In 1989, sociologist Arlie Hochschild published a groundbreaking study that described the “second shift” of housework that married women complete after their first shift of paid employment. She interviewed couples like Nancy and Evan Holt, who experienced ongoing conflict about how to divide the household labor. Should Evan contribute his fair share, as Nancy argued, since they both were employed full time? Or did the responsibility remain with Nancy because it was part of her wifely role? She may have a job, Evan argued, but that doesn’t mean she should be able to get out of her household responsibilities. Hochschild called these mismatched expectations about paid and unpaid work a “stalled revolution.” Women’s entry into the labor market had been revolutionary, but changes in men’s behaviors at home had not kept pace.

More than twenty years later, in 2011, another sociologist, Kathleen Gerson, published *The Unfinished Revolution*. In this study, she interviewed more than 100 young men and women about their family experiences growing up and about what they hoped to achieve in their own work and family lives. Most of these young people aspired to have egalitarian relationships with employment and caregiving shared equally between partners. But most also expressed real skepticism that they will be able to achieve this equality. As one man said, “Work situations are not very accepting of people who want to put kids in an equal priority with their job” (Gerson, 2011, p. 120).

The word *revolution* is commonly used to describe the changes in women’s employment patterns over the 20th century. The breadwinner–homemaker family peaked in the 1950s, and today, dual-earner couples are the majority. Changes in mother’s employment have been especially striking: In 1950, only 11 percent of mothers with children younger than age six were in the labor market (Carter et al., 2006); in 2012, that figure was 65 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a). Most women now expect to work throughout their adult lives, and most men expect that their wives and partners will as well.

Although it is true that most mothers maintain some attachment to the labor market, they also tend to curtail their hours or take several years off when they have young children. Someone in the household needs to shop for groceries,
clean house, do laundry, prepare and clean up after meals, and care for children, and that someone still tends to be a woman. Men are more involved in household labor and childcare, but their movement into household work has not been as dramatic as women's movement into the labor force. In addition, U.S. social policy offers few supports for families as they balance their family and employment responsibilities. Twenty-five years after Hochschild's (1989) stalled revolution, conflicts between work and family responsibilities remain.

This chapter focuses on family labor—the paid, unpaid, and sometimes paid-for labor that families engage in to maintain their households. It starts with a review of separate spheres and an overview of the complexity and pervasiveness of care work. Next, we review historical and empirical patterns in employment, housework, and childcare, and we discuss the implications of these patterns for work–family conflict and social policy. Throughout the chapter, we will keep in mind the theme of change and continuity for as much as some changes have been revolutionary, continuities in how families divide the family labor remain.

**Ideology of Separate Spheres**

Our contemporary ideas about how families should divide the paid and unpaid labor are strongly influenced by the ideology of separate spheres, which we first discussed in Chapter 1. This ideology emerged in the 19th century as the U.S. economy shifted from an agricultural to an industrial base. In an agricultural economy, work and home were one—men, women, and children worked in and around the farm to produce the goods that households needed. Although tasks were gender segregated, all tasks were valued as economic necessities; without the labor of both men and women, households could not survive. With industrialization, work and home became physically and ideologically separate—the public male sphere and the private female sphere. No longer producing goods at home, men now worked for wages in the public sphere and used these wages to support their families financially. By providing this support, men fulfilled their family obligations. Being a good husband and a good father was defined primarily through economic providership, the so-called *provider role*. As long as men fulfilled this role, contribution to the household in other ways was not expected.

In contrast, women's family obligations in an industrial economy focused on the private sphere. They were expected to keep house, care for children, and manage the day-to-day running of the household. Separate spheres ideology redefined this work as “an act of love rather than a contribution to survival” (Coontz, 2005, p. 155), nurturing rather than labor. This cult of domesticity, as it is called, limited women's opportunities in the public sphere and confined their attentions to the home.
Although this separate spheres ideology was assumed to be universal, it was class and race specific. It was primarily middle- and upper-class White families who had the economic resources to live up to this ideal. Middle-class men earned sufficient wages to support their families; most other men did not. Middle-class White women were deemed worthy of protection from the drudgery of paid work. Women of color and working-class White women, particularly immigrants, were not granted this same protection. Although the ideology of separate spheres was influential throughout society, its reality was more limited in scope.

Even today, when high rates of women’s employment make the reality of separate spheres even more tenuous, we can still see how the ideology lives on. Women continue to take on primary responsibility for housework. Mothers spend more time with children than fathers do. Men spend more time in the paid labor force than women do. On the macro level, most workplaces are still organized around the ideal-worker norm, which assumes that workers do not have family responsibilities and that they are free to work whenever and wherever the boss needs them. With limited family leave and long work hours, U.S. family policies also reinforce this norm, much more so than in most other industrialized nations.

**Defining Care Work**

Employment is the most visible kind of work that families engage in. Work hours are monitored, we get paid for the time we spend working, and “what do you do for a living?” is one of the first questions we ask upon meeting someone new. Families need at least one wage-earner, and more often two, to meet the economic needs of a household. Yet maintaining a household and raising a family also require a tremendous amount of unpaid labor, traditionally done by women; this labor is often referred to as care work. Although some people engage in care work as their paid job, for example, childcare workers and home healthcare aides, most care work is unpaid and in the private sphere. In fact, it is so taken for granted that often it is not considered work at all.

Yet the variety of tasks that are included under the umbrella of care work take considerable time and energy. Caring for children is the most visible type of care work, but care work also includes (Carrington 1999):

*Feeding work:* planning meals; shopping for groceries; cooking meals; knowing what family members like to eat; learning about food and food preparation; monitoring pantry supplies; keeping a food budget; and cleaning up while cooking and after meals.
Housework: cleaning house;¹ caring for clothing and linen; caring for pets and plants; managing household paperwork and financial work; interacting with service or delivery workers; and making household repairs.

Kin work: maintaining relational ties with friends and family, including visiting, calling, and writing letters, cards, and emails; purchasing gifts for birthdays and holidays; organizing family gatherings; and deciding which relationships to focus on at any given time.

Consumption work: monitoring the marketplace by reading catalogs, magazines, and newspaper ads; learning about products from books, radio, and television; comparison shopping; making phone calls about products; maintaining purchase and service records; monitoring product and service quality; commuting to retail sites; waiting on line to purchase items; and keeping a budget.

This exhaustive—and exhausting—list of tasks highlights the many small activities that family members complete to maintain their households. Invisible and undervalued, these tasks form the latticework around which family life is structured. They are both a consequence of family life, that is, things that must be done to maintain a household, and a means by which family identity is created and reinforced. In the process of engaging in these caring activities for and with each other, families are created. Sharing meals, celebrating holidays together, and making an effort to pick up around the house before one's partner gets home “produces a stronger and more pervasive sense of the relationship(s) as a family, both in the eyes of the participants and in the eyes of others” (Carrington, 1999, p. 6). Care work is a way to do family.

¹ In itself, this includes “vacuuming, sweeping, scrubbing, mopping and waxing floors; cleaning stovetops, ovens, refrigerators, microwaves, coffee pots, food processors, and other small appliances; cleaning kitchen sinks, cabinets, and counters; washing and drying dishes by hand, loading and unloading dishwashers; setting, cleaning, and wiping tables; dusting, cleaning, and polishing furniture; cleaning windows, mirrors, and window coverings; straightening and arranging furniture, books, magazines, newspapers, and toys; dusting and cleaning walls, baseboards, and ceilings; cleaning bathroom sinks, tubs, showers, and toilets; changing linens and making beds; cleaning and organizing closets, cupboards, storage spaces, and garages; emptying garbage and taking it out for collection; separating recyclables and taking them out for collection; cleaning garbage cans and recycling bins; and cleaning out fireplaces” (Carrington, 1999, p. 71). Whew.
Of course, care work has practical value, as well as symbolic value. It is absolutely essential not only to running a household but also to the U.S. economy: The U.S. gross domestic product (GDP) would be 26 percent higher if it included the value of nonmarket work (Bridgman, Dugan, Lal, Osborne, & Villones, 2012). And if families had to pay someone to do the tasks that women do for free, it would cost each family about $60,000 per year (Marquand, 2014).

**Empirical Patterns in Employment, Housework, and Childcare**

**Women’s Employment Before 1950**

The development of the wage-based industrial economy in the 19th century completely changed family life. Rather than producing the goods they needed, families purchased them using money that family members earned in paid employment. Although most workers in the early years of industrialization were men, many women also were employed. Certain occupations—domestic service, teaching, and nursing—have long been dominated by women and some groups of women have a long history of labor force participation. As shown in Figure 8.1, for example, single women have had relatively high labor force participation.

![Figure 8.1: Women’s Labor Force Participation by Marital Status, 1890–2010](image)

participation rates since the late 19th century, with 40 percent to 60 percent of single women working between 1890 and 1960. It was not unusual for young single women to work until marriage or having their first child, although, as we will discuss, women of color often continued their employment even after marriage and motherhood.

What was less common was married women’s employment. Until 1930, no more than about 10 percent of married women were in the formal labor market. When we break this down by race, however, the patterns are a bit more complicated. Married White women had the lowest rates of employment, with only 6.5 percent in the labor market in 1920 (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). Those who could afford it would rely on husbands for all of their financial support, whereas others would earn wages at home in the informal market. For example, it was not uncommon for White working-class women to earn money by taking in boarders or doing piecework at home. This kind of labor maintained the image of separate spheres, in that women were doing female-typed jobs and were doing them at home, even though their earnings made essential economic contributions to the family.

Patterns for Black women were different. Black women have had higher employment rates than White women since Reconstruction. For example, in 1920, 32.5 percent of married African American women were employed, a rate five times higher than the rate for White women (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). This can be explained by both economic and ideological factors. Economically, the rural southern economy in which most African Americans lived had a high demand for Black women’s labor, both as sharecroppers and as domestic servants. In addition, families relied on the earnings of both women and men to get by. Even after millions of African Americans migrated to cities in the North and West during the Great Migration, economic demands made women’s employment a necessity.

Ideological factors also contributed to Black women’s employment. Although not considered ideal, women’s employment was acceptable in Black communities, free from the stigma that many White women experienced when they were employed. This acceptance went beyond economic necessity as even among the middle and upper-middle classes, Black women had relatively
high rates of employment. In 1940, almost 40 percent of middle-class Black married women were in the labor market, compared with less than 20 percent of middle-class White married women (Landry, 2000). Bart Landry argues that middle-class Black wives pioneered an egalitarian ideology of the family that contrasted sharply with the cult of domesticity so prominent among whites. Instead of following the prevailing segregation of women to the private sphere, with only men allowed entry in the public sphere, black middle-class wives championed a “three-fold commitment” to family, community, and careers. In doing so they offered a different version of “true womanhood,” one white women eventually adopted in the 1960s and 1970s. (pp. 5–6)

With their high rates of employment in the early 20th century, middle-class Black wives were on the forefront of family change, committed to supporting their families both financially and domestically. By the late 20th century, middle-class White wives were following in their path.

National-level employment data for Asian American, Latina, and Native American women are not available before the mid-20th century. However, historical records indicate that women in these racial-ethnic groups were also actively involved in financially supporting their families (Amott & Matthaei, 1996). For example, many Latinas in the Southwest worked on farms, in manufacturing, or as domestic servants. Along the West Coast and in the Hawaii territory, Asian American women, which at that time included women mainly of Chinese, Japanese, and Filipino descent, worked on farms, both family-owned and larger plantations, and as domestic servants, whereas others ran family-owned businesses. Native American women were mostly employed in traditional work, including agriculture, fishing, and textile-manufacturing, although women who had been relocated to urban areas also worked in domestic service.

**Women’s and Men’s Employment Since 1950**

The second half of the 20th century brought several changes to encourage the employment of married women, as shown in Figure 8.1. Most significantly, the decline in the manufacturing sector in the 1970s and stagnant wages for low-skilled workers since then means that it has become increasingly difficult for men without a college education to support their families. In 2010, the median weekly earnings for men with a high-school diploma was $710. In 1980, those same men would have earned $865 per week (adjusting for inflation), over
20 percent more than they earn today. As well-paid manufacturing jobs have disappeared, due to outsourcing and technological advances, what has taken their place are low-paid, unstable jobs in the service sector, particularly in retail sales.

Other macro-level changes have also encouraged women's employment. The removal of legal barriers to women's employment in traditionally men's jobs, including law, medicine, and business, has created an avenue for women to pursue these rewarding and well-paid professions. A decline in fertility rates after 1964 means that women now spend fewer years caring for young children and are available for employment when their children enter school or move out of the house. Finally, increasing consumer expectations for what it means to live a middle-class life, including high-end electronics, vacations, and a second (or third) family car, means that more families need an additional wage-earner to meet those expectations.

Given these macro-level shifts, it is no surprise that 74 percent of women aged 25 to 54 are in the labor market (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014a), as are almost two-thirds of mothers of young children (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). Although women are more attached to the labor force than ever before, we can also see the lingering influences of separate spheres ideology. For example, although most women are in the labor force, many of these women work part time. Among employed women aged 25 to 54, almost 1 in 5 worked part time in 2014; for men, that figure was 1 in 15 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2014b). This figure is even higher for women with young children—28 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2015). In other words, given the numbers of women who work part time and who are not employed, only 56 percent of women aged 25 to 54 are employed full time.

We also see the lingering influence of separate spheres in that most men remain firmly committed to the provider role and both men and women expect men to support their families financially. Unlike women, most men do not consider giving up their jobs or reducing their employment hours to provide care for their families. Although the number of stay-at-home fathers has increased, they remain a distinct minority; only 3.4 percent of stay-at-home parents are fathers, increasing from 1.6 percent in 2001 (Harrington, Van Deusen, & Mazar, 2012). Stay-at-home fathers often face stigma for making this choice (Doucet, 2004; Rochlen, McKelley, & Whittaker, 2010). Because masculinity and providership are so closely intertwined, men who are not employed are viewed suspiciously as failed men. One father who was the primary caregiver in his family and worked part time stated, “I think there were times when I felt I wasn't being a good man, by not providing more money for the family. And that I wasn't doing something more masculine. And there were times when my wife felt that she wasn't filling
her traditional role as a wife and a mother” (Doucet, 2004, p. 288). The power of separate spheres ideology—that so closely links breadwinning with masculinity and caregiving with femininity—continues to shape how contemporary families organize and understand their family lives.

**Housework**

Another arena of both rapid change and persistent inequality is housework. Take a look at Figure 8.2, which shows the average weekly hours spent on housework for men and women since 1965. Women have significantly reduced the time they spend on household tasks over the past 45 years, from 30 hours per week in 1965 to 16 hours per week in 2009–2010. Men have doubled their housework time over the same period, from 5 hours to 10 hours per week. Yet the gap persists, with women spending about 60 percent more time on household tasks than men do. Several factors affect how much time men and women spend on housework, including number of children, age, social class, whether one rents or owns a home, and marital status. Yet, even when all of these factors are controlled, women spend more time on housework than men.

![Figure 8.2: Average Weekly Housework Hours for Men and Women Aged 25 to 64, 1965–2010](source: Bianchi, Sayer, Milkie, & Robinson, 2012.)
What accounts for this continuing gender gap in housework? Three explanations have been offered: time availability, power dependency, and the gender perspective. The time availability model argues that women spend more time than men on housework because they spend less time in the labor market. Not only are women more likely than men to work part time, they also work fewer hours when they are employed full time—an average of 8.5 hours per day for men and 7.9 hours for women (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013a). Thus, women have more time available to complete household tasks. Yet, this begs the question as to why women spend less time in employment than men. The often unstated assumption in heterosexual families is that women are better suited to domesticity than are men. In addition, persistent wage inequality means that in most families, men earn more than women. When families decide that one partner needs to cut back on employment to take care of domestic responsibilities, that partner tends to be a woman. Thus, differences in employment hours can explain why women spend more time on housework than men, but it doesn’t explain why domesticity continues to be defined as women’s work and employment as men’s work.

The second explanation for the gender gap in housework is derived from social exchange theory and focuses on power and economic dependency. This power-dependency model argues that (a) housework is an unpleasant task...
that individuals would rather not do; (b) earnings are resources that increase power and reduce dependency in a relationship; and (c) the less powerful and more dependent partner in a relationship will do more housework because they cannot leverage their partner to do more. According to this model, women spend more time on housework than men because they earn less; this financial dependency reduces women’s power and leaves them responsible for housework. When women’s earnings are similar to that of their husbands, they can use this bargaining power to reduce their housework time or to push their husbands to do more. In a more power-balanced relationship, men would be more responsive to those demands.

Evidence for this perspective is strong. For example, several researchers (Bittman, England, Sayer, Folbre, & Matheson, 2003; Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000) have found that women decrease the time they spend on housework as their earnings increase relative to their husbands’ earnings. In addition, Sanjiv Gupta (2007) found that regardless of husbands’ earnings, housework time has an inverse relationship with women’s income—the more a woman earns, the less time she spends on housework.

We also see evidence for the power-dependency model among same-sex couples. Christopher Carrington (1999) conducted interviews and home observations with gay and lesbian couples in the San Francisco Bay Area. He found that despite describing their relationships as egalitarian (which is also typical among heterosexual couples), most couples tended to be specialized, with one partner more responsible for economic support and the other partner more responsible for household maintenance. Although the couples often explained this in terms of personality or interests, Carrington found that income was an important part of the story: The higher earning partner contributed less to household tasks than did the lower earning partner.

The power-dependency model shows how access to economic resources influences family life; yet, economic resources alone are not a sufficient explanation for the housework gap. In fact, gender remains the most reliable predictor of housework patterns in heterosexual couples. Regardless of work hours, education, or income, women spend more time on housework than men. To explain this, the gender perspective focuses on the pervasive influence of gender on individuals, interactions, and institutions (Risman, 1999). To put it simply, women do more housework than men because they are expected to—by themselves, their partners, and the institutional structures of which they are a part.

Candace West and Don Zimmerman (1987) coined the term “doing gender” to emphasize the ways in which gender is an interactive process that is created.
by our social behaviors. In other words, gender is not something we have; it is something we do. By enacting or avoiding particular behaviors, we demonstrate our gender. For example, housework is a way to do gender: women do gender by completing household tasks, which demonstrates their femininity, and men do gender by avoiding them, which demonstrates their masculinity. According to the gender perspective, housework is not only a practical activity necessary to maintain family and home life, but it is also an ideological activity that reinforces appropriate masculinity and femininity.

We see evidence of the gender perspective when we observe what happens when men and women move in and out of various living arrangements. Gupta (1999) found that when moving from living alone into heterosexual cohabitation or marriage, men reduce their housework hours by 29 percent and women increase theirs by 17 percent. Similarly, when moving from cohabitation or marriage into living alone, men increase their housework time by 61 percent and women decrease theirs by 16 percent. The gendered context of cohabitation and marriage is structured so as to expect women to take care of housework. When men live alone, they take care of these tasks themselves. But as soon as a woman enters the picture, the responsibility becomes hers. The gendered context of heterosexual co-residence, with or without marriage, puts housework squarely on women's shoulders.

This is not to say that same-sex couples are immune to gendered expectations. Carrington (1999) found that in gay male couples, partners tend to downplay the time and energy either partner spends on domesticity and that lesbian couples tend to emphasize it. To protect their gender identity, men were depicted as economic providers even when they spent much of their time in domestic labor. Similarly, women were depicted as nurturers and caregivers even when they spent little time on domestic tasks. Carrington's research demonstrates how cultural expectations about gender, providership, and housework maintain their ideological power even among same-sex couples.

The gender perspective also demonstrates a major limitation of the power-dependency model. As discussed, there is a negative linear relationship between income and housework for women—the more she earns, the less time she spends on housework. Yet for men, the picture is a bit different. Men increase their housework hours as their wives’ income becomes more similar to theirs, which is consistent with the power-dependency argument. However, once women start earning more than their husbands, and particularly when the husband is completely economically dependent on his wife, his time on housework declines. In an attempt to neutralize the stigma he faces as a man who is economically dependent on a woman, he compensates by limiting the time he spends on nonmasculine tasks like housework.
Finally, the persistence of gendered expectations about housework can be observed in that few people, neither men nor women, report housework inequality as unfair. This goes back to the provider role. Even though women are employed, they are often not seen as providers or breadwinners, nor do they see themselves in this way (Potuchek, 1997). Their earnings may make important contributions to the financial maintenance of the family, but their identities as wives and mothers remain firmly attached to caregiving, just as men's identities as husbands and fathers continue to be associated with breadwinning. The symbolic meaning of employment is gendered in such a way as to reinforce women's responsibility for domestic tasks. Because housework continues to be defined as a woman's responsibility, even when she is employed, it is not considered inequitable if she does more.

**Macro-Level Perspectives on Housework** Although most of the research on housework focuses on the micro level—how much time individuals spend on housework in various circumstances—more recent research uses a macro-level lens to understand housework patterns. These researchers compare the division of labor across countries, taking into account policy regimes and overall levels of gender inequality. This research finds that structural and cultural contexts matter for how men and women divide the housework: “[C]ouples in more gender egalitarian societies divide housework more equally than those in less gender egalitarian societies, even when holding constant individual characteristics” (Lachance-Grzela & Bouchard, 2010, p. 774).

Jennifer Hook (2010) found that both married and single men do more housework in countries where women's employment is more common, suggesting that a high level of women's employment contributes to a cultural shift in gender expectations that influences all members of society, even men who are not living with women. In other research, Hook (2006) found that when governments encourage paternity leave, thereby challenging separate spheres ideology, men spend more time on housework even if they have never taken paternity leave. These macro-level patterns emphasize how closely housework is tied to gender inequality in the larger society. The more a society encourages and values gender equality, the more these values are enacted in the private sphere.

**Childcare**

Chapter 7 described how changing ideas about children and parents have influenced how mothers and fathers spend time with their children. In this chapter, we discuss childcare as it relates to the other kinds of labor that families engage in. Let's start by looking at Figure 8.3, which shows a surprising trend. One would expect that as women's labor force participation rates increased,
the time they spent with their children would have decreased. Yet, Figure 8.3 shows just the opposite. After a dip in mother's time with children in the 1970s and 1980s, it is now almost 40 percent higher than it was in 1965 despite the increases in women's labor force participation since then. Men's childcare time has been increasing since the 1960s and is at a peak. What happened? As you learned in the previous chapter, expectations about good parenting have intensified, and both mothers and fathers spend more time interacting with and caring for their children in a variety of contexts. They sacrifice other ways of spending their time—housework time, leisure time, and time alone—to spend more time with their children.

One primary concern about a mother's employment is the question of who will care for the children when she is at work. With more than 60 percent of mothers of young children employed at least part time, paid childcare providers are in high demand. Figure 8.4 shows the percentage of children younger than age 5 who are in various kinds of care arrangements. The most common arrangements are relatives (27 percent of young children), organized facilities (25 percent), and
parents, either the father providing care while the mother works or the mother watching the child while she works (22 percent).

Because the childcare system in the United States is market based, the type and quality of care varies widely by family income:

The affluent have multiple market options that are flagged, like products on a supermarket shelf, by a nuanced array of labels—nannies, babysitters, housekeepers, au pairs, preschools, day care—and for school-aged children, fee-based after-school programs, lessons, and other specialized activities focused on sports, music, drama, dance, computers, and science. . . . At the other end of the class spectrum, parents from lower (and even middle) incomes lack the means to purchase quality paid care. Even if they qualify for government subsidies, they often confront long waiting lists. Low-income solo mothers and their children who are without kin or friends able to lend a daily hand lead especially pressed lives. (Thorne, 2004, p. 166)
The growth in the “24/7 economy” (Presser, 2003) means that about 20 percent of U.S. workers work evenings and nights, work a rotating schedule, or work varying hours (Bianchi, 2011). In addition, about one in three American workers work on the weekend. For married parents, this nonstandard schedule decreases the time they spend with each other, but it increases the time fathers spend caring for children while the mother works. Single parents are in a much more difficult position as finding childcare outside of regular daytime hours can be challenging if not impossible. For example, in the California Childhoods Project, Thorne (2004) tells the story of Betty Jones:

a low-income solo African American mother who worked the late afternoon and evening shift as a custodian in an Oakland hospital. Her car had broken down months before and she couldn’t afford repairs, so her 11-year old son Tyrone took responsibility for bringing himself and his 6-year-old sister to school on a city bus. After school, Tyrone picked up his younger sister and they walked to a bus stop to begin an hour-long daily ride, including a transfer, from Oakland to San Leandro where their grandmother lived. The grandmother took them with her to her evening job as a custodian in an office building. After she got off work at 10 or 11 p.m., she drove the kids back to their apartment. (p. 168)

This situation is far from ideal as the children have to travel long distances and accompany their grandmother to work until late in the evening, which is
a far cry from the enrichment activities that a better-off family would be able to purchase. But if Betty did not have her mother nearby to help, the situation would be even more precarious.

Childcare is a major expense for families with children. Adjusted for inflation, average childcare costs have increased 70 percent since 1985. In 2011, the average weekly cost of care for children younger than age 5 was $179 per week or $716 per month (Laughlin, 2013). Many families calculate the costs of childcare through the lens of women’s earnings. Does she earn enough to outweigh the cost of childcare? If most of her earnings will go to childcare, many families decide that it is not worth it for her to work. Notice how this decision-making process assumes that childcare is the women’s responsibility. She either has to earn enough to pay for it or to forgo employment altogether. Childcare is not conceptualized as a family expense but as a direct cost of women’s, but not men’s, employment.

Even with these high costs, childcare workers often make poverty-level wages and receive no benefits. In 2011, childcare workers, 96 percent of whom are women, earned $383 per week on average, about half as much as women workers in general (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013b). Childcare workers, many of whom are mothers themselves, take care of other people’s children for poverty-level wages and often struggle to care for their own. About one third of childcare workers are women of color, which is well above their percentage in the overall labor market (Tuominen, 2003).

**Work–Family Conflict and Social Policy**

Given all the work that is necessary to take care of one’s family—earning wages, caring for children, and maintaining the house—it is not surprising that many parents feel overwhelmed. Meeting responsibilities at work, getting children to and from school or childcare on time, putting meals on the table, and keeping the house at least somewhat presentable are major demands on time and energy that are often in conflict.

The nature of the work–family conflict that families experience depends on their place in the class system. Suzanne Bianchi (2011) differentiates families with “too much work” from those with “too little work.” For high-income professional families, the problem is “too much work”—expectations for long hours at work and an unwavering commitment to job and career leaves limited time for home and family. For lower income families, the problem is often “too little work”—too few hours working at jobs with inadequate pay, which leaves families economically vulnerable and can negatively affect well-being for family members, especially children. In addition, middle-income families face “work [that] offers
little flexibility, requires mandatory overtime on short notice, or offers wages that can support a family only if both parents in two-parent families work full time or if single parents hold multiple jobs” (Bianchi, 2011, p. 24). Although most public conversation about work–family balance focuses on the challenges faced by the most privileged families, families across the income distribution face unique challenges that deserve public attention and remedy.

U.S. family policies are notorious for lagging behind those of other countries. Our individualistic culture tends to focus on individual rather than on collective solutions to the problem of work–family conflict. For example, employed parents, particularly women, often receive the message that their problem is simply a matter of time management. Popular magazines, books, and websites suggest that harried working mothers can find balance by following a few simple pieces of advice, like keeping a regular laundry schedule and planning the week’s meals on the weekend. As useful as advice like this might be for a specific individual, it locates the problem—and the solution—in the individual, rather than in social arrangements. It turns a public issue into a private trouble, and in so doing, it lets us off the hook for our collective responsibility to support families.

The United States is the only developed country and one of only four countries in the world, that does not offer paid maternity leave; the others are Tonga, Suriname, and Papua New Guinea (World Bank Group, 2015). Most developed nations also offer paid paternity leave and generous supports for childcare. U.S. policy is much more limited. The U.S. Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which was passed in 1993, entitles employees to 12 weeks of unpaid leave to care for an infant or for their own or a family member's medical needs. Not only is this leave unpaid, meaning that many workers cannot afford to take it, it also applies only to employers who have 50 or more employees, which leaves out a significant portion of the labor force.

Figure 8.5 shows how the United States compares with the other developed countries in the OECD (World Bank Group, 2015). It shows the days of guaranteed paid maternal, paternal, and parental (which can be taken by mothers or fathers) leave. The final column shows guaranteed unpaid leave for mothers and fathers, which in all countries except the United States is in addition to the paid leave. These data show clearly that the United States is an outlier among market-based democracies. We are the only nation not to offer paid leave, and even our unpaid leave is minimal compared with what other countries require of employers. For example, Sweden offers parents 16 months (480) days of paid leave plus another 109 days of unpaid leave (most of which are designated for mothers only). Germany offers more than three months of paid maternity leave; a year of paid parental leave that can be divided between mothers and fathers; and an additional 679 days of unpaid parental leave.
Figure 8.5 Days of Government-Mandated Maternity, Paternity, and Parental Leave in OECD Countries

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Days of Paid Maternity Leave</th>
<th>Days of Paid Paternity Leave</th>
<th>Days of Paid Parental Leave (can be taken by mothers or fathers)</th>
<th>Days of Additional Unpaid Leave (includes maternity, paternity, and parental leave)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>1095</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>224</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
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<td>435</td>
<td>590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>24</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FRANCE</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1025</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>679</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GREECE</td>
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<td>120</td>
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<tr>
<td>HUNGARY</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>590</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>90</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
<td>238</td>
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<td>ISRAEL</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>368</td>
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<tr>
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<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEW ZEALAND</td>
<td>112</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>308</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NORWAY</td>
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<td>0</td>
<td>343</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Although some private corporations in the United States offer generous leave policies, especially for their higher level employees, the government does not mandate that they do so. In addition, having policies on the books does not mean that employees feel comfortable taking them. Corporate culture tends to expect that workers prioritize their jobs over anything else in their lives (Fried, 1998). Long hours, mandatory overtime, and being available 24–7 have become standard expectations in many professions. Although corporate policy might technically allow a worker to take time off after the birth of a child or to work flex-time to facilitate taking care of family responsibilities, many workers fear that doing so will lead to wage and career stagnation.

The motherhood penalty—the fact that women with children earn significantly less than those without children—is well documented. Differing work hours, levels of human capital, and occupational choices can explain only part of this penalty. What is left is discrimination. In an experiment that asked participants to evaluate job applicants who shared all the same characteristics except for their parental status, Shelley Correll, Stephen Benard, and In Paik (2007) found

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Days of Paid Maternity Leave</th>
<th>Days of Paid Paternity Leave</th>
<th>Days of Paid Parental Leave (can be taken by mothers or fathers)</th>
<th>Days of Additional Unpaid Leave (includes maternity, paternity, and parental leave)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>POLAND</td>
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<td>14</td>
<td>182</td>
<td>898</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>SLOVENIA</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPAIN</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED KINGDOM</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNITED STATES</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

that mothers were judged to be less competent, less committed, less worthy of promotion, and less likely to be hired than women without children; if they were hired, they were offered a lower salary than other women. In contrast, fathers experience a fatherhood bonus—fathers are judged to be more committed, more promotable, and more worthy of being hired, and at a higher wage, than nonfathers.

Policies can be effective tools to support women’s employment, encourage men’s participation in family caregiving, and minimize gender inequality at work and at home. Ironically, policies that provide generous family leaves for women can reinforce, rather than reduce, gender specialization in market and nonmarket work if men are not offered similar benefits. If employers expect that women, but not men, will be on leave for an extended period after the birth of a child, they are less likely to hire or promote them. But if fathers are also encouraged to take leave, it not only increases men’s involvement with their children but it also improves women’s wages and career prospects. In Sweden, for example, where strong incentives exist for fathers to take at least two months of paid leave, men have increased the time they spend with their children and women have maintained stronger connections to the labor force.

Recent research in the United States has identified important ways that institutional constraints impact family–work attitudes and decisions. David Pedulla and Sarah Thébaud (2015), for example, found that when men and women had access to supportive policies like subsidized childcare, paid family leave, and flexible scheduling, they preferred egalitarian relationships, where financial support and caregiving were shared equally between partners. When these policies were not in place, however, they fell back into preferences for traditional breadwinner–caregiver gender arrangements or preferred to forgo children and family altogether. Even the most privileged women are not immune to these institutional constraints. Pamela Stone (2008) found that the highly educated and accomplished lawyers, physicians, and managers whom she interviewed were pushed out of their high-demand professions because they were incompatible with the responsibilities of parenting. This pattern of highly educated women choosing to be stay-at-home mothers is often called opting out, but Stone’s research emphasizes that their experiences are less about choosing family over work and more about the ways that workplaces and policies have not responded to the needs of today’s families. Certainly, these privileged women have more options than women who do not have a high-earning spouse to depend on. But the focus on individual choice obscures how social structure—institutions, policies, and gender arrangements—create the context for that choice. Many mothers—and fathers—would choose to do things differently if their structural circumstances allowed it.
Change, Continuity, and Diversity in Family Work

In taking a closer look at family work—employment, housework, and childcare—patterns of change and continuity are clear. On the side of change, we see increases in women's labor force participation, particularly for mothers of young children, and increases in the time men spend on housework and childcare. These changes have not completely undermined traditional ideas about the division of labor in families, however, as we also see gendered continuities in family labor. Women are less attached to the labor market than are men, men are still expected to be the economic providers for their families, and women are still expected to take on responsibility for housework. The lack of social policies to support families as they balance employment and care responsibilities also reinforces the ideal worker norm, a norm that has little relevance for most contemporary families. This discussion of family labor also emphasizes the importance of family diversity and inequality. In particular, we see how gender and class shape the patterns and challenges of family labor, and we see how even same-sex couples are influenced by gendered expectations about providership and care work.

Main Ideas

- The ideology of separate spheres has changed, and it continues to influence contemporary families.
- Much care work is invisible and devalued, although it is absolutely necessary for maintaining households and families.
- Unmarried women have a long history of labor force participation as do married women of color. White married women increased their labor force participation over the 20th century.
- Men have not shifted their time and energy to care work to the same extent that women have done so for employment.
- Gender inequalities in housework persist and can be explained by time availability, power-dependency, and gender theories. Housework inequalities manifest on both the micro and macro levels.
- Both mothers and fathers are spending more time with their children today than they did in the past even though more mothers are employed.
- Families face unequal access to quality childcare.
- U.S. family policy lags significantly behind other countries.