

A Family-Friendly Workplace? Striving for Work-Family Balance

When Jane Swift took over as acting governor of Massachusetts, she was pregnant with twins. Critics wondered if she would be able to fulfill her duties as governor and manage not to neglect her children. When she said that she would not take maternity leave, they discussed the propriety of her plan to continue running the state from home, and from bed if necessary, while she recovered from childbirth. Although her husband was a stay-at-home father, people had doubts about her ability to balance her family responsibility with a demanding job (C. Goldberg, 2001).

Swift faced, in a very public way, a dilemma that confronts many women more privately: how to balance family and work. An AFL-CIO survey of employed women in two-income families revealed that nearly three-quarters of them did not have access to any childcare benefits from their employers and that more than half could not get paid leave to

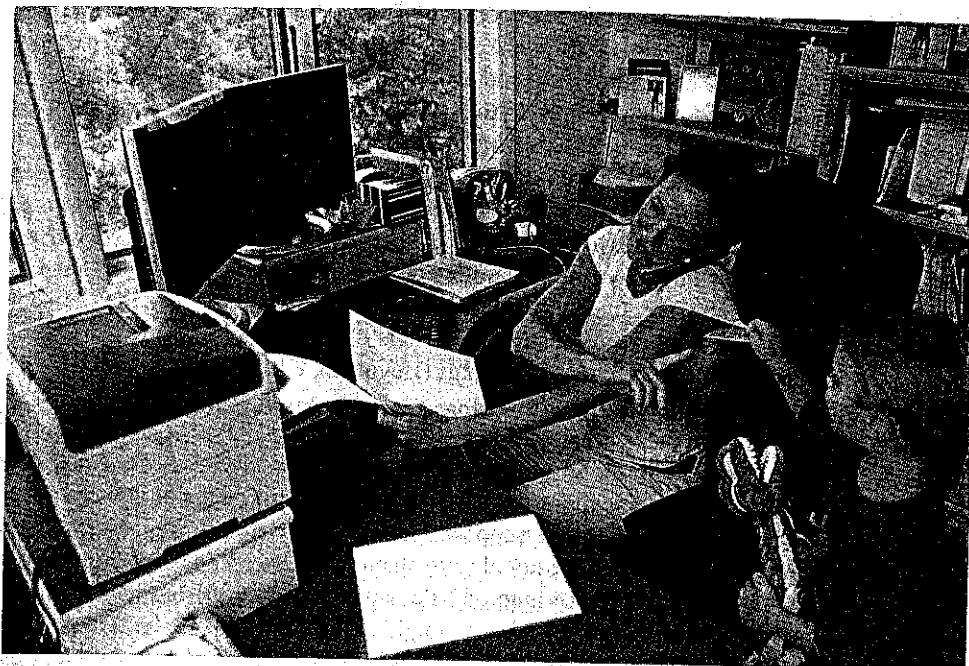
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Even when women hold heavy responsibilities at work, they are still charged with the main responsibilities for childcare and domestic work.

care for a baby or a family member who was ill. Twenty-nine percent did not receive any paid sick leave for themselves, and 34 percent reported that their employers did not give them any flexibility or control over the hours they worked (Swoboda & Joyce, 2000). The women coped, where possible, by working different hours than their partners, so that at least one parent would be available to the children as much as possible. The survey showed that 46 percent of the women worked a different schedule than their partner. The women often felt that life was a juggling act, in which they had to be compulsively conscious of their calendars and their watches.

Work-family balance is a critical issue for everyone, but especially for women. Women are the ones who are assumed to be primarily responsible for family matters. Before Jane Swift's experience, other governors have had babies while in office, but no one thought it cause for concern. That is because in all those cases, it was the governor's spouse who was giving birth. No one worried about whether the governor could handle the family and political responsibilities—after all, he had a wife.

Childcare: A Thorny Issue

During the highly publicized "nanny trial" in Boston in 1997, in which Louise Woodward, a 19-year-old au pair from England, was accused of murder in the death of the 8-month-old baby in her care, public anger flared not just against the young nanny, but also against

the child's mother, a doctor married to a doctor. Why was she not looking after her own child instead of turning him over to an inexperienced stranger? Was her career more important than her son's welfare? How could she be so self-centered? The debate was an uncomfortable reminder to many women in the United States that, in this culture, mothers are still held blameworthy for whatever happens to their children. Here, a woman risks disapproval whenever she turns the care of her children over, even part time, to anyone else. This appears to be particularly true when the woman is financially able to stay at home with her children and yet chooses to be employed. By contrast, women who are on welfare are often exhorted to find employment, regardless of the effect on their families. Irrespective of such blame or pressure, many families place their children in the care of others for part of the week. Fifty-four percent of children 3 years old and under in the United States are cared for in public or private day-care settings (Heymann, Earle, Simmons, Breslow, & Kuehnhoff, 2004).

It is not surprising, in the highly individualistic culture of the United States, that child-care is viewed as a problem to be solved by each family on its own. In America's individual-centered worldview, children are seen as the result of personal choices—and the people who made those choices are supposed to take responsibility for caring for the children. (The reality that children are not always planned or chosen does not fit comfortably into this worldview and is often ignored.) Perhaps what is surprising is that in this country that puts so much public emphasis on individual responsibility, only mothers, not fathers, are usually expected to take primary responsibility for their children. No one was angry at the *father* in the nanny case for not staying home with his child.

Many cultures do not share this narrow view of responsibility for childcare. They place a stronger emphasis on the *community's* responsibility for making sure children are raised and nurtured well. Japan, for example, where discrimination against employed women is rampant, paradoxically has a sophisticated, affordable day care system that many employed parents in the United States would envy. Heavily government subsidized, the system, which cares for children a few months to 6 years old, is justified not so much as a way to make life easier for employed mothers, but as an investment in the future of children. In fact, the nursery school environment has become so impressive that many parents feel it is better for their children than home. Some mothers even get fake job certificates in order to make their children eligible for what they consider to be the superior environment of nursery school (Kristof, 1995).

As noted earlier in this chapter, the United States is one of very few countries in the world that do not provide any form of paid maternity leave for employed women when their children are born (United Nations, 2000). In many countries, ranging from the developing nations of Africa such as Algeria, Cameroon, and Morocco to the developed nations of Canada, France, Poland, and Turkey, the cost of paid maternity leave for a certain number of weeks is covered by some form of government-based social insurance. In others, such as Switzerland, Malta, Botswana, Saudi Arabia, Bangladesh, and Singapore, the employer bears the cost. In still other countries, the government and the employer share the cost of paid maternity leave. The provision of paid maternity leave is one of the only formal ways that countries acknowledge that the unpaid work women do in bearing and caring for children is valuable to the society as a whole.

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Whether paid maternity leave is available or not, most mothers of young children return to work after a fairly brief absence when their children are born. This raises the issue of how children will be cared for while one or both parents are at work. It is fairly recent that childcare has become something that is part of some workplaces. Some companies and institutions provide on-site day care for the young children of their employees, thus acknowledging that their employees are multidimensional people who have family as well as work responsibilities. In a variety of other ways, some workplaces have moved toward becoming family friendly.

"Best Practices" by U.S. Companies in Aid of a Comfortable Work-Family Balance

Some American companies have been innovators in family-friendly policies, operating on the assumption that their workers will be less stressed and more productive if they are given some help with "the balancing act" (Smith, 2001). For example, IBM offers a 3-year, job-protected family leave, during which company-paid benefits remain intact. Employees may also choose from a variety of flexible work schedules, including one in which they have a 2-hour lunch break to attend to personal business and one in which they may work 20 to 30 hour per week for six months. Greeting-card giant Hallmark offers 6-month unpaid maternity or paternity leave, reimbursement of up to \$5,000 for the cost of adopting a child, a referral program for childcare and eldercare, and on-site activities for children during school holidays when their parents are at work. Computer software company SAS provides a free on-site childcare center staffed by specially trained and certified teachers. Fel-Pro, one of the world's largest makers of gaskets, provides a \$1,000 savings bond in the child's name on the day an employee's baby is born. Employees' children are eligible for day care at the on-site childcare center, in-home caregiving if they are ill, a summer day camp at the company's own recreation area, tutoring, college counseling, and \$3,000 a year toward college tuition. BE&K was the first construction company to offer childcare at a construction site. Boston's Beth Israel Hospital provides on-site day care and an earned-time program, which entitles employees to up to 34 days off per year to attend to family matters.

Companies such as those discussed here are in the minority, however. Most women are on their own when it comes to finding a job-family balance that is workable for them. The result is often a great deal of stress.

Having It All? Stress and the Double Day

In the first decades of the 20th century, higher education was associated with singlehood for women: Half the women in the United States who finished college bore no children, and almost a third did not marry (Wallich, 1996). Elsie Clews Parsons, the prominent anthropologist and folklorist whose fieldwork among Native Americans of the Southwest made her famous in the early part of this century, was one exception. Married and with several young children, she faced the problem of combining her career with a family life. Her

solutions were characteristically pragmatic. She developed a work routine when she was at home that ensured her family would take her work seriously. She did her writing in a small cabin on a hill behind the family's house. Every morning she would go up to the cabin to work, coming down only to join her children for lunch. Even though she was "at home," her children soon learned that her working time was not to be interrupted (Zumwalt, 1992).

Parsons had resources that many career women with children would envy: a separate space at home where she could work undisturbed and household help to supervise her children while she was doing so. For many women lacking such resources, the combination of demands from employment and family can be extremely stressful. Yet most young women now in college in many countries want and expect to have a career as well as a family. And the majority of women in the world have virtually no choice but to work both inside and outside the home. What are the implications for women's well-being of combining family and employment roles?

Staying Busy, Staying Healthy?

The combination of family and employment roles adds up to a heavy workload for most women, and studies show that women complain of exhaustion and the stress that results when the two roles one is trying to fill impose conflicting demands (Wiersma, 1990). When it occurs, the sharing of household tasks is associated with lower levels of role strain for women, and many employed women would prefer that their husbands take on more of the domestic chores. One study of Mexican American women in dual-earner couples found that these women perceived themselves as coproviders (Herrera & DelCampo, 1995). They did not subscribe to the myth that they should be "superwomen"—able to work full time and handle all aspects of the housework and childcare.

Stress among employed women comes not only from the burden of unpaid, unrecognized domestic work added to their outside employment, but also from conditions on the job. One study of stress and coping styles among women in professional positions in India showed that the most salient stressors to them were inadequate pay, underutilization of their skills, variability in their workloads, lack of participation in decisions, and conflict between home and job. Women in the United States list similar stressors (Ghadially & Kumar, 1989).

Despite the many sources of stress and strain, combining employment and family roles can be good for women—particularly if they have support from family and friends. Studies done in the United States show that employed women appear to be happier and healthier than homemakers, except when they have infants to care for (Walker & Best, 1991), and that employed women have lower risk of heart disease than either homemakers or women unable to find steady work (Wingard, Kritz-Silverstein, & Barrett-Connor, 1992). Even adult daughters who are employed and also spending many hours per week providing long-term care to chronically ill or disabled parents experience not only stress, but also some positive benefits in terms of health (Martire & Stephens, 2003).

How can all this extra stress sometimes be associated with such positive outcomes for women? One perspective, the expansion hypothesis (Marks, 1977), suggests that people who occupy multiple roles actually expand their resources as a result: They gain an increased sense of mastery, self-esteem, identity, and the social and economic rewards of

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the different roles. So perhaps women gain self-esteem and satisfaction from their employment roles that translate into greater psychological well-being. Perhaps they make friends and build social networks that can help them resolve problems. Perhaps the higher income gives them access to resources such as better health care or exercise programs. Even in the exploitative sweatshops of Southeast Asia, there is some evidence that young women may glean advantages from their exhausting and stressful jobs. Employment may give them their first freedom from severe family restrictions, help them escape a poor village, offer them some discretionary income, and enable them to live more independently (Ward, 1996).

The Future of Women's Work

Recent decades have seen dramatic increases in women's participation in the paid labor force in many parts of the world. The percentage of women who were economically active in northern Africa, for instance, grew from 8 percent in 1970 to 21 percent in 1990; in the Caribbean regions it grew from 38 percent to 49 percent during that period. And women are doing more paid work. In the United States, between 1978 and 1998, the number of people "moonlighting" (holding down more than one job) increased by 3.4 million—and women accounted for 72 percent of that increase (Costello & Stone, 2001).

The situation for women has also changed with respect to the kinds of paid work they do. Women's share of administrative and managerial jobs in Western Europe went from 12 percent in 1980 to 18 percent in 1990; during the same period this share rose from 15 percent to 23 percent in Latin America. Women's wages have moved closer to men's. In Australia, for example, women in manufacturing jobs earned 57 percent of men's wages in 1970, 79 percent in 1980, and 82 percent in 1990; however, by 2000 the figure had apparently stalled, remaining at 82 percent. In Norway, the comparable percentages were 75, 82, 86, and 86 (United Nations, 1995; World Bank, 2002a).

During the same time period, legislation on a number of fronts has improved women's lot with respect to salary and working conditions. Antidiscrimination laws mandate equal pay for women and men and outlaw sexual harassment in many countries, although there is tremendous variation in the determination with which such laws are enforced.

Women have made inroads even into such traditionally male-dominated fields as the military and professional sports. Most positions in the military have been opened to women in Canada and the United States. The first woman to head an Atlantic Fleet aircraft squadron took up her command in 1992. Women finally attend two military academies that barred them for so long: Virginia Military Institute and the Citadel. There is a viable, thriving women's professional basketball league in the United States. Women have become boxers in the United States and sumo wrestlers in Japan. The 1998 Winter Olympics had the first women's hockey competition—an event that may eventually lead to support for women's professional hockey.

Admittedly, there are places where women have not been able to enter the paid workforce in large numbers. In Saudi Arabia, 25 percent of college-age women, but only 20 percent of college-age men, are enrolled in college. However, women constitute only 16 percent of the labor force (World Bank, 2002a). Nonetheless, an overview of the changes that have occurred with respect to women and work since the 1960s provides, at first

glance, an impression of inexorable and inevitable progress. More women are employed, and it has become possible for even mothers of young children to maintain paid employment. Women have gained access to a wider range of jobs and to higher levels of advancement. Day care centers and maternity leave, affirmative action programs that reach out to pull women into nontraditional jobs, and laws against gender-based discrimination and sexual harassment all make employment for women more likely. Surely it is just a matter of time before women reach equality with men in the workplace?

There are reasons to doubt this optimistic assessment, however. Perhaps one of the most dramatic counterexamples to women's progress in the workplace is the experience of women in the changing economies of Eastern Europe. As Eastern European countries moved away from Communism and embraced capitalism, women lost any real assurance of equitable access to job opportunities, promotions, and salary increases. They also lost many of the benefits that used to make labor force participation possible for them: maternity leave, day care for their children, health benefits. In these countries, women's employment has tended to stagnate or decrease in recent years, while it increases in the rest of the world.

The ease with which such an elaborate system of guaranteed workplace equity for women can be undone, apparently scrapped with some relief, by male politicians suggests that progress for women in the workplace is far from inevitable. Indeed, the world scene provides us with other signs that women's progress will be supported and encouraged only up to the point where it becomes inconvenient for men or for the political system in power. The sudden removal of the right to work from the women of Afghanistan, described at the beginning of this chapter, is another example. Yet a third may be the 1995 ruling by the European Court of Justice declaring Germany's affirmative action legislation to be in violation of the European Union's equal opportunity law because under some circumstances (i.e., where women were underrepresented in jobs), it gave women priority to be hired over men.

Laws do not have to be changed for women's progress to be stopped, however. There are many subtle ways of holding women back while appearing to give them equal opportunity. The very necessity for women to do more than their share of unpaid domestic work drains their time and energy in ways that make it difficult for them to give the attention to their jobs that might lead to more rapid advancement—and simultaneously frees men to do just that. Stereotypes of women as being unsuited for the aggressive style of behavior expected in certain top-level jobs cause them to be overlooked for promotion, even when their credentials are exemplary. Token women are used by organizations to "prove" that positions are open to women—while often simultaneously being made the targets of resentment and resistance. The barriers against women have become a little more permeable and a lot less obvious, but many apparently still remain.

Given such barriers, it becomes less surprising to find that although women have entered the labor force in general and jobs that used to be off-limits to women in particular, they are still often clustered at the lower end of the pay and status hierarchy at work (see Table 8.3). For example, a study of female university faculty in the United States—aptly titled *Women Faculty: Frozen in Time*—shows that their share of the highest-level faculty positions has changed little over the years. In 1975, 46 percent of women full-time faculty members had tenure; in 1992, the percentage was still 46 percent. In 1982,

TABLE 8.3 Median Annual Income of U.S. Men and Women by Level of Education in 2000

Education Completed	Women	Men
Less than 9th grade	\$15,978	\$20,789
High school	24,970	34,303
Associate degree	31,071	41,952
Bachelor's degree	40,415	56,334
Master's degree	50,139	68,322
Professional degree	58,957	99,411
Doctorate	57,081	80,250

Source: (U.S. Department of Education (2003), Table 381. Statistics are for year-round full-time workers aged 25 years and over.)

women who were at the rank of full professor earned 89 percent what male full professors earned; in 1995, women full professors earned 88.5 percent what their male colleagues earned. In 1982, 27 percent of all faculty were women, although women obtained 35 percent of Ph.D.s; in 1994, 31 percent of all faculty were women—although by that time women were earning 47 percent of all Ph.D.s (West, 1995). A more recent study by the American Association of University Professors (2003) shows that women faculty are still “frozen”: women at the rank of full professor earn 88.4 percent of what their male colleagues do.

So what is the future of women and work? Clearly it will depend on the social and political context within which they labor. But even in the most favorable contexts that now exist—those countries where gender-based discrimination is forbidden and at least lip service is paid to the idea that women can do anything—women are not even *close* to equality in the workplace. Equality may be in women's future, but not the near future.

SUMMARY

Women work more hours than men all over the world, primarily because women do a greater share than men of unpaid work. Two-thirds to three-quarters of domestic work is done by women. With respect to paid employment, there is considerable occupational segregation; women and men are concentrated in different jobs. Thus, for example, women hold most of the positions as secretaries and nurses. However, the notions of “women's work” and “men's work” are in flux in many places. In many countries, women's share of managerial positions has increased significantly in recent years. Women have shown much smaller increases in their share of some other kinds of nontraditional jobs, however, notably those in trades.

Women often face inequities and discrimination in the workplace. Women earn less than men all over the world and are often overlooked for raises and promotions. A “glass ceiling” seems to block women from the highest positions. Discrimination takes the form

of undervaluing work done by women, making unjustified assumptions about women's values, making the workplace difficult for women who are mothers, assuming that women belong in the home and are not as entitled as men to good jobs with good salaries, and defining as "women's work" many low-paid jobs with poor working conditions. Many women also suffer discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation.

Some remedies have been offered to address these issues. Employers are urged to be aware of and put policies in place to resist the tendency toward gender stereotyping. Laws have been passed mandating pay equity, which may include both equal pay for equivalent work, or comparable worth, which is equal pay for work of equal value. Many employers use systems of job evaluation in order to compare jobs, so that those filled mainly by women are not compensated differently than those filled mainly by men. In the United States and many other countries, there are legal mandates for affirmative action, actions taken to combat the underrepresentation of women and minorities in certain jobs and workplaces.

Affirmative action is sometimes viewed with uneasiness. People, even those who benefit from affirmative action, tend to be most in favor of efforts to get rid of discrimination, and least in favor of more active strategies such as preferential hiring. Research suggests that women who know they have been chosen for a position as a result of preferential hiring on the basis of their gender, or who believe that those around them think that is how they got their position, feel uncomfortable and expect others to have low expectations of them. This is particularly likely if the women are unsure of their abilities to begin with. Yet there is also evidence that women become impatient with less active forms of affirmative action if they do not seem to be having any impact after a reasonable time, and they become more supportive of a variety of approaches.

Sexual harassment is a significant problem for women in the workplace. Consequences of being harassed may include stress, anxiety, depression, reduced job performance, and job loss. There is some disagreement about what behavior constitutes sexual harassment. In the United States, most people surveyed perceive sexual bribery, explicit propositions, unwanted touching, or pressure for sexual activity as harassment. There is more disagreement about such behaviors as sexist comments, suggestive looks, sexual jokes, and coarse language; however, these behaviors too are perceived as sexually harassing by many individuals. In other cultures, there may be more disagreement about the latter behaviors. A variety of legal remedies have been enacted to combat harassment. In some countries, such as the United States, it is a civil matter, but some countries treat sexual harassment as a crime punishable by jail time.

Work-family balance is a critical issue for everyone, but especially for women because women are the ones who are assumed to be primarily responsible for family matters. The balance becomes particularly difficult when women have children. In some countries, such as the United States, there is a tendency to treat children as the responsibility of individual parents; other countries, such as Japan, tend to assume that children are in some respects a community responsibility. Most countries in the world have laws that provide employed women with paid maternity leave when they bear children. However, the United States has no such law. Some U.S. companies have, however, developed family-friendly policies that help parents combine their family and job responsibilities. Such policies have

an important function in reducing stress, which can be very high among women trying to juggle job and family duties.

Women complain of exhaustion and the stress that results when family and job roles impose conflicting demands. Sharing of household tasks is associated with lower levels of role strain for women, and many employed women would prefer that their husbands take on more of the domestic chores. Combining employment and family roles can actually be good for women—particularly if they have support from family and friends. Studies done in the United States show that employed women are often happier and healthier than homemakers.

The future of women and work is far from assured. Although women have joined the workplace in unprecedented numbers in the last three decades, and although there is an increasing number of legal protections against discrimination and sexual harassment, women have made slow progress in terms of pay equity and making inroads into some kinds of jobs. There are also signs that women's progress can be lost as quickly as it was gained. It is unlikely that women can look forward to equality with men at work as long as inequities persist in the more general treatment of and expectations for women and men.

KEY TERMS

glass ceiling

hierarchy-enhancing values

hierarchy-attenuating values

pay equity

affirmative action

comparable worth

personal relative deprivation

collective relative

deprivation

sexual harassment

quid pro quo harassment

hostile environment

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Women work more hours than men because they do so much of the unpaid work. How could the division of unpaid work be made more equitable between women and men?

What factors discourage such changes?

Why do you think there is disagreement about what behaviors constitute sexual harassment?

Why is affirmative action so controversial? Try to imagine an affirmative action program that everyone would accept.

FOR ADDITIONAL READING

Grossman, Hildreth, & Chester, Nia L. (Eds.). (1990). *The experience and meaning of work in women's lives*. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum. This anthology contains accounts of women in a variety of occupations, from psychotherapists to secretaries.

Hess-Biber, Sharlene J., & Carter, Gregg L. (1999). *Working women in America: Split dreams*. This book offers a broad perspective on the diversity of women and their work in the United States, and it places women's work in historical and economic context.

- Kung, Lydia. (1994). *Factory women in Taiwan*. New York: Columbia University Press. Kung tells the stories of these women, whose work is so often invisible.
- Tucker, Susan. (1988). *Telling memories among Southern women domestics*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press. An oral history of one group of U.S. women who were household workers.
- Zappert, Laraine T. (2001). *Getting it right: How working mothers successfully take up the challenge of life, family, and career*. New York: Simon & Schuster. To gather material for this book, the author, a clinical psychologist and working mother, interviewed 300 Stanford Business School graduates who are now working mothers. While this sample is certainly not representative of all, or even most, working mothers, some of the insights about how to juggle family and employment are practical and useful.

WEB RESOURCES

Sloan Work and Family Research Network. The site contains a newsletter, a searchable database of literature on work-family issues, and dozens of links to other useful sites. www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/wfnetwork

Gender Program of the International Labor Office. This office works on important issues with respect to women and work all over the world. The site provides access to some of the ILO publications and news releases, and links to other sites. www.ilo.org/bureau/gender

National Committee on Pay Equity. This committee represents a collaboration among interested individuals and nonprofit, civil rights, and religious groups that are interested in promoting pay equity. The site contains detailed information about the history of equal pay legislation in the United States, current legislation, the status of the gender wage gap, and links to salary survey sites where people can compare their salaries to those of others in the same jobs. www.pay-equity.org