

Working to Place Family at the Center of Life: Dual-Earner and Single-Parent Strategies

By ROSANNA HERTZ

ABSTRACT: There are two basic types of work-family strategies: workplace-based strategies and family-centered strategies. In the past, attention has been placed mostly on work policies. This article focuses on members of dual-earner and single-parent families who have actively placed family at the center of their lives. The strategies they adopt depend upon their position in the labor market as well as marital status. Some dual-earner families jointly calculate scheduling and job trajectories while utilizing benefits from both of their employees; others reluctantly coparent because of underemployment. Single mothers who have professional or technical skills try to make special accommodations with bosses or they become contract workers, while less skilled single mothers need benefits in order not to have to work several jobs. In addition, some single mothers have developed extensive networks and advocate for more community support of child rearing. Most working parents committed to keeping their families at the center have pursued nontraditional career paths. Ideologies about families and parenting may shape strategies about employment more often than workplace norms or work-family policies.

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MOST scholars have focused on the ways in which employment structures family life. Economic resources and employment status are frequently noted as major correlates (if not predictors) of parents' beliefs about parenting and child care (for example, who should do it and how it ought to be arranged). This holds true even in studies of child care arrangements where parents' beliefs about motherhood are positioned as independent variables. While my own empirical studies look at how workplaces cause families to organize in particular ways, in each of these studies I have also encountered numerous couples and individuals who are pushing workplaces to accommodate them or who are creating their own careers and businesses in order to place children and child rearing before employment. For the sake of clarity, I will use the term "work" to refer to paid employment; work in the home is referred to as "housework." In this article, I move these couples out of the margins and into the spotlight to examine how and why they navigate the work world despite indifferent and, in some cases, hostile employment policies. I use the cases from two recent studies as examples: a study of 95 dual-earner couples and a study of 52 single, unwed mothers.¹

THE BROADER WORK-FAMILY CONTEXT

Family benefits (for example, flextime, on-site day care, and parental leaves) are more common now than when I wrote *More Equal Than Others: Women and Men in Dual-Career*

Marriages over a decade ago.² However, while organizations may acknowledge that most employees have families, families have yet to exert a dramatic influence on organizational policies. In part, the lack of a strong push to make work family-friendly can be attributed to the ability of employers to make special (that is, unique or onetime) concessions to individual employees. For example, flexible work hours may be granted to valued professional or technical women (Catalyst 1997), but such concessions generally do not translate into flextime for everyone.³ More broadly, a concept of social contract like that found in many Western European economies is notably absent in policy circles (much less in corporate personnel departments) in the United States. However, less obvious (but no less important) is the fact that not all employees utilize benefits even when they are offered; for example, men rarely make use of paternity leave benefits. As long as a core group of employees continues to advance without the use of the new family benefits, the structure and the culture of the workplace are likely to remain unchallenged. In short, employers remain the silent (and relatively intransigent) partners in the life of all families (Hertz 1986).

Without a doubt, family structure has changed dramatically, and economic and workplace factors have an important role to play in explaining the change in family structures.⁴ However, there remains a great deal to be learned about the effect of family on work, on one hand, and of family ideology on work choices, on the other. For instance, it is not at all

clear that women are trading home for employment as a less stressful environment (cf. Hochschild 1997). More likely, women work outside the home because they and their families cannot get by on one paycheck. Indeed, as Coontz (1992, 18-19) notes, polls show that the pressures for balancing work and family, particularly for women, are enormous and that a large percentage of women would trade a day's pay for an extra day off. Additionally, studies of shift-work families demonstrate that wives remain in the workforce after children are born but change to working shifts (Presser and Cain 1983; Presser 1988). Working opposite shifts from those of their husbands allows them to care for their children (Hertz and Charlton 1989) and does not compete with views of being a "visible" mom in ways that working days did (Garey 1995; Hertz 1997).

Our relative ignorance about the effect of family on work stems at least in part from the fact that most scholars continue to focus their research on a narrow slice of employed families: the most successful (and elite) dual-career and dual-earner couples. Left aside are couples who—for reasons of ideology or economic circumstance—may actually be placing family ahead of workplace demands. For example, insufficient attention has been paid to dual-earner couples who have faced the effects of job loss by one or both spouses. For these couples, job loss for husbands may, in fact, be causing couples to rethink the primacy of work outside the home over family. Moreover, the most under-represented category of family are

those single (never married) women and men who have families that they support. While the fastest-growing category of U.S. families may be single moms, the focus continues to be on teen mothers and not those who are active in the labor market, economically self-sufficient, and over the age of 20.

The two groups whose experiences I analyze in this article offer up an interesting comparison. The first group consists of married dual-earner couples who have put into practice an egalitarian approach to parenting. The second group consists of women who are financially self-sufficient and who intentionally became single mothers. Both groups would appear to have made conscious choices to put family ahead of employment. Therefore, they offer a valuable opportunity to examine the conditions under which family affects employment.

DUAL-EARNER COUPLES AND THE NEW PARENTING

In my most recent study of dual-earner couples and their decision-making practices (Hertz 1997), I found three general approaches to child care: the mothering approach, the market approach, and the new parenting approach. The mothering approach assumes that the person best suited to raise the couple's children is the wife, who should be with them at home. The market approach involves hiring other people to care for one's own children. The new parenting approach is exemplified by the belief that the family ought to be

organized around caring for the children—with the critical distinction that both parents are full participants. While this approach was the least common of the three, it posed the strongest challenge to a traditional family division of labor and to conventional definitions of job and career.

The two groups of couples found to most often practice the new parenting approach came from very different economic and social situations. One group was made up of couples in which both spouses held middle-range managerial and professional jobs that allowed them to request more flexible work time or fewer workdays. As valued employees whose jobs did not involve extensive direct supervision, their requests for flexibility were met with individual concessions but not policy changes. Other employees were asking to be evaluated on a per project or task-completion basis. This contract with bosses allowed individuals to structure their own work schedules and pace, shifting the work culture to performance evaluation as separate from employee visibility. The arrangement did not require income reduction. A shift to a project-based evaluation afforded parents (particularly mothers but also a small but growing number of fathers) afternoons with children in order to coach sport teams and chauffeur children to enrichment activities.

The other group was the working-class, dual-earner families where husbands were underemployed. These fathers had held blue-collar jobs before those jobs were eliminated by downsizing.⁵ For these cou-

ples in particular, underemployment and/or major shifts in occupation and employer became a catalyst for reshaping—if not rethinking—traditional gender-based divisions of labor. These couples were crafting strategic responses to a turbulent and shifting labor market. Tag-team parenting typified by shift workers involved parents who worked opposite shifts in order to care for children themselves. Overlapping shift workers used a neighbor or family member for transition periods.

Couples in the upper middle class (who occupied positions often at the top of organizations and tended to have the most authority and responsibility for lower-level employees) were among the least likely to restructure their employment in order to adopt the new parenting approach. Though they might have chosen to seek alternative employment, few did, reasoning that they would have had to give up salient parts of their careers in the process of redefining their work and family goals. The other groups of couples less likely to adopt the new parenting approach to child care comprised those who worked in settings that were highly structured (inflexible) or highly demanding of their time.

In the following, I discuss two different situations where coparenting strategies are used to keep family at the center. In the first group, coparenting reflects beliefs about the importance of shared parenting itself. In the second situation, coparenting evolves as an option for keeping family at the center of daily life when both parents need to work outside the home (although some of these

families might choose not to coparent if their economic circumstances were different).

*Reorganizing employment
to maximize parenting*

This group of parents shared a belief that equal parental contributions to child care represented a superior solution to the market (for example, day care) or the mothers' complete withdrawal from the labor force. They believed that men and women should work outside and inside the home and share responsibility for child rearing. Individuals attempted to modify their jobs and employment commitments in order to regulate the demands that paid work makes and, thus, to restore some semblance of control—even if it meant loss of income.

Couples emphasized that men have historically been shortchanged as nurturers. Husbands talked about achieving parity with wives in their desire to experience fatherhood. Men modified their work schedules in order to be actively involved in child care. Usually they did this by working longer hours four days a week in order to have the fifth day to care for their child. Occasionally, this fifth day included taking the child to the office for a meeting or holding the meeting at home. But this reorganization of time did not lead to a cut in pay. For her part, the wife found a new, less demanding job working part-time three days a week. Not only did the individual spouses alter their work schedules, but the total number of hours the couple worked each week was reduced because of a

belief by the couple that both parents should be child oriented as a priority.

*Underemployment as a
route to shared parenting*

The couples previously described arranged work scheduling to fit coparenting as a core belief. In this second dual-earner couple situation, the couples emphasized their belief in keeping family at the center. It was possible to observe couples implementing the new parenting approach in practice while not forsaking the ideology that only mothers are really capable of "maternal thinking" (Ruddick 1980). Indeed, oftentimes women with underemployed husbands struggled with the idea of sharing mothering. Still, many women whose husbands settled for jobs with less than full-time hours conceded that their husbands had mastered maternal practice. Husbands, in turn, frequently remarked that this approach to parenting was one they never imagined themselves doing.

Economic downturns and corporate downsizing in the 1980s (Hodson and Sullivan 1990) and major sectoral shifts in the mid-1990s led these couples to piece together new employment and child care arrangements from which active fathering was a by-product. These couples did not consciously choose to work less (and earn less) in order to do more for their children directly. They worried about a further erosion in their economic standing. Wives commonly worked in jobs in the service sector, particularly as caregivers such as nurses. Since many wives had secure jobs with benefits and some over-

time, they often brought home a larger paycheck. Unable to find a comparable job to the one they had lost, many husbands were forced to take temporary, unskilled, or part-time work; others found entry-level jobs with a new employer and industry. Retraining programs, these men reported, had not led to well-paying full-time jobs comparable to the ones they had lost, even with the booming economy of the late 1990s. Both jobs may be important to the household economy, but the larger paycheck is symbolic of an inability to fulfill beliefs about one's identity.

One father, who was 39 years old with two children and who worked part-time as a home health aide, explained how his employment history had devolved:

I think [for] *many* of the long-term unemployed, [for] people like me who don't show up in the statistics, life goes on. So you do other things, you work part-time, either delivering pizza, which I did for three years, or bagging mail for the post office, whatever. But life goes on, so you have to adjust yourself because first of all, no one's gonna hire you. Once you're over 30, no one's gonna hire you for any real job. So what's the sense? . . . Your buddy who mows lawns for a living is offering you \$10 an hour. So you do what you have to do. And you just fall into a whole other world that you forget exists when you worked for a large company, working 9-5 for six years.

The wife, aged 35, was a nurse who typically worked the night shift, from 7 p.m. to 7 a.m. She worried that, if she lost her overtime, she would have to find a second nursing job. (Not only did she not want to

work a second job, but she would have preferred to stay home part-time, an unlikely reality in the near future.) She explained how underemployment had affected her husband's sense of masculinity: "And of course his ego was all shot to hell. He's not the family provider he wants to be and he's not doing exactly what he wanted, what he set in his mind. All his goals are rearranged."

Couples in which the wife was employed full-time while the husband was employed part-time often wished that the wife could opt to work fewer hours outside the home. Since she was the source of medical benefits, however, these couples were unable to reduce her employment to part-time without sacrificing these benefits. While middle-class white women continued to think of themselves as having the option of staying at home or entering the labor force, ideological and structural barriers prevented men from having similar choices (Gerson 1993).

Dual-earner couples: Summary

Regardless of which path they traveled to shared child care, the practice of new parenting transformed these men into more nurturing and sensitive caregivers who were teaching their young children how to navigate the world (Coltrane 1996). Indeed, it is ironic that many of the couples who are on the cutting edge of transforming maternal thinking are doing so not because of an ideological belief but as the result of constraints associated with corporate downsizing and economic restructuring. In both instances, however, couples rethink family life,

particularly caring for children, as they cobble together identities that are no longer unidimensional. Underemployed couples continue to wish their home and work time could be more evenly divided but not because they wish wives would become full-time mothers.

SINGLE MOTHERS

The single mothers I discuss in this section were all economically self-sufficient and chose to parent without a partner. The majority described themselves as strongly committed to employment prior to motherhood. They had occupations as diverse as lawyers, corporate consultants, waitresses, and aerobics instructors. Most worked within the service sector in feminized occupations (such as nurses, secretaries, social workers, elementary school teachers). The remainder were self-employed and pieced together a living wage.

While single parents in general have been glossed over by researchers interested in work and family dilemmas, these women represent a potentially valuable source of insight into the effects of family on work. There are two reasons for this. First, family was highly valued by these women. This is powerfully portrayed in the stories the women told about the lengths to which they went to build a family (for example, enduring the uncertainties of donor insemination or the bureaucratic travails of trying to adopt as a single parent). Therefore, we should expect them to be quite dedicated to shaping em-

ployment to fit family. Second, single mothers have no one immediately available to share the tasks within the home or to shoulder the burden of earning a living. They have few easy ways to expand their financial resources, and the increase in financial costs that women experience when they double the size of their households is dramatic. For instance, child care for an infant at a day care center in metropolitan Boston is \$12,000 per year (family day care is \$8000 per year) and medical coverage for a family plan is usually triple the cost of an individual plan. (This leaves aside diapers, formula, car seats, strollers, and clothing, just to mention major items.) Therefore, single mothers are likely to have the least slack (the least flexible alternatives) in order to adjust family to the demands of work outside the home.

Regardless of income, these women believe themselves to be part of the middle class. This belief—even when it masks structural inequalities in the labor force—is important because it symbolizes a sense of having a future, not simply getting by from one paycheck to the next. As women said repeatedly, they worked hard to ensure that they were visible middle-class consumers. Reducing their income when children arrive—for all but the wealthiest women—would mean slipping down the economic ladder and potentially losing footing within the middle class. Cutting back, therefore, was not a viable solution (Hertz and Ferguson 1998).⁶

Like the dual-earner couples described in the preceding section who

practiced the new parenting approach, these single mothers come from two very different points in the economic spectrum. First, there are the women who worked in top jobs in their chosen fields and who had spent years competing with their peers in dual-earner families (or childless peers). Once they wanted to start a family, they turned away from the attractions of job success that had motivated and rewarded them. Second, there are women who worked at the bottom of the labor force hierarchy and were employed in several part-time (sometimes full-time) jobs with no medical or child care benefits when their children were born. They had to keep (or find) one job with benefits or slip down the economic ladder and collect welfare and other subsidies. Slipping to welfare dependency went against the grain of their own values: these women had worked to keep themselves independent, and many were among the last of their high school girlfriends to have children.

Unlike the dual-earner couples, however, these single mothers have fewer resources internal to the family to call on in trying to balance work and family. They are more likely to cultivate external resources—in broader kin and friendship networks—to help them put family first. The implications of this form of community building will be taken up later, in the conclusion.

In the following, I discuss the three strategies adopted by these single mothers in order to place family life at the center: financing their own “mother time”; multiple jobs; and community supports.

Women professionals: Financing their own mother time

Armed with college and advanced degrees, these women professionals typically described themselves as workaholics prior to having children—always available to work extra hours. Once children arrived, however, they had to decide whether to set a more flexible work schedule or to reduce the inflated number of hours of “face time” that their work culture expected of them (see Landers, Rebitzer, and Taylor 1996). The work culture of competition and fear of job loss made it seem essential to be in the office from 7 a.m. till late at night. Often the last to leave the office, they used employment to fill the void of a family life.

When children arrived, many of the women cut back significantly on their work hours and, at least symbolically, demonstrated greater commitment to family over work. Quite a few took extended leaves. However, unlike Swedish families who take long parental leaves, the women in my study were financing their own parental leaves and extended periods of part-time work through savings they consciously set aside years before, knowing that someday they would have children. This gave them the time to be with their children without altering their lifestyles. When the savings ran low, they turned to credit card debt or reluctantly increased their work hours. To make up for lost mother time, they might spend their lunch hour with their child at the day care provider's.

Technical or professional skills sometimes allowed women who worked in larger organizations to ar-

gue for flexible arrangements, including working a shorter workweek (with longer days), or working part of the week in the office and part from home, or cutting back to limited travel. A manager who recently decided to change firms explained how this move enabled her to be an agent in shaping her work life, but she admitted that she could do this because of her advanced technical skills:

I'm going to have one-third of the number of people reporting to me than I used to and I'm going to walk out of work at 5:15 p.m. . . . And that was a very conscious choice. I didn't want a job that was going to consume me right now because I know that my priority needs to be taking care of Ben. . . . So it's constantly this balance of how much time at work and with my child. How deep does the foot go in? Is it the toe; up to the ankle; up to the knee? How deep am I in the work world with still my arms and my head free to be with Ben and it's a balance that I anticipate continually needing to adjust as the years play out.

However, in their attempts to strike a balance between work and family responsibilities, many traded off job advancement or opportunities for more interesting work projects in order to be out of the office by dinner time. The new goal is "streamlining": trying to "become more efficient" in order to "structure their work time better." But, since many of their managers measure time in the office—not work accomplished—the women who left early reported losing out, a trade-off they were willing to make. Sometimes they started their own businesses or freelanced on a project basis as a way to set their own

work hours and avoid the stress of a work culture that may be family friendly but not woman friendly.⁷ Even the women who take on piece-rate projects, which they believe gives them independence from the dictates of corporate structures, know there are only so many hours they can shave off a day and still maintain their lifestyle. Some try to increase the rates they charge; others take a part-time job that carries medical benefits (a huge expense for the self-employed) and do contract work with the remaining allocated work hours each week.

Even more create income by turning assets like space in their homes to barter for services or rent. For instance, one woman lived in a large Victorian house with her child and retired father. When he died, however, they lost his contribution to the mortgage. Assessing her life, she decided she could either find a more lucrative job and be away from her daughter all day or turn the house into a seasonal inn. Turning space into economic value gave her continued autonomy from a more structured job situation and allowed her to blur the boundaries between work and family. Other women bought triple-decker buildings and rented out two of the apartments in order to reduce housing costs. Lacking the savings to purchase a building, others took in roommates in order to cut costs.

Women working multiple jobs

Good mothering for women who hold several jobs more closely resembles the experiences of minority and immigrant women in the United

States (as well as other mothers around the world). For these women, being a good provider and having a close family member care for a child is being a good mother (cf. Glenn, Nakano, and Forcey 1994, especially the chapters by Collins and Segura). For instance, one woman who was a day care provider at a for-profit day care center worked just under the number of hours necessary for her boss to pay her benefits. She had begun working at this center as an intern in high school, and by the time she had her child (at age 26) she had worked 10 years at the same workplace. With no benefits and an unpaid maternity leave, she took off a few weeks and then returned to work. Her child spent four days a week being cared for at her mother's home and three days a week at her own home. Without her mother's help, the cost would have made it impossible to remain employed. The day care center director gave this valued employee one free day a week of child care. The child did have medical coverage through the state, while the mother remained uninsured. To earn additional money, when her child was at her mother's, she baby-sat in the evenings, and during the summer on weekends she cleaned cottages at a vacation resort. Between her mother's ability to watch her child, the free day of child care, and the extra jobs, she managed to save money.

Those at the bottom of the labor force hierarchy, typically high-school-educated women, worked long hours and often held several part-time jobs from which they derived no benefits. Prior to having a child, they

cared about piecing together enough hours of work to live decently.⁸ Others worked day jobs and then night jobs (for instance, during the day they worked as an administrative assistant, and then they waitressed at night or worked as phone operators for a catalogue company). Working two or three jobs in this fashion in the Boston area gave women incomes of \$25,000-\$30,000 a year with no benefits, making them vulnerable labor force participants.

With the arrival of a child, however, benefits become essential. Making good money without benefits might be doable without a child, but having a child can dramatically change one's financial situation from independence to welfare dependence in a matter of months. The majority of women who parent without a partner do not have the choice of leaving the labor force. Besides a brief maternity leave (and even these may be forfeited if unpaid), these women have no option but to work for income. Some women go the route of expanding their work hours by working multiple jobs, but extra hours spent at work is a disheartening trade-off for time spent with children. Moreover, they are likely to earn entry-level wages, and the extra jobs are usually seasonal or erratic.

When workplaces do not give all their employees benefits (such as health care), these women turn to government subsidies (such as Medicaid), which are a necessary but poor substitute. In my study, those women without families to help out were likely to resort to collecting welfare until they could reorganize their lives to hold a job and parent a child

at the same time. Every woman in this study who received welfare also went to two-year college programs with the hopes of acquiring skills that would get them out of the cycle of multiple jobs and hired into a job with advancement and benefits.

In short, every mother in this study wanted to reduce work hours. They cut back at work if it did not lead to downward mobility. Some who found that they could not make ends meet once children grew older took the children to their extra jobs (such as housecleaning and babysitting). These women took these extra jobs despite their personal cost because the chosen lifestyle—for the poorest women, remaining off of state aid—required a minimum level of cash available only through paid work.

Creating a support network

Single mothers cannot expand their time available for parenting or their income to support their families by crafting an arrangement with a family partner—because there is no partner. Therefore, as I found in my study, single employed mothers are apt to create networks of external resources (that is, external to their household) to substitute for the flexibility afforded to dual-earner couples. For example, nearby relatives are frequently tapped for child care; when kin are not available (as happens far more frequently these days), fictive kin like godparents are woven into the family as sources of spiritual and material support. Even more creatively, single mothers often build

a “repertory family” (Hertz and Ferguson 1997) by pulling together an ensemble of people who provide some combination of emotional and psychological support, economic contributions, and performance of routine household chores and maintenance. This way, they spread the risk of losing a key person by having a network of people in their lives.

The women I found to be most likely to create an external support network were those employed in female-dominated occupations earning wages at the border of the working and middle classes. They were highly social, resourceful, and adept at relationship building. Many of these women had or sought out middle-class sponsorship—help from other women they had met through previous jobs—particularly in sustaining a modicum of middle-class social and cultural opportunities for their children, such as invitations to birthday parties, inclusion in car pools and sports leagues, and participation in community events. Finally, they were skilled at finding “pennies from heaven,” that is, at establishing rapport by revealing their circumstances to people they trusted who sometimes became significant gift-givers (Hertz and Ferguson 1998).

CONCLUSION

The objective of this article was to study the effect of family on work by comparing the experiences of two distinctly different family forms: dual-earner couples who had adopted an egalitarian approach to

parenting and women who had chosen to become parents without marital partners. These families, I suggested, were most likely to offer insight into the way family is made to have priority over employment. Two conclusions, deserving of additional study, should be emphasized.

First, most parents either have or evolve a belief system about how children should be raised—whether, for example, mothers should work outside the home while children are toddlers—but not all families have the means or the opportunity to enact those beliefs. Indeed, the very concept of balancing work and family may be better viewed as a euphemism for competing ideologies about child rearing. Positioning in the external labor market and, more specifically, within a particular organization's internal labor market strongly influences whether individual women and men implement (or even contemplate implementing) their ideologies about parenting. People employed in a workplace with flexible hours and benefits are freer to live out their beliefs about parenting. When flexible work schedules or work-related benefits are not available, it is far more difficult for mothers and fathers to actively parent even when they want to.

Second, ideology is important, but benefits matter. While women with professional training or job skills, regardless of marital status, may be able to negotiate individual deals for themselves on the basis of their own value or nonsubstitutability to the organization, couples with two high-status jobs have a major source of

leverage not available to single mothers: that is, the cushion (or indirect advantage) that derives from the other spouse's benefits package (and paycheck). The couple can decide how to distribute their combined time between paid work and parenting, or one spouse can decide to go solo and open up a business. As long as one partner has benefits, the other can create flexibility, including staying home with children or starting up a business. Thus, while marriage may constrain the unbridled pursuit of one career to the possible disadvantage of the other, it also buffers the negative impacts of reversals in one or the other career. The practice of combining two careers—not the articulation of a nonsexist ideology—shapes decisions and informs change (Hertz 1986).

The couple can make decisions that might not be deemed optimal from the perspective of individual employers. Put differently, the couple is utilizing two work organizations even though it may appear to the employer that only the individual is making the decision. Gender is not the determining factor as to which partner might decide to try something different. Passion or vocation is more likely to be the concern between spouses when one decides to become an entrepreneur, a consistent finding in my studies of dual-earner couples since 1986. But if both spouses remain in traditional organizations, the wives will more likely (though not always, as the new parenting approach demonstrates) be the ones to ask for part-time or flexible work arrangements. Therefore, these cou-

ples are able to exercise their family and child care ideologies in ways that single mothers (divorced or unwed) with the same human capital and similar child care ideology cannot.

Unwed single mothers who have professional and managerial careers are more likely to take longer maternity leaves in order to be with their hard-won children, and they are more likely to think up creative solutions to deal with organizations that demand either on-site constant face-time or frequent client-related travel; both work cultures limit the ability of parents to parent. These women may become the new entrepreneurs because of their organizing skills. They are more likely than their dual-earner peers to believe that raising children is not solely the responsibility of parents, but that workplaces and communities need to provide an adequate supply of day care slots for children—not just model day care for a few employees. For instance, communities need to rethink lengthening the school year and providing after-school programs as an accepted reality in community life so that children can keep up with the amount of information and skills essential to successfully entering the labor force but also so that parents are not constantly forced to make ad hoc arrangements for half days and school vacations. After-school programs have become the new neighborhoods our children play in; these programs need not simply a paid staff but community volunteers—perhaps retired individuals—who can share special talents and vocations with the young. In this regard,

privatized corporate day care has been more willing to operate during hours that are more accommodating to parents. Once children enter school, parents complain about the quality of public school education (shortened school days and year), which continues to ignore the needs of employed parents. Ironically, work sites may have day care on the premises, but the supply of slots may not equal the demand for care for children under school age. Nevertheless, we have begun to find ways to enhance parents' employment when their children are very young. Through public education, communities must take the next step from kindergartens that end by 11 a.m. to schools that end by 2 p.m.

For those dual-earner parents of preschool children and for younger couples who have experienced downsizing and underemployment—similar to single mothers—the lack of benefits is crucial. Benefits are crucial for all families but particularly those who, without spouses, manage to make a living through piecing together a variety of jobs. A world in which benefits existed for everyone would give families more choice in how to position themselves in the workplace. New employment alternatives (in some cases, new employment alternatives mean unconventional jobs and employment contracts; in others “new” just means different jobs in the same organization) are important if people are to feel they have a choice. If they are unsatisfied as a couple with work arrangements, family life becomes stressful, and work, simply clocked

hours to pay the bills. Remember the nurse who wanted to stay home part-time but worked extra shifts because her husband could not find a job with adequate benefits.

In this regard, the unit of analysis is the couple, not the individual work site. Cafeteria-style benefits may allow couples to choose from the alternatives provided by two different workplaces to maximize their ability to spend time with children. But, as a society, we must also acknowledge that an important and growing part of the labor force is and will be single parents who need ways to be productive employees and good mothers: this recognition may force communities to become more than empty spaces and, instead, to become places where children can be left in safe environments so mothers can become and remain self-sufficient.

The aim of this article has been to highlight families that have tended to be overlooked in research on work-family issues and to better understand why and how they may shape their work lives to fit their beliefs about family. As I have tried to show, ideologies about family and coparenting motivated employed parents to develop creative strategies to keep family at the center. At the same time, close examination of how these families put family first demonstrates that work-family policies and programs rarely address the broader meaning of balancing work and family life. Indeed, it may rest with employees to collectively alter the future of workplace cultures by placing families first—rather than waiting for policies (public or private) to address their needs.

Notes

1. The data for the dual-earner study were collected between 1993 and 1995 in Massachusetts. Husbands and wives were interviewed in-depth separately but simultaneously. A total of 36 percent of the couples were working class; the other three-fifths were middle and upper middle class. See Hertz 1997 for a more complete description of sampling and methods. The single mothers are part of an ongoing data collection. The first wave of data, collected between 1995 and 1997, was based upon in-depth interviews with 52 single mothers stratified by route to motherhood. With social class defined by education, occupation, and income, currently the sample is 24 percent working class and 76 percent middle class. See Hertz and Ferguson 1998 for a more complete description of sampling and methods.

2. For the 837 major U.S. employers that provided information about work-family benefits in the 1990-91 Hewitt Associates SpecBook (*Work and Family Benefits* 1991), child care was the most prevalent benefit: 64 percent of the employers offered some kind of child care assistance to their employees; 89 percent of those who offered child care assistance offered dependent care spending accounts; and 41 percent offered resource and referral services. Only 9 percent of the employers provided an employer-sponsored child care center. Elder care programs were more limited: only 32 percent of the employers provided assistance to their employees. Of those providing elder care assistance, 88 percent offered dependent care spending accounts.

3. Flextime is a catchall category including time alterations ranging from arriving or leaving a half hour earlier than the official start or end of the work day, to broad blocks of time away from the workplace (for example, in the middle of the day) or banking time for use as time off in the future. Flexible scheduling arrangements are offered by 54 percent of the employers in the 1990-91 Hewitt Associates SpecBook (*Work and Family Benefits* 1991). The most common arrangements offered by these employers are flextime (provided by 76 percent of the employers) and part-time employment (provided by 67 percent of the employers). But fewer employers had scheduling on an individual basis (4 percent), work at

home (15 percent), compressed work schedules (23 percent), or job sharing (31 percent).

4. In the 1950s, the archetypal family had a stay-at-home wife, who was responsible for the children and chores. Today, only 14 percent of U.S. households consist of a married couple where only the husband earns income. The dual-earner and single-parent families of today can no longer count on a family member's running the household and taking care of the needs of each member. The most visible evidence of a changing family structure is reflected in women's workforce participation. In 1993, fully 60 percent of all women with children under age 6 worked for pay. Of those women with children aged 6 to 17 years, 75 percent were employed. This represents a marked increase from 1966, when 44 percent of women with children this age were employed (Hayghe and Bianchi 1994).

5. See Bluestone and Rose 1997 on the divided labor force.

6. The median income for the 52 women in this study was \$40,000 per year, which approximated the median income for all families in Massachusetts (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1993, 23-145).

7. Family-friendly policies apply to both men and women. However, since women are more likely than men to actually care for family members, women pay a price in terms of face time, overtime, and other symbolic expressions of organizational commitment. They may do the actual job just as well as men but still be perceived as less dedicated to the job or the company.

8. It is beyond the scope of this article to discuss the economics of the part-time worker, but, clearly, not offering compensation benefits reduces the organization's costs.

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THE ANNALS

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THE EVOLVING WORLD
OF WORK AND FAMILY:
NEW STAKEHOLDERS, NEW VOICES

Special Editors of this Volume

MARCIE PITT-CATSOUPHES
BRADLEY K. GOOGINS

*Boston College
Chestnut Hill
Massachusetts*

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