooted in social arrangements over which individual women and men have only limited control, a gender lens reminds researchers to shift the focus from passing judgment on individuals to understanding the larger social contexts in which personal choices and strategies are crafted.

Transcending Gender Stereotypes: When scholarship adopts an image of gender as a dichotomous category whereby women and men form uniform and separate groups, gender stereotypes can supercede careful analysis (Epstein, 1988). A framework that assumes homogeneity within gender groups and large or fundamental differences between them leaves work-family researchers without the tools to analyze differences among women or among men in their work and family outlooks and strategies.[7]

Yet research makes it clear that gender is not a binary and unchanging category, but rather a fluid and varied dimension of social life. Definitions of "gender" change as social institutions shift, options are restructured, and beliefs about gender difference and gender-appropriate behavior are redefined. As important, across varied social-historical contexts, stereotypic (or hegemonic) notions of masculinity and femininity typically describe only a small proportion of women and men. Statistical measures, for example, show that women's and men's "temperaments" and "personalities" form overlapping curves. While small mean differences may be found on a number of specific measures, the more important statistical story is one of large variation within each

[7] Frameworks that posit differences in women's and men's orientations toward caring for others and defining the self are especially likely to be found in psychological approaches, such as Carol Gilligan's argument that women share an "ethic of care" in contrast to men's "ethic of rights" (Gilligan, 1982).

gender group as well as substantial overlap between them. A gender lens reminds us to look beyond stereotypes and average gender differences to analyze diversity among women and men along with the potential convergence between them.[8]

Seeing Gender as an Institution: A gender lens also encourages scholars to reject a conception of work-family dilemmas as individual problems – and especially women's problems. Although work-family conflicts are experienced in intensely personal ways, they have institutional sources. Without a framework that acknowledges the gendered nature of these dilemmas, individual women can be left bearing the lion's share of responsibility for "solving" socially constructed problems, including the time squeezes that have become so widespread. Media reports thus abound about new studies that purport to demonstrate how successive generations of women have made ill-advised choices. Young women, in particular, face a barrage of cautionary tales about the costs of holding onto high aspirations – either overwork, exhaustion, and guilt if they try to combine work and motherhood or childlessness if they postpone family commitments to pursue a work career.[9] Yet these "costs" (many of which are exaggerated) are embedded in

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[8] Michael Kimmel (2000) presents a summary of findings about women's and men's overlapping curves. R.W. Connell (1995) provides an analysis of the variety of forms of "masculinities" in the post-modern world, and Scott Coltrane (1996) details the variety of men's family strategies. My research also emphasizes the diversity of work and family strategies emerging among contemporary women and men (Gerson, 1985, 1993, 2001).

[9] An example of the tendency to use social science to send a cautionary message to young women can be found in Sylvia Hewlett's recent book, *Creating a Life*, which exaggerates the costs of work achievement to women (Hewlett, 2002). Another example is a recent, highly misleading article, entitled "Opt Out Revolution," which proclaimed on the cover of the *New York Times Magazine* that women are "abandoning the climb and heading home" (Belkin, 2003). In fact, women's ties to paid work are stronger than ever (see Gerson, 2003). Franke-Ruta (2002) offers a telling critique of Hewlett's reasoning and statistical analysis.

institutional arrangements that create work-family conflicts and leave women – and men – facing dilemmas that individuals alone cannot resolve.

A focus on individuals, and especially individual women, takes attention away from, in the words of C. Wright Mills, "the public sources of private troubles" (1959). In the case of work-family issues, an individualistic approach can hold women responsible for social conditions beyond their control (such as the emerging crisis of childcare) and for having aspirations that are not considered problematic when applied men (such as work success or economic self-sufficiency). It also obscures the ways that options and opportunities are unequally distributed. Since gender inequality permeates the ways in work and family institutions shape both personal and social problems, ignoring gender can hamper efforts to resolve work-family conflicts.[10]

A gender lens directs attention to the social-structuring of inequality and provides a way to place individual work and family "problems" in a social and cultural context. The institution of gender organizes women's and men's options in different and unequal ways (Lorber, 1994; Risman, 1998; West and Zimmerman, 1987). Contemporary work and family arrangements have, moreover, created paradoxes and contradictions in the social organization of gender. Women thus increasingly confront contradictory pressures to engage in "intensive mothering" while simultaneously supporting themselves and their families through paid employment (Hays, 1997). And all workers confront a stubbornly persistent "ideal worker" ethic that equates work commitment with uninterrupted employment and very long workweeks.[11] These cross-cutting

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[10] For example, family-friendly workplace policies that create "mommy tracks" reinforce an unequal structure of parenting and assume that women alone should be asked to sacrifice career opportunities for parenting involvement.

[11] See, for example, Williams (1999).

pressures reflect a changing economic and social order that has been reluctant to create new supports for child rearing even as it has increased families' dependence on women's earnings. The structural roots of such personal dilemmas become apparent once gendered experiences are placed in an institutional context.

Recognizing the Multifaceted Nature of Change: Overlooking gender can also lead to overemphasizing the costs of change. It has become common, for example, to argue that changes in family life, such as the rise of single parents and employed mothers, represent "family decline" and an erosion of "family values" (Blankenhorn, 1994; Popenoe, 1989, 1996; Wilson, 2002). Such approaches implicitly assume (or explicitly argue) that family arrangements departing from the homemaker-breadwinner model threaten social stability and the welfare of new generations. Without denying that new social problems have accompanied work and family change, it is also important to recognize the ways that change has created new opportunities as well. A gender lens helps directs attention to the full range of consequences, including its positive dimensions along with its drawbacks.[12]

Take, for example, the case of employed mothers. When a full analysis of women's situation is ignored, debate tends to remain focused on the purported dangers to children when their mothers go to work.[13] A closer look, however, reveals not only a more complex but also a

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[12] Moore et al. (2002) report good news about some aspects of family change, including rising closeness between parents and children.

[13] Despite the continuing concern over working mothers, decades of research have failed to demonstrate any significant short or long term harm to children. The quality of child care arrangements, mothers' satisfaction with their situation, and fathers' involvement are far more important than a mother's work status (Hoffman, 1987; Harvey, 1999).

more optimistic picture. When mothers are employed, they and their families reap a range of benefits, from the obvious economic advantages to more subtle ones such as greater parental equality and increased maternal satisfaction (Barnett and Rivers, 1996; Galinsky, 1999; Gerson, 2002). A gender lens reminds us, moreover, that employment may pose difficulties but it also provides women with the same rewards that it has historically offered men, including a degree of economic independence and enhanced self-esteem.

A gender perspective thus draws attention to the complexity of change, with a mix of opportunities and difficulties. If family life seems less secure than it did three decades ago, it is also less confining. A varied array of work and family patterns offer women, men, and children a wider range of options, even if each poses conflicts as well. And since changes such as the rise of women's employment and the diversification of family forms appear irreversible, it is important to attend to the ways that these shifts have created the conditions for greater equality along with new dilemmas. New generations are not likely to reject these emerging opportunities, but they will need social supports that enhance the positive aspects of change and limit the difficulties.

Acknowledging the Strengths and Needs of Diverse Family Forms: Emphasizing the drawbacks of work and family change is also linked to framing work-family issues as a moral crusade. Many neo-conservative analysts, for example, see the rise of co-habitation, postponed marriage, divorce, permanent singlehood, and even employment among mothers as family and moral decline.[14] Yet the search for one "best" family type, whatever form it takes, devalues

[14] For a focus on the importance of marriage, see, for example, Waite (2000), Waite and Gallagher (2000), Blankenhorn (1994), Poponoe (1989), and Poponoe, et al. (1996).

alternative work-family arrangements just as families are becoming increasingly diverse. It overlooks the dilemmas that can be found in all family types and creates a context in which parents and workers are asked to defend their most private decisions. The public concern with "mommy wars," in which employed women and homemaking mothers alike feel criticized, reflects a wider trend toward judging personal choices.[15]

The rise of new, more diverse work and family patterns is rooted in economic and social changes that are endemic to all post-industrial societies. It is thus neither helpful nor illuminating to focus on the search for "good" and "bad" families or to pit women against each other by defining some choices as "better" than others. The greater challenge is to discover the social conditions that either allow or prevent workers and their families to construct satisfying personal lives in the context of irreversibly altered circumstances. Rather than search for one best family form in favor, a gender lens directs us to investigate the strengths and the needs of all family arrangements.

Acknowledging the strengths and dilemmas of diverse family forms does not, however, prevent researchers from taking a moral perspective. Work-family researchers are also socially embedded actors who can, and often do, disagree about ultimate values. Neo-conservative analysts may stress the importance of stability and tradition, while feminists may be more

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[15] A recent cover of *New York Magazine* thus asks, "Who's the Better Mom?" and refers to "the growing conflict ... between working and stay-at-home mothers" (Gardner, 2002). This putative conflict between employed and nonemployed mothers is rooted in social arrangements that leave both groups facing "damned-if-you-do and damned-if-you-don't" dilemmas. Married working mothers are criticized for "neglecting" their children, while the nonemployed are seen as "just a housewife." Poor, single mothers, on the other hand, are forced by policies such as TANF to seek a paid job despite a lack of child care. Hays (1997) and Gerson (1985) discuss the structural roots of these cultural conflicts and contradictions.

concerned with social inequality and opportunity. These contrasting concerns motivate us to pose and seek answers to questions of social importance. Once posed, however, the answers need to emerge from careful research and clear explanatory frameworks.[16] We may disagree about the implications of our findings, but our normative inclinations should not predetermine what those findings reveal.[17]

Examining the Intersection of Gender, Work, and Family Change

A gender lens prods us to transcend gender stereotypes, to see gender as an institution, to recognize the multifaceted nature of work and family change, and to acknowledge the strengths and needs of diverse family forms. These insights provide a set of principles for making sense of

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[16] A distinction can be made between taking a moral perspective – for example, asking how social institutions can provide the conditions for human liberty or social equality – and judging individual choices when these conditions are not available. Similarly, normative orientations, which refer to the values of social analysts, can be distinguished from explanatory frameworks, which provide the theoretical structure for explaining how and why social patterns emerge. Conservatives and liberals who disagree about the "goodness" or "badness" of specific work-family arrangements may not necessarily disagree about the causes or contours of these outcomes, although the language they use is likely to convey different moral concerns. See Aycock and Demo (1994), Cancian (1987), Coontz (1997), Stacey (1990), and Skolnick (1991) for discussions of the politics of family change.

[17] A historical perspective reminds us that social practices we now take for granted were once considered morally suspect. Across the political spectrum, for example, employed women have been criticized for hiring others to perform childcare and housework. Yet the "commodification" of family work has a long social history, and many activities once performed at home are now performed in the marketplace with no social outcry. Few would argue, for example, that women should still produce clothing for their families. In the context of irreversible change, social policies that create fair work conditions for those who are paid to care for children are more likely to enhance social and individual welfare than chastising women for purchasing child care services or precooked meals. (See Bergmann, 1987, and Helburn and Bergmann, 2002, for a defense of childcare and Crittenden, 2001, for a defense of the value of unpaid domestic work.)

work-family links and transformations. They point to theoretical frameworks and research methods that pay attention to women's and men's diverse outlooks, the links between social and individual change, and the institutional tensions and contradictions that pose dilemmas in individual lives.

Focus on the Link Between Individuals and Institutions: The study of work and family is, by definition, concerned with the links between institutions. This perspective can be further expanded by following C. Wright Mills injunction that the orienting questions of social science should be concerned with the intersection of biography, history, and social structure ©. Wright Mills, 1959). By analyzing work and family institutions in historical context and linking them to the biographies of individuals, we are better able to see how they change over time and how they shape and are shaped by human action.

Numerous scholars have used this life course approach to understand work, family, and gender change.[18] In my own research, I have studied two pivotal generations, who can be viewed as the "parents" and the "children" of the gender revolution. In earlier studies, I examined how the women and men who came of age in the 1970s and 1980s helped forge new patterns in gender, work, and family life as they encountered shifting structural and cultural circumstances (Gerson 1985, 1993). My current focus is on how members of the generation who grew up in these changing households are responding to a world where nontraditional family forms predominate and gender inequality has been seriously questioned.

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[18] For a life course perspective on work and family, see, especially, Moen (2003).

Examine the Dynamics of Social and Individual Change: A focus on social and individual change also reminds us that work and family arrangements are not static entities, but fluid processes. Periods of rapid social change, moreover, promote individual change in several ways. First, over the life course, individuals can encounter new social opportunities or constraints that push or pull them in unanticipated directions toward unexpected destinations. We thus need to examine how individual change takes place as adult experiences with social structures in flux mitigate or overcome the influence of childhood experiences.

Second, new generations born into changing times can and often must depart from the patterns of their parents. Social change is thus enacted by individuals and given shape through the process of intra-generational change and inter-generational succession (Ryder, 1965). Investigating the similarities and differences within and between generations helps uncover the social sources of stability as well as change and reminds us that continuity with the past is never guaranteed.

In the study of work and family life, it is important to distinguish between the aspects of change that are irreversible and those that can be shaped by collective actions and social policy. The rise of employment among women, for example, is an irreversible consequence of the emergence of a post-industrial economy that depends on a growing service sector. Yet responses to this transformation can vary. All affluent societies thus show rising rates of women's employment, but they differ markedly in the support they provide working women through child care supports and occupational opportunities (Jacobs and Gerson, 2004; Gornick and Jacobs, 1998; Wilensky, 2002).

Locate the Structural and Cultural Tensions Created by Work and Family Change: Since social change is typically uneven, inconsistent, and incomplete, it is also important to attend to the ways that some institutional patterns shift while others resist, often creating structural and cultural tensions with few clear resolutions. These situations pose dilemmas to which people must respond in creative, if not altogether satisfying, ways.[19]

Contemporary work and family arrangements provide vivid examples of this process. Developments such as the rise of work opportunities for women, the decline of male family wage, and the erosion of permanent marriage have created a family landscape in which dual-earning couples and single-parent households predominate (Jacobs and Gerson, 2001; Moen, 2003; Moen and Sweet, 2004). Yet other aspects of work and family life remain organized as if the homemaker-breadwinner family still prevailed. Employers typically presume full-time and even overtime commitment as a precondition for advancement, and child care remains a largely private and female responsibility.[20]

The contradictions between the demands of the workplace and the needs of families leave women and, to a lesser but still significant extent, men facing work-family dilemmas that undermine traditional notions of gender differences. If mid-20th century family ideals expected women to express care by devoting time to their families while men provided economic support, women (and men) must now balance the trade-offs between time and money in new ways. And if

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[19] Anthony Giddens (1979) discusses how "structural contradictions" provide a critical point for studying the relationship between action and structure.

[20] See Epstein, et al. (1998) and Williams (1999) for considerations of how contemporary “time norms” create workplaces where less than full time (and overtime) workers are treated as “time deviants.”

women were once expected to seek their identities "vicariously" through their husbands and children, fewer women now depend on a male partner for either identity or economic security. In a world where personal relationships and job commitments are fluid and unpredictable, women and men alike must balance their commitments to others with the search for self-sufficiency. These dilemmas of commitment and personal independence are transforming the meaning of gender as they leave young women and men to develop new work and family strategies (Gerson, 2002).

The Work-Family Strategies of a New Generation: Lessons from the "Children of the Gender Revolution"

New work-family dilemmas have emerged, but contemporary institutions have yet to offer clear-cut avenues for resolving them. Coming of age in this context, a new generation of young adults has watched their parents respond to the erosion of the breadwinner-homemaker ethos and must now devise their own strategies for coping with work and family change. These "children of the gender revolution" offer a lens through which to view the consequences of recent and the prospects for future work and family change. To borrow a phrase from Marx, they must create history, but not under conditions of their own choosing.

To understand how these young women and men experienced growing up in changing families and how they are crafting their own work-family strategies, I conducted 120 in-depth, life-history interviews with a sample of 18 to 32 year-olds living in the New York metropolitan area (Gerson, 2001). Evenly divided between women and men, the sample contains people with diverse

race and class backgrounds.[21] Their family experiences also mirror the U.S. population. About 60 percent grew up in two-parent homes, while the remaining 40 percent lived at some point in a single-parent home (with 36 percent divorced or never married, 2 percent separated but reunited, and 2 percent lost a parent through death). Among consistent two-parents households, 33 percent had two-earner parents who established relative equality in their work commitments, and 27 percent had neo-traditional parents in which the husband remained the primary breadwinner (with about 7 percent of the two-parent households undergoing divorce after the child left home).

Children's Perspectives on Parents' Work and Family Choices:

Figure 1 presents an overview of how young women and men perceive the families in which they grew up. It shows that most of those who grew up in dual-earner families (79 percent) concluded that this arrangement was the best option, while the results are more ambiguous for those who grew up in more traditional families as well as in single-parent households.[22] Those

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[21] Respondents were selected by a random sampling procedure from a range of urban and suburban neighborhoods in the New York metropolitan area. Most were chosen as part of a larger study of the children of immigrants and native born Americans. To assure that the parents of my respondents had grown up amid the changing family circumstances of American society, my sample was drawn entirely from the native-born group. To enlarge the number of respondents with a college education, I supplemented this sample with a smaller random selection of recent enrollees at a local college. The full sample includes respondents from a range of ethnic identifications (with 54 percent Nonhispanic White, 21 percent Black, 18 percent Hispanic, and 7 percent Asian) and class backgrounds (with 43 percent from middle and upper-middle class households, 42 percent from working class homes, and 15 percent from homes that hovered in or close to the poverty level). The average age is 24, and 5 percent claim a lesbian or gay identity. See Mollenkopf, et al., for a description of the sampling techniques used in the Second Generation study.

[22] Since the sample size is small, these percentages describe the sample breakdown but should not be interpreted as strictly representative.

living in relatively traditional households, anchored by a breadwinning father and home-centered mother, are almost evenly divided in their outlooks, with 52 percent believing this to be the best arrangement and 48 percent concluding that it would have been better if their mothers had gone to or stayed at work. Children from single-parent homes are also divided in their outlooks, with 56 percent believing a two-parent home would have been better and 44 percent concluding that having a single parent (at least temporarily) was – if not ideal – better than continuing to live in a conflict-ridden home or with an unsupportive parent.

What accounts for these differences? Children from two-earner homes generally perceive that having two employed parents increased their families' economic resources and provided appealing models of marriage as a shared endeavor. In contrast, among those whose parents chose more traditional arrangements, many perceive that their mothers would have been happier, more satisfied, and less reliant on others if they had created a more balanced set of commitments. For those in single-parent homes, assessments depend on whether family life improved or worsened after the break-up. Many experienced economic decline and emotional difficulty in the wake of marital separations, but a notable group came to see such separations as an opportunity for one or both parents to create better lives for themselves and their children.

The more important point, however, is that work conditions matter as much as having a job, and family processes matter more than family form. Children feel better about their parents situations when mothers and fathers alike can count on secure jobs that offer personal gratification but do not drain them of needed time and energy for family life. Children are also more likely to thrive when they feel supported by satisfied, committed caregivers, regardless of the whether this takes place in a two-parent or a single-parent home. The diverse range of reactions makes clear

that no one family form is automatically best or right for everyone. All arrangements hold perils, but diverse family forms can share similar strengths.

Work-Family Aspirations and New Gender Divides:

As these young women and men reflect on their childhood experiences and face the transition to adulthood, what work and family strategies do they hope and expect to craft? Aware of the many new opportunities they enjoy as well as the many obstacles that are likely to cross their path, most are hoping for the best, but also making plans to avoid what they deem to be the worst. Figure 2 outlines their aspirations for the future as well as their plans if those aspirations prove out of reach. It shows that most women and men share similar hopes and aspirations, including a desire to establish a generally egalitarian relationship based on mutual support, long-term commitment, and work-family balance.[23] Although prevalent in both groups, a greater percentage of women (90 percent) than men (65 percent) hold an egalitarian ideal. While few are aiming for a life of permanent singlehood, men are more likely than women to hope for some form of neo-traditional arrangement, where they remain the primary – in not the only – earner.

The future is, of course, uncertain, and many are skeptical about their chances for achieving a relatively egalitarian balance between the home and the workplace. In a world where both relationships and work opportunities are uncertain, most have developed “fall-back positions” that will help them avoid worst-case scenarios if their ideals cannot be achieved.

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[23] These findings suggest that, despite significant ethnic and class differences, women and men across a range of backgrounds are developing some similarities in their work and family ideals. There is great variation, however, in the economic and cultural resources different groups possess to achieve these ideals.

If egalitarian commitment and work-family balance prove out of reach, is it better to forge some form of modified traditionalism or pursue a more independent course? Here a wider gender gap emerges. Most women (about 80 percent) are hoping to forge work ties strong enough to offer an economic safety net and a modicum of personal independence. Most men (about 60 percent), however, hope to fall back on some form of modified traditionalism, where they can count on wives to perform a larger share of parenting and domestic work. As important, women and men alike are concerned that their ideals will be difficult and potentially impossible to achieve. Aware of persisting work-family conflicts, most prefer to postpone marriage and parenthood in the hope of first creating a satisfying work life and an economic base to see them through unpredictable future contingencies.

Conclusion: Viewing a New Work-Family Landscape Through a Gender Lens

The shared hopes but diverging concerns of young women and men underscore the importance of gender issues in work-family research. They also show how a gender lens is central to the formation of effective work and family policies. A new generation faces unprecedented conflicts and dilemmas, but also unprecedented opportunities to build the lives that they wish to have. Most believe that despite the obstacles, they are better off than their counterparts in earlier generations. Amid uncertainty, they are prepared to adapt to changing contingencies and reluctant to pass judgment on others' choices.

Genuine resolutions to new work-family dilemmas depend on providing equal opportunities to integrate work and family life. Policies that protect the rights of parents, offer more flexible workplaces, and create mor child-supportive neighborhoods and communities will ease work-

family conflicts for everyone. Policies that provide equal occupational and economic opportunities for women will help dual-earning and single-parent families alike. Only policies that are both "gender equal" and "family-friendly" will be able to meet the needs of a new generation of mothers and fathers. In this regard, many European countries have adopted programs, such as shorter workweeks, widely available childcare, and generous parental leave policies, that reflect a concern for family welfare and women's rights.[24] The success of these policies makes it clear that a more gender-equal and family-supportive society is not only desirable but possible. In the absence of policies that recognize the inevitability of gender as well as work and family change, however, a new generation will be left to resolve work-family dilemmas in private, unequal, and only intermittently satisfying ways.

[24] Gornick and Myers (2001,) place American work-family policies in cross-national perspective and conclude that many European countries have done a much better job than the United States in creating policies that support "dual-earner, dual-caring families." Williams (1999) considers the ways that American social policy can create a new "ideal worker" model that does not presume full-time and overtime commitment. Jacobs and Gerson (2004) show how and why American workers put in longer workweeks than their European peers and consider a range of policies to ease the time dilemmas facing contemporary American workers.

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