

Fatherhood, Gender and Work-Family Policies

Scott Coltrane

What fathers and mothers do – or don't do – with and for their families typically defines who they are as gendered adults. When a woman changes her baby's diaper, comforts her crying toddler, or serves a nutritious family meal, her actions are seen as expressions of motherhood. When a man sits at the head of the family table, plays catch with his son, or takes an extra job to afford a new house, his actions are seen as expressions of fatherhood. But contrary to popular cultural stereotypes, the activities associated with mothering and fathering are converging, and their symbolic meanings are constantly undergoing change. What constituted the ideal father in colonial America is different from the family breadwinner model of the 1950s, and both diverge from current images of nurturing caregiver fathers. Not only are human parenting behaviors and family practices learned rather than instinctual, but they vary considerably across time and place, and have always responded to the complex and shifting demands of the natural environment, economics, politics, culture, personal history, individual temperament, and couple dynamics (Coltrane, 1998). Over the past half century, women's increased employment has been the primary engine driving changes in marriage and family life, though cultural ideals have also shaped what we consider appropriate behaviors for mothers and fathers.

In this essay I describe how social and economic forces have influenced men's family involvements over the past few decades and document how work-family issues have become more similar for men and women. In so doing, I begin to assess whether the goal of gender symmetry envisioned by Gornick and Myers is worthy and practical. If these policies were implemented, would fathers take advantage of new opportunities to balance their family and

work lives? Whose needs would be met by the various policies and which men might be expected to accept or resist them? What impact might these policies have on the gendered division of labor within families and how much sharing is it realistic to expect? Finally, which policies and programs carry the most potential for furthering the goal of gender equality?

Recent Trends in Men's Family Involvement

To assess whether Gornick and Meyers' proposed policies might be adopted by men, it is useful to review recent changes in family composition and the division of labor within two-parent households. Research in the United States reveals two contradictory tendencies— more father involvement within two-parent families but fewer father-present families in the population (Coltrane, 2004a). These trends mirror popular culture stereotypes of “good dads” (those who marry the mother, care for the children and support the family) and “bad dads” (those who don't marry the mother, participate in child care, or pay child support) (Furstenberg, 1988). Although this good-bad dichotomy is too simple, many scholars concur that fatherhood has gained symbolic importance in the past few decades precisely because men's family participation has become more voluntary, tenuous, and conflicted (Coltrane, 1996; Griswold, 1993; Kimmel, 2006; LaRossa, 1997; Pleck & Pleck, 1997).

The trend toward fewer two-parent families in the population is driven by declining marriage rates, relatively high divorce rates (though falling since the 1970s), an increasing number of births to unmarried mothers (for all race and ethnic groups), and an increasing number of single-mother households. The entry of significant numbers of mothers into the permanent labor market and the weakening of the male-only breadwinner ideal, coupled with trends in fertility, marriage, divorce, and custody, has resulted in the average American man spending fewer years living with children than in the past (Eggebeen, 2002), and has also resulted in more

American children spending time in a family without a co-resident father. Though marriage rates have been declining slightly in the United States, belief in marriage and the likelihood of marrying continue to be higher in the United States than in most other countries (Cherlin, 2005).

As families were becoming less likely to contain fathers in the 1970 and 1980s, a “new father” cultural ideal emerged in which men were expected to be nurturing and to share most aspects of routine child care with their wives (Coltrane, 1996; Furstenberg, 1988; Pruett, 1987). This ideal has gained wide acceptance in popular culture, with American men ranking marriage and children among their most precious goals. For example, in a 2007 survey, eighty percent of U.S. fathers ranked their relationships with their children (under 18 years old) as very important to their personal happiness and fulfillment (10 out of a possible 10). Similarly 81 percent of the men ranked their relationships with their wives as very important, compared to just 21 percent who rated their jobs or careers using this top category of importance (Pew Research Center, 2007). Similar shifts in men’s attitudes and in father imagery have occurred in England and Europe (Sullivan, 2006). Changes in popular ideals about fathers have not been uniform, with the result that there are now many different versions of fatherhood ideals at play in developed nations (Coltrane, 2001, 2004a; Kimmel, 1997; LaRossa, 1996). Nevertheless, most recent fatherhood imagery suggests that it is now considered masculine to be a nurturing and involved father (Coltrane, 1996; Hochschild, 1995; Knijn & Kremer, 1997; Smart & Neal, 1999). In relation to the Gornick and Meyers proposal, it is worthwhile to investigate the extent to which the emergence of these new fatherhood ideals can be linked to empirical changes in practice (Sullivan, 2006).

Fathers in two-parent households now spend more time with co-resident children than at any time since such data were collected and the number of single-father households has

increased dramatically (though they still constitute only about one in five U.S. single parent families) (Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2003). Men's absolute level of unpaid family work in two-person households has increased significantly over the past few decades, especially for direct parenting and housework, and somewhat less for managing or planning those activities (Coltrane, 2000; Pleck & Masciadrelli, 2003). As noted below, researchers show that these increases in men's family labor are statistically significant, but are they meaningful in the context of gender relations within households?

Studies show that men's family labor continues to lag well behind women's, especially for routine housework. Men's proportionate share of the work has risen faster than their hourly contributions, primarily because the women they live with have decreased the number of hours they devote to these routine activities. Even in two-parent households where gender convergence is most evident, large differences remain in the type of work that men and women perform. The average married father continues to spend significantly more time in paid employment and less time in unpaid family work than the average married mother (no doubt related to the fact that men earn significantly higher average wages than women). And most men still contribute only about a third to half as much time as women to unpaid family work (Coltrane, 2000). In summary, although men ARE doing more domestic chores than ever, recent changes in family life have been driven primarily by women increasing their labor force participation and by women cutting back their contributions to housework.

Because men's contributions to parenting and housework lag behind those of women, it is difficult to evaluate the significance of recent changes and to estimate how much more might be achieved with policies designed to encourage more equal sharing. In order to address those questions, we need to disaggregate the changes that are occurring. Which men are doing more,

and how do their individual contributions compare to their partners? How are mothers and fathers in different types of families responding similarly or differently to the work and family dilemmas they face? Past research suggests that we are observing some unprecedented changes toward de-gendering various household and child rearing tasks, yet it also reveals that systems of gender hierarchy still operate in and through divisions of paid and unpaid labor (Risman, 1998). Will the proposed policies strategically undermine those systems of gender hierarchy or inadvertently sustain them?

Predictors of Men's Involvement in Family Work

Under what conditions do men do more family work? Research shows that there are differences in the predictors and outcomes associated with men's participation in child care versus housework, although the more routine aspects of each are highly correlated. In addition, researchers attempting to predict absolute hourly contributions to housework and child care by men and/or women often come up with different findings from those who use relative measures – i.e., the amount of sharing within the couple (Coltrane, 2000). I focus this discussion on men's and women's proportion of family work within households because this approach has the simplest and most direct relevance to issues of gender equality as framed by Gornick and Meyers (but this does not imply that domestic labor in single-parent households, same sex couples, or other family forms is any less important). In other words, what factors have researchers found to be associated with men in heterosexual couples sharing more family work with their partners?

Variables associated with women's initiative and enhanced bargaining position, such as more education and higher relative earnings, tend to predict shared housework better than shared child care, though the more mundane aspects of parenting can also be predicted by women's resources and time availability. Shared involvement in parenting, in contrast, appears to be

especially responsive to men's availability, initiative and gender ideals (Bulanda, 2004; Ishii-Kuntz & Coltrane, 1992). The latest research shows that men do more housework and routine child care when they are employed fewer hours and their wives are employed more hours (Coltrane, 2000; Hook, 2006). Men also tend to do more housework when they are more highly educated and their wives earn more of the family income, though results here are more mixed as discussed below.

Although both men and women tend to be committed to raising children when their offspring are conceived, most studies conclude that the arrival of children shifts the couple toward more conventional gender based allocations of family work (Cowan and Cowan, 2000). Having children tends to increase women's family and household work, whereas men's hourly contributions to family work traditionally remain about the same after the children arrive, though their hours of paid work tend to increase. In the United States, having a child means working about three more hours on the job per week for men, but for women, it has been associated with spending about an hour less in the paid labor force each week but putting in significantly more time on housework and child care (Shelton, 1992). These gender-linked patterns of paid and unpaid labor allocation are the target of the Gornick and Meyers proposal, and raise the question of how these new policies might change the domestic labor allocation process in two parent families. To assess prospects for change, I review findings on the influence of employment, earnings, education, and attitudes on the sharing of family work. Because most of this research is based in North America, I also provide a brief review of some recent cross-national research on men's sharing of household labor and child care, focusing on the potential influence of national differences in work-family policy regimes. I follow this with a discussion of women's patterns of labor force attachment in relation to men's paid and unpaid work. At the end of this

essay I offer some predictions about men's likelihood of using the new programs, as well as prospects for men (and women) resisting equal sharing of family work. I conclude with a discussion of the need for embracing gender egalitarian goals, even if they are may be utopian for some families.

Employment. Research shows that employed mothers do less housework and child care than those who are not employed, and consequently share more family work with their male partners. I discuss women's employment more fully below, but here I focus on findings about men's family participation in relation to their own employment demands, as well as their wives'. Employment schedules are perhaps the most consistent and important predictors of housework sharing that researchers have documented (Coltrane, 2000).

When men are unemployed or working part-time, some studies show they perform more household labor (Sullivan, 2006; Orbuch and Eyster, 1997; Wheelock, 1990) but some show they do less (Brines, 1994; Shelton and John, 1993). Most research does find that when employed, a father's employment hours are a strong predictor of his involvement in both housework and child care (Coltrane, 2004a). When mothers of preschool children are employed, a father's time availability, measured by employment hours, predicts whether he will serve as a primary caregiver (Brayfield, 1995; Casper, 1998). Fathers and mothers with non-overlapping work shifts are the most likely to share child care (Presser, 1995). When mothers of school-aged children are employed more hours, their husbands tend to do a greater portion of the child care and housework, and fathers tend to be more involved to the extent that they view their wives' career prospects more positively (Pleck, 1997). And although some early research from the 1970s and 1980s suggested that men's "free" time was not readily convertible to domestic labor, men's time seems now to be more fungible. For example, Brewster (2000) found that U.S.

fathers in the late 1980s and 1990s were likely to use nonworking discretionary hours for child care, whereas previously (1970s to early 1980s) they tended to use those hours for other activities.

Although many researchers have reported that middle class men are most likely to embrace nurturing fatherhood ideals (Messner, 1997), some recent data suggests that working class fathers have changed more than their more privileged counterparts. Focusing on longitudinal data from England, Sullivan (2006) showed that men assumed more responsibility for family work if their jobs were in the manual/clerical category. Other data suggest that whereas managerial and professional couples were the most likely to share family work in the 1970s and 1980s, by the 1990s and 2000s the most change (and sometimes the most sharing) occurred in couples with blue collar or pink collar jobs (Coltrane, 2004b).

Earnings. Most researchers find that when wives have higher relative earnings, or when the gap between husbands' and wives' earnings is smaller, the more equal the division of labor (Blair & Lichter, 1991; Cooke, 2007; Kamo & Cohen, 1998). Others focus on the independent influence of wives' earnings on their own hours of housework, rather than relative measures, suggesting that the economic influence comes from wives' absolute contributions and autonomy rather than from bargaining influence (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003; Gupta, 2006, 2007; Parkman, 2004). Thus, researchers typically find that earnings influence women's household labor (by decreasing it), but that women's absolute or relative earnings do not automatically increase men's household labor (Brines, 1994; Coltrane, 2000; Gupta, 2006, 2007).

Women's higher occupational status and income (but not men's) is strongly associated with the purchase of domestic services (Cohen, 1998; Oropesa, 1993). Results from sample

surveys and historical or ethnographic studies converge on a general finding: women's economic resources allow them to reduce their own housework contributions and "buy out" of gendered domestic obligations (Coltrane, 2000). Well-educated women are the most likely to purchase domestic services, whether performed in their own homes or embedded in the food and products they purchase for the family from outside the home (Oropesa, 1993). It is predominantly white, middle-class women who consume these services and products, and it is immigrant, ethnic minority, and working-class women who produce and provide them (Glenn, 1992). This gender, class and race-based allocation of paid domestic work is an additional area in need of policies to promote social justice.

Education. Findings about the influence of education on family work are also somewhat mixed, with patterns sometimes differing for men and women and for housework versus child care. Many studies show that women with higher levels of education do less routine housework (cooking, meal clean-up, shopping, house cleaning, and laundry), perhaps because as noted above, they tend to hire others to do the work (Cohen, 1998; Coltrane, 2000; Presser, 1994; South & Spitze, 1994). A few studies show that men with higher levels of education do less housework and have spouses who do more of it (Blair & Lichter, 1991), but most studies indicate that men with higher levels of education do more overall household labor and child care (Kamo & Cohen, 1998; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997; Pittman & Blanchard, 1996; Presser, 1994; Sayer, Gauthier & Furstenberg, 2004; South & Spitze, 1994) and that couples with more education share more household labor (Iversen & Rosenbluth, 2006), in part because education is associated with more egalitarian gender ideals, which in turn, are associated with men doing more family work.

Attitudes. Research shows that women's egalitarian gender ideology is a consistent predictor of sharing housework, though women's attitudes are a less consistent predictor of sharing child care (e.g., Bulanda, 2004). When wives feel more strongly that both paid work and family work should be shared and when they agree more fully with statements about equality between women and men, they are typically more likely to share housework with husbands (Coltrane, 2000). Many studies also show that men with more egalitarian attitudes share more housework or child care than more traditional men (Almeida et al., 1993; Baxter, 1993; Calasanti & Bailey, 1991; Greenstein, 1996; Orbuch & Eyster, 1997; Perry-Jenkins & Crouter, 1990; Pittman & Blanchard, 1996; Presser, 1994), but questions remain about whether gender attitudes should be considered as causes or consequences of such sharing (Coltrane, 1996; Sullivan, 2006).

Attitudes about sharing child care or housework operate in tandem with self images, proportionate earnings and job schedule pressures and these tend to shift as couples confront new challenges and opportunities (Deutsch, 1999; Doucet, 2006; Dowd, 2000; Gerson, 1985, 1993). As the emerging gatekeeping literature (e.g., Allen & Hawkins, 1999; Beitel & Parke, 1998) attests, if women hold to strong separate spheres ideals in the face of increased demand for women to work and men to "help" at home, such sharing can be seen as coerced and father involvement in routine tasks can be interpreted as interference rather than helpfulness (see also C. Macdonald, this volume). In general, if family members want fathers to be more involved and if they agree that women should share breadwinning (arguably now the norm), their participation in routine family work is evaluated positively. In contrast, if family members feel that mothers should not work outside the home and that fathers should not be expected to change diapers or do laundry, then such practices can cause stress. Nevertheless, interview studies show that the ideology of intensive mothering that leads some mothers to feel totally responsible for children

and to resist sharing with their male partners often gives way to new ideals about the benefits of sharing the emotional as well as the mundane aspects of parenting (Coltrane, 1996; Deutsch, 1999; Doucet, 2006; Dowd, 2000; Ehrensaft, 1987).

Ideals about marriage and marital status also matter. Proving that housework is not *inherently* gendered, studies have shown that men do more housework before they are married than they do after. Once married, however, they tend to more easily denote domestic chores as “women’s work” and turn more of them over to their wives. And when couples have children, a combination of gender attitudes and practical choices coalesce to shape decisions that increase men’s employment hours and increase women’s domestic chores. This research shows that culture and attitudes are influential in how parents think and talk about their family lives, but my reading of the research findings in this area does not support the supposition that gender attitudes determine family practices. In fact, I would suggest that material concerns often override abstract ideals, so that gender attitudes are often overlooked or modified to accommodate shifting practical realities (vivid examples from my own research include Evangelical Promise Keepers and Mexican immigrants who maintain beliefs in male family headship and male breadwinning, even when wives’ jobs or superior earnings would seem to undermine them). Such findings raise issues about how gender attitudes and domestic labor allocation are related and suggest that work-family policies directed toward married couples with children are an ideal focus for future initiatives to promote gender equality.

Types of Parental Involvement. Some researchers also make a distinction between routine parenting (including helping with dress, hygiene, or homework; general supervision and monitoring, putting to bed, driving to school, etc.), versus more enrichment or leisure activities (playing games; coaching or supervising children’s sports; accompanying children to museums,

parks, recitals, concerts or sporting events; engaging in creative activities such as arts, theatre, or music; participating with children in youth groups; overseeing religious activities). In general, routine parenting (as opposed to the above enrichment activities) is more likely to be associated with everyday housework and home maintenance activities that are also more likely to be shared by men when they are employed fewer hours, have more education, and have wives who are employed more hours and make more money. In contrast, if men participate in enrichment or leisure activities with children they are not necessarily more likely to share routine domestic work with their wives (and such men have been found to be *less* likely to do cooking and cleaning, see Coltrane & Adams, 2001). In the discussion that follows, I focus on the more routine aspects of housework and child care (including especially cooking, cleaning and child supervision) because they are the most time consuming and most likely to be allocated on the basis of gender (Coltrane, 2000). In addition, these are the tasks that when shared are the most likely to relieve stress and help women feel appreciated and supported. If the Gornick and Meyers proposals are to advance the cause of gender equality, men will need to perform a greater share of these routine tasks.

Cross-national Trends in Men's Housework

Recent research using cross-national time diary data from 20 countries in Europe and North America documents a significant increase from 1960-2000 in men's share of housework and child care (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2001). For routine housework (cooking, cleaning, and clothes care), employed women's time went down (just under one hour per day) and men's went up (around 20 minutes per day). These data, based on time diaries (widely considered to be the most accurate measure of time use), show men's share of the routine housework increasing substantially (from 15% to 25% of the total) but still lagging behind women's. Results differ for

shopping, driving children, and leisure activities with children, with both women and men spending significantly more time doing these things. For general child care, employed women increased their time commitments from 1960-2000, and to a lesser degree, so did men (this finding held for those employed full-time and those employed part-time; for those with preschoolers and those with school aged children). These general changes apply across national context and across employment status and family status (Sullivan, 2006; for comparison, Bianchi 2000, reports that U.S. women's time in child care was relatively constant over this period). The greater time spent on childrearing in this multi-nation study could result, at least in part, from a decline in normatively backed "mandatory parenthood." As fewer people opt to have children, existing parents include a higher proportion of those who affirmatively and deliberately choose to have children. Thus, time spent with children might be expected to increase for both mothers and fathers and child care might correspond more closely to deeper preferences than in the past (i.e., via self-selection into the status).

Comparative time-use data from developed countries shows that there has been a general decrease in hours of paid work for both men and women over the past 30 years or so. This finding appears to be at odds with commentators who focus on the "time poverty" or "time bind" faced by modern parents (Hochschild, 1997; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). The former finding is derived from structured time diary data, whereas many of the later findings are based on interviews with parents who express feeling intense pressure to fill their children's lives with structured leisure and enrichment activities. As the Gornick and Myers paper reminds us, the former findings are also based primarily on data from countries where sick leaves are automatic, parental or family leaves are ensured, vacation time is guaranteed, and the average work week is limited to less than 40 hours per week. For overall time in all forms of paid and unpaid work in

these developed nations, full-time employed women with school-aged children decreased their hourly contributions, but part-time employed women with preschool children showed no change (Sullivan and Gershuny, 2001). Women employed in low wage part-time work face the most severe time pressures and tend to have the least leisure time. Although aggregate trends are similar across employment categories, individual women's employment does make a difference within the family. Women employed full time for more years have male partners who do more housework (Gershuny, 2000) and a transition to full-time employment for the woman is typically associated with the man taking on more of the routine family work (Sullivan, 2006).

To assess the gender equality goal of the Gornick and Meyers paper, changes in labor force participation and domestic work allocation must be assessed with reference to sharing within the couple. In the Sullivan (2006) analysis of cross-national data, in nearly one third of couples with two full-time workers, men were contributing more time to domestic work than their women partners. This is a significant change from past decades and suggests that work schedules and (and perhaps relative earnings) are increasingly important to couples' family work allocation strategies. Sullivan (2006) found that there has been a general decline in the percentage of couples with a gendered division of domestic labor and an increase in the percentage of couples with more equal divisions of labor. This increase in sharing is directly linked to women's labor force participation. Among couples with part-time employed mothers, 41% did over 70% of the domestic labor, whereas among couples with non-employed mothers, 54% did over 70% of the domestic labor (Sullivan, 2006). And changes over time have been significant, if still limited: women (overall) were doing three-fourths of the domestic work previously, but they are now doing about two-thirds.

Sullivan suggests that findings of increasing amounts of time spent on child tending are most interesting because they happened during the period when media concern over a shortage of time devoted to children in developed countries was growing. Sullivan found that the increase in time devoted to child care is consistent across countries with different subsidies, policies and regulations governing child care. Interpreting time diary data from the U.S., Bianchi suggests that employed mothers attempt to maximize their time with children by reducing time spent in other activities such as housework. Participation in child-related activities (homework, activities, lessons etc.) has received more attention from researchers in recent decades, and parents report spending more time doing these activities for and with children (see also Hofferth, 2003; Hofferth & Anderson, 2003). And enrichment activities of this sort are increasingly linked to social class and “cultural logics” of child rearing (see Hays, 1997 and C. Macdonald, this volume). Annette Lareau (2003) reports how middle-class mothers and fathers (regardless of race) engage in practices of “concerted cultivation” by fostering and assessing their children’s talents, opinions, and skills. They schedule their children for a myriad of activities, reason with them, hover over them, intervene on their behalf outside the home, and make deliberate and sustained efforts to stimulate their cognitive and social skills (2003: 238). Poor and working-class parents, in contrast, frequently talk about money in the face of severe economic constraints, focus on providing for their children by giving them food and shelter, and tend to view their children’s development as unfolding spontaneously, spending less time engaging in the enrichment activities that preoccupy aspiring middle class parents. Changes in the meanings of these child enhancement activities have likely influenced parents’ reporting rates, so it is difficult to make precise judgments about actual time spent in these activities over time (Sullivan, 2006). In addition, rather than viewing child care hours as a zero sum calculation, recent research shows

that the more time mothers spend with children, the more time fathers spend with children (Aldous et al., 1998; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Kean, & Hofferth, 2001), adding further support for the symbolic valuation of children in two-parent families as this family form becomes somewhat less prevalent in the population at large, and as middle class family size continues to shrink.

As Gornick and Meyers suggest, cross-national differences in policies and employment patterns can also predict men's family involvements (see also Cooke, 2006; Iverson & Rosenbluth, 2006; Sayer, Gauthier & Furstenberg, 2004). In a cross-national study of 20 industrialized countries, Jennifer Hook (2006) found that in nation states with higher levels of maternal employment, men did more unpaid work in the home. If countries had generous maternal leave programs, men tended to do less, but when those leaves were available to fathers as well, men in general tended to perform more hours of household and family work (these data did not allow for testing recent "Daddy-Days" parental leave options discussed by Gornick and Meyers). And in general, the provision of publicly supported child care did not suppress men's contributions to unpaid domestic labor.

Supporting the main Gornick and Meyers' thesis, Hook (2006) suggests that individual-level theories of unpaid work behaviors ignore how national context can affect men and women's time-allocation decisions by influencing the benefits of specialization, the terms of bargaining, and the ease or difficulty of adhering to gender norms. She found that "there is a direct effect of women's labor force participation on men's unpaid work that affects all men – men married to employed women, men married to non-employed women, and even single men. In contexts where women are more involved in the public sphere, men are more involved in the private sphere, not necessarily because of household bargaining or other household-level

processes, but because of societal shifts in gendered behavior” (p. 655). Asking related questions, Iversen and Rosenbluth (2006) found that in countries supporting general labor market skills, public sector jobs, and work-family policies such as child care, women have more power at home and shoulder less of the domestic labor. Similarly, in an analysis of Germany and the U.S., Cooke (2006) concluded “the slow evolution in the division of domestic tasks observed over the past half century may not result from persistent gender differences, but from continuing institutional reinforcement of the gendered division of labor (see also Breen and Cooke 2005).” In an analysis of U.S. couples, Cooke (2007) found that interstate differences in poverty, public transfers, child support and family law, along with more typical measures of income and education, shaped the division of housework within couples, presumably because these factors influenced women’s alternatives to marriage. Research of this sort supports the idea that public policies contribute to the gender balance of power within couples, even in the U.S. where state supports are relatively meager compared to European-style welfare states. As noted above, an emerging body of cross-national research also suggests that government policies providing paternal, as well as maternal, leaves and other family supports can influence the normative and behavioral dimensions of gender relations in housework and parenting.

Mothers’ Employment, Male Breadwinner Assumptions, and Gender Equity

The Gornick and Meyers’ goal of gender equality assumes that women’s labor force participation is the key to parity with men, but does not specify the various mechanisms through which their labor and earnings might influence family dynamics. Why have women entered the labor market in record numbers and how do their jobs alter the balance of power in family negotiations over domestic labor? Some women take jobs for reasons of personal fulfillment, for

career motivation, or to be able to afford luxury items, but most women go to work for wages out of necessity. Demographers note that the need for women to work for basic living expenses has increased dramatically in the past few decades, and national surveys find that over eighty percent of Americans agree it takes two paychecks to support a family (Hernandez, 1995; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Wilkie, 1993). Over a quarter of all U.S. children need a mother's income to lift the family out of poverty (Proctor & Dalaker, 2003).

Although women are more likely to be employed than before, it is still men who tend to be identified most strongly with paid work. Masculinity and men's authority are still associated with success on the job (Coltrane, 2004b). Even though male breadwinner families with stay-at-home wives are now vastly outnumbered by dual-earner families, the man's work still tends to count (in some peoples' eyes) for more than the woman's. In part this is because full time employed workers who are male continue to be paid about 25 percent more than full-time employed workers who are female (Fronczek, 2005). There are two contradictory patterns concerning employment and wages of U.S. women: Although they now make up 47 percent of the labor force, stay employed when they become mothers, and are earning more than they used to, on average, women continue to be employed slightly less and to earn significantly less than men.

With two earners in most families, however, the provider role has undergone some changes, and most families now give recognition to women whose incomes are essential. Nevertheless, men tend to retain symbolic responsibility for earning money and often get more credit for doing it than do their equal-earning female partners (Coltrane, 1996). Many men are still reluctant to accept wives as equal providers, even when both spouses are working full-time (Gerson, 1993; Hochschild, 2003; Pyke & Coltrane, 1996; Townsend, 2002). In working-class

couples where it is evident that wives take jobs out of financial necessity, they are more likely to see themselves, and are more likely to be seen by their husbands, as sharing the provider responsibility. This is particularly so when wives' earnings approach husbands. Among all married couple U.S. families in which both the wife and husband work, about one-fifth of the wives earn more than their husbands (U.S. Department of Labor, 2005). And the trend toward more equal earnings continues: in over a third of all U.S. couples, wives make at least 40 percent of the couple's income (Raley, Mattingly & Bianchi, 2006). Although American couples in which women's earnings exceed men's are more likely to divorce than others, this tendency is eliminated when men share half of the housework (Cooke, 2006).

Within couples, the wage gap is smallest, on average, between working-class spouses. Nevertheless, most studies of work-family issues in two-earner families have been conducted with middle-class samples. Considerable research attention has been paid to professional couples who focus on their careers and espouse egalitarian beliefs. Some researchers conclude that such marriages are "more equal than others" (Hertz, 1986; see also Deutsch, 1999; Ehrensaft, 1987; Risman, 1998). Nevertheless, professional men's salaries are usually considerably higher than their wives, so the women may have a harder time receiving recognition as providers than their working-class counterparts (Ferree, 1987, 1991; Potuchek, 1997). It may be that well-educated professional couples talk more about the importance of sharing, which leads researchers to report more equality than actually exists (Coltrane, 1996).

Today, most people say they hold jobs to make money, but the majority also report that they derive personal satisfaction from their jobs and careers. This is now as true for women as it is for men. Satisfying well-paid work is related to enhanced well-being for both men and women (Baruch & Barnett 1986; Thompson & Walker, 1989). The only exception seems to be when

people – especially mothers -- believe that they should NOT be working, but circumstances force them to take jobs or work longer hours than they want. This is especially stressful for mothers who work exceptionally long hours, bring work home, have non-standard shifts, and those who generally feel under pressure at work (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). In general, however, as men's and women's jobs and work histories begin to look more alike, they are also likely to share similar family concerns. Recent polls find that over sixty percent of both American men and women would like to work fewer hours on the job (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). In addition, 60 percent of men and 55 percent of women say they experience conflict in balancing work, personal, and family life (Bond, Galinsky & Swanberg, 1998) and the majority of both men and women report that they feel torn between the demands of their job and wanting to spend more time with their family (Gerson, 1993). Workplace factors like flexibility in scheduling work hours, increased autonomy, and a supportive supervisor are associated with both men and women workers reporting less work-family conflict, interference and stress (Jacobs & Gerson, 2004).

Because of an older ideal of separate work and family spheres, it has been easier for men to feel that they are fulfilling their family commitments by working and being a financial provider. Women, on the other hand, have had to justify why having a job does not make them a bad mother. Pleck (1977) suggests that the boundaries between work roles and family roles are “asymmetrically permeable” for men and women. Men have typically been able to keep family commitments from intruding on their work time and have been able to use job demands to limit family time. In contrast to men, women’s family obligations have traditionally been allowed to penetrate into their workplace. It is usually mothers who take time off from work when a child becomes ill, though we are seeing a small increase in the number of fathers doing this (Coltrane,

1996; Doucet, 2006). The typical pattern has been for women, more than men, to move in and out of the labor force, regulating the number of hours they are employed in response to child care demands and other family needs (Moen, 1985; Presser, 1989).

Social scientists have often reproduced assumptions about separate spheres for men and women in the ways they have defined work-family research questions (Moen & Coltrane, 2004). For example, research before the 1980s tended to conceive of men's nonemployment as a problem whereas women's employment was seen as a potential problem for the family and for children's development (Coltrane and Collins, 2001; Hays, 1997). More recently, the issue of "working families" has been defined by researchers as one of overload and "balance" (Aldous, 1996; Hochschild, 1997). Some work-family researchers have labeled the lock-step model of continuous full-time employment exemplified by the male breadwinner model as "the career mystique," noting that this ideal is not only still dominant for men, but also for the few women (often single or childfree) who can now pursue it (Moen, 2003; Moen & Roehling, 2004). Most researchers also point out that it is still women who tend to do the balancing, by scaling back on their occupational aspirations or hours of paid work, thus perpetuating the asymmetrical permeability between work and family roles for men and women (Williams, 2000). As Hochschild (2003) phrased it, this has resulted in a "stalled revolution," fundamentally changing women's equal access to primary sector careers, but not fundamentally challenging the social organization of those careers. With equal opportunity in the labor market as the major focus, all adults in families, and especially women, are expected to pursue long-hour, lock-step occupational careers (Moen, 2003; Williams et al, 2006).

Researchers have attempted to measure people's work and family attachments by asking questions about how committed they are to each. Although somewhat superficial, answers to

these survey questions indicate whether someone gains special meaning from family and work activities and how willing they might be to cut back on one or the other. Both men and women say they are strongly committed to both family and work. Nevertheless, on average, men tend to be slightly more identified with work than with family, and women to be slightly more identified with family than work (Bielby, 1992). Men's commitments to paid employment have remained relatively stable or declined slightly over the last few decades, but women's have continued to increase. Overall gender differences in commitment to paid work are thus diminishing.

As women receive more education and as job opportunities and rewards open up to them, they become more attached to their careers. If women have work statuses and experiences similar to men's, and have the opportunity to identify as strongly with the work as men, gender differences in commitment to work and family begin to disappear (Bielby & Bielby, 1989; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004; Risman, 1998; Rosen, 1987). In recent studies, job conditions and opportunities are the strongest determinants of work commitment, with marital and family status having little if any impact (Bielby, 1992; Jacobs & Gerson, 2004). Although there is much less research on the family side, there is also evidence that when men have household responsibilities similar to those of women, they are as strongly committed to the family as women (Deutsch, 1999; Doucet, 2006; Risman, 1998). This seems to be especially true if men take advantage of paternity leave or otherwise arrange to spend significant amounts of time with their children when they are young (Coltrane, 1996; Doucet, 2006; Parke, 1996).

Against an optimistic vision of gender convergence in work and family roles, some scholars cite difficulties faced by fathers that are similar to dilemmas faced by mothers with careers (Doucet, 2006; Gerson 1993; Sullivan, 2006). Others focus on high divorce rates, an increasing number of single-mother families throughout Europe and North America, and levels

of children's contact with their birth fathers that are moderate at best (Acock and Demo 1994; Eggebeen, 2002). And some social scientists suggest that recent small changes in the domestic division of labor "should be better understood in terms of a largely successful male resistance" (McMahon 1999:7). Why are men resisting? The short answer is that it is in men's interest to do so (McMahon 1999; Goode 1992), as it reinforces a separation of spheres that underpins masculine ideals and perpetuates a gender order privileging men over women (Adams & Coltrane, 2004). Early work-family research suggested that the most resistance would come from working-class men who would defend their patriarchal privilege, though more recent findings suggest that male wage workers (rather than upwardly mobile professionals) will be the most likely to take advantage of such policies (without necessarily embracing the feminist or egalitarian principles underlying them).

Will The Policies Work?

Gornick and Meyers present a range of policies to encourage father involvement and I predict that all would promote more sharing of family work (with the exception of promoting part time work for women and the provision of universal child care, both of which could have the opposite effect). I discuss each proposal in turn, making predictions about possible uptake by men.

Shorter Work Week. Limiting weekly employment hours and setting normal fulltime weekly hours in the range of 35 to 39 hours per week (as is standard in several European countries today) would affect men more than women. Though not all fathers would use the increased non-work time to do more with their children, recent research suggests that a significant proportion of men would use the time to participate more in family life. As noted above, one of the most

consistent predictors of men sharing housework and child care is their own hours of employment. As Gornick and Meyers suggest, limiting the standard full-time week to below 40 hours would grant fathers more time for children on a daily basis. I agree that limiting men's time in the labor market (and limiting mandatory overtime work), would raise the likelihood that men would share more family work with their partners. If most men had employment that was "full-time," but at less than 40 hours, men who left work to be with their families would be less likely to be sanctioned or passed over for promotions. Evidence suggests that dual earner couples who each work thirty hours per week experience less stress and report higher family satisfaction (Hill et al., 2006).

Paid Time Off. A month of paid time off per year would assure workers a substantial number of paid days off each year and would very likely be used by men in a wide range of occupations. As Gornick and Meyers suggest, the right to paid time off would alleviate some of the burden of arranging child care coverage during summer and other school breaks and would grant parents needed periods of uninterrupted family time. Fathers with vacation time, sick time, and personal time now take time to spend with their children, and an increased amount would undoubtedly increase their time spent with children. As noted in the literature review above, men's paid work hours is a consistent predictor of men's family work performance, most men say they would like more time off, and reductions in work time have been linked to increases in men's child care.

Scheduling Options. Increasing the availability of flexible work scheduling, telecommuting, and other individualized control over the timing of work would also be used by many fathers in the United States. Studies show that men who use these options report greater job satisfaction and better relations with their children (Hill, Jackson & Martinengo, 2006).

Availability of Part-time work. The proposal to ensure all workers the right to formally request a shift to reduced-hour or flexibly-scheduled work, subject to employer agreement, is clearly advantageous for parents and children, and on that basis is a worthy policy objective. Access to part-time work would allow some men to become primary parents and others to more fully adopt co-parenting. As the earnings of men and women become more similar and as their career trajectories converge, there will be more men who will opt for part-time work when they become parents, and this will allow them more time to devote to child care and housework. Nevertheless, previous research suggests that men will be less likely to pursue such options than will women. Seeking pay and benefit parity for part-time workers will benefit parents and children in general, but because uptake will be greater among women than men, this provision will do less to promote the goal of gender equality within the couple. In fact, making long-term well-paid part time work readily available to all workers may actually decrease the amount of sharing between individual mothers and fathers, as many couples will decide that for financial reasons, only one spouse should pursue such an option, and that spouse will most often be the woman. If women's and men's wages were equal, then instituting this initiative would carry less potential for reinstating separate career paths for women and men.

Paternity Leave. In the countries discussed by Gornick and Meyers, national maternity leave policies grant nearly all employed mothers several weeks or months of job security and wage replacement around the time of childbirth or adoption. Some offer the leave to either men or women in a family and some also offer special paternity leave that is only available to men. Because few firms now provide paternity leave in the U.S., it is difficult to assess the extent to which men would take advantage of these leaves. Modest leave periods (e.g., 1-2 weeks) with wage replacement would be very likely to be used by the majority of U.S. men. A survey of

leave taking in California, before the new paid family leave program was operating, showed that men took as many leaves as women, though often for shorter time periods (Milkman & Appelbaum, 2004). The new California paid family leave program and the national Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) have nontransferable benefits of the type proposed by Gornick and Meyers and as they note, this provision would promote men's utilization better than a European-style family-based allocation of a set number of weeks for parental leave to be used by either parent. Gornick and Meyers note that Swedish and Norwegian fathers use of paternity leave increased exponentially when they instituted non-transferable benefits for men (i.e., "Daddy Days"). Interview studies in Canada and the United States show that leave taking around the birth of a child has helped many fathers to develop stronger attachments to their newborns and afforded them opportunities to develop competencies that would not be possible if only mothers had taken parental leave (Coltrane, 1996; Doucet, 2006; Parke, 1996).

Paid Family Leave. The Gornick and Meyers' proposal calls for six months of family or child-related leave with wage replacement for men (as well as women). I suspect that the majority of men will take a week or two at the time of the birth (or adoption) of a child, but will likely take the bulk of their paid leave time as children grow older and as mothers exhaust their leave benefits. This fits a general pattern of men being secondary caretakers for infants, even when they attempt to share parenting equally with the mother (Coltrane, 1996; Ehrensaft, 1987). Although some men are actively involved in infant care, more men begin to share significant amounts of child care when their children become toddlers, and become more comfortable as routine caregivers when their children are school-aged. With nontransferable benefits for each parent, it is likely that mothers will use their leaves around the birth and during infancy (when many are breastfeeding). Because children routinely and repeatedly get sick, need doctor and

dentist visits, and have gaps in their care provision, it is likely men will use this leave in short spurts to cover routine emergencies of child and health care. And if leave allotments can be taken for a period of eight years as proposed by Gornick and Meyers, and if male leave taking becomes normative, fathers will use their time to attend preschool and elementary school conferences, performances, and other activities as their child matures. With full wage replacement and strong job protection provisions, most men would use the leaves, though undoubtedly at somewhat lower levels than women.

With the proposed means tested earnings cap, working-class men would receive a greater portion of wage replacement. Because men with more education and higher status occupations are already more likely to espouse sharing ideals and embrace new fathering models, they may need less monetary incentive to take these leaves. And if the leave policies were utilized widely, even men with partial wage replacement would be more likely to take them than currently, in part because workplace culture will be more accepting of men utilizing such leaves. Spreading the cost for the leave programs among employers and employees should make employers less likely to discourage men from taking the leaves. Using funding mechanisms that resemble existing unemployment insurance programs is especially promising (as the new California family leave program does). As Gornick and Meyers note, publicly-financed “leave for family reasons” would make sure that parents could meet children’s needs when unpredictable but routine “emergency” situations arise. Importantly, the policy would extend benefits to low-wage workers, whose jobs and employers typically grant the fewest options for parents who need to make short-term changes in work scheduling. Most American parents would heartily welcome this policy, and as recent research on working-class fathers attests, these men are definitely committed to caring for their children and are poised to utilize the leaves if they were to receive

wage replacement and if they knew their jobs were secure. I predict that a majority of fathers who are hourly wage workers would utilize family leaves, typically for a few days at a time and as their children reach school age, but longer when their children or other family members have special needs. Previous research suggests that the ability to adjust work schedules to meet child care or medical care needs leads to better mental health among parents, and presumably this will lead to more effective parenting and better child outcomes.

Child Care Provision. The Gornick and Meyers' proposal calls for the provision of nonparental care for children of various ages in various locations and configurations. Although high quality child care is probably more expensive than the various parental leave and work schedule options they propose, a combination of the two will benefit both children and parents. As with the promotion of part-time work possibilities for mothers, full provision of state subsidized high quality child care could undermine the goal of including more men in the provision of routine child care if couples used the child care in place of men's contributions. But by changing women's alternatives outside of marriage, universal child care could also improve women's bargaining position within the couple.

An addition to the child care proposal might include an explicit focus on child care that also trained fathers in parenting skills. As the research on father involvement shows, more education is a key predictor of greater father involvement. Recent efforts by the Federal Head Start program could provide a model, especially because the target populations are men with less education and social capital, but who nonetheless have a strong desire to be good fathers. Men have few opportunities to learn how to care for children, yet they respond well to institutionalized instruction, particularly in the company of other men. I favor new initiatives to promote subsidized child care that also maintain the goal of gender equity between men and

women. Such programs could include child development skill building for adolescent boys (and “home economics” for boys in middle or high school), birthing classes for new fathers delivered through hospitals and medical clinics, parent education classes and support for fathers’ groups, and cooperative child care centers where fathers are encouraged to participate in routine onsite care and in so doing are taught new skills. Research shows that most fathers want to be involved in their children’s lives, but that they feel unprepared and inadequate. More state resources devoted to the development of men’s nurturing capacities would benefit mothers, fathers and their children.

Conclusion

Because categorical beliefs in parenting and gender differences mask relations of power and inequality, asking men to do more family work is both discomfoting and necessary (Coltrane, 1994). Policies designed to help families should assume that both men and women want to contribute to their families through both breadwinning and the provision of everyday care and unpaid support work. I suspect that it is unrealistic to assume that men will do half the parenting and housework in the majority of families, but along with Gornick and Meyers, I do not believe we should set significantly lower standards for fathers than for mothers. We need to stop assuming that men are incapable of nurturing children or doing housework, or that women can’t be primary breadwinners (see Brighthouse and Wright, this volume). The Gornick and Meyers’ policy proposals have a realistic chance of helping men and women to negotiate new patterns of sharing for both paid and unpaid work.

American men and women need policies to promote parental leave when children are born, to allow for paid leave to care for children or other family members as needed, to shorten

the work week, to guarantee longer vacations, to ensure living wages, to set pay equity standards for women, and to support subsidized child care. Instead of allowing these proposals to be seen as attacking “the family,” we should think about how we might utilize the power of cultural symbols of “motherhood,” “fatherhood,” “family,” and “children” to promote gender equality. If policies are to successfully increase men’s participation in family work, they might neutralize the ambivalence that many women and men feel about bringing men into a realm considered by many to be “the woman’s domain.” They might do this by drawing on American ideals of individual rights and equal opportunity. Although I formerly questioned the wisdom of using rhetoric from the women’s movement to champion fathers’ rights (Coltrane & Hickman, 1992; Coltrane, 2001), the Gornick and Meyers’ policies could easily be promoted on the basis of full parenting rights for every individual, whether woman or man, married or single, gay or straight (see also Hobson, 2006). Children do benefit when they have loving and committed fathers in their lives, and these policies are designed to create more fathers (and mothers) who fit this profile. In addition, these policies are designed to maximize the chances that fathers and mothers will participate as equal parents, by balancing their commitments to paid employment and unpaid family work. If men would thus be encouraged to assume more responsibility for routine child care and housework, we might approach the necessary conditions for more egalitarian gender relations in society at large. This is, indeed, a worthy goal.

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