5-20-2000

Still Swimming Against the Tide: Obstacles to Gender-Neutrality in Parenting Arrangements

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Still Swimming Against the Tide:
Obstacles To Gender-Neutrality in Parenting Arrangements.

by

Helen Lafferty

FINAL PROJECT SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF
MASTER OF ARTS IN LIBERAL STUDIES

SKIDMORE COLLEGE
December 1999

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Still Swimming Against the Tide:
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Abstract.

Parenting, in our society, is a highly gendered activity, with mothers overwhelmingly taking responsibility for the care of children. This responsibility is frequently associated with negative effects for women in terms of workplace opportunity, financial security, work load, and emotional wellbeing. The identity of "mother" is a positive one, and there is nothing inherently gendered about its features. The identity is, however, conflated with certain parental behaviors, such that "mother" identity and mothers' behaviors have a common underlying meaning; being a mother by definition, therefore, involves undertaking primary responsibility for childrearing. Gendered parenting arrangements are reinforced by interactions with every aspect of society, in particular with workplace structures which devalue pregnancy, support occupational segregation by sex, and maintain a substantial gap in earnings between men and women. To effect gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements, women could individually attempt to break the link between "mother" identity and mothers' behaviors, and men could attempt to forge such a link for themselves. Structural changes such as state funding of pregnancy disability leave programs, elimination of the wage gap between men and women, and an increase in the monetary value attached to jobs associated with parenting are more likely to bring about positive change by equalizing the status of men and women in the workplace. Such change would equalize the factors influencing how men and women make decisions about parenting responsibilities, and would help to render the parental behavior patterns of men and women more similar. Similarity in parental behavior patterns of men and women could eventually lead to changes in the meanings attached to motherhood, fatherhood, and parenthood, such that parenting would be considered a more gender-neutral institution.
Chapter I.

Introduction.

In only one of many conceivable versions of Utopia, human beings would occupy a world that did not define them, protect them, or restrict them in any ways that related to their gender. In this Utopia, children would not be socialized from an early age into gender-specific roles. For adults, employment choices and opportunities for career advancement would be gender-neutral; "pink-collar" jobs, the "Mommy track", and the wage gap between males and females would disappear. Childrearing would no longer be a heavily gendered undertaking. Books with titles like "Maternal Thinking" (Ruddick, 1989) and "In a Different Voice" (Gilligan, 1982) would not be written; neither would newspaper articles with titles like "Child-Care Day Cannot Replace Mom at Home" (Charen, 1998) or "Women and Work, the Hard Choices" (Charen, 1998). Sayings like "Women can have it all, but not all at once" would be obliterated from human consciousness. In this Utopia, all human beings would have the ability to reach their fullest potential, free from gender stereotyping.

Currently, however, life in Western society is a highly gendered affair. Even a cursory look at demographic data, in particular data dealing with distribution of wealth among men and women (Fuchs, 1986), male and female work patterns (Renzetti & Curran, 1999; Rotella, 1998; Waite, Haggstrom, & Kanouse, 1985), male-female wage gaps (Renzetti & Curran, 1999; Rotella, 1998; Waite, Haggstrom, & Kanouse, 1985), occupational segregation by sex (Renzetti &
Curran, 1999; Rotella, 1998; Sorensen, 1994), and parenting and housekeeping arrangements (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1989; Walzer, 1998), must lead even the most cynical observer to conclude that life, and the opportunities and constraints encountered throughout life, differs in ways both trivial and far-reaching for males and females. There is indeed an enormous gulf between life as we now live it and the life envisioned in our theoretical gender-free Utopia.

Clearly, there are many angles from which to explore gender inequity. For this paper I wish to concentrate on the area of gender and parenting, since parental status (as a mother or a father) appears to have particularly gendered associations. Gender "issues" may not assume much importance in many people's lives as young adults. Young men and women may feel that they have achieved some form of gender equity in their own lives, that they have somehow personally escaped the constraints of the gendered arrangements so prevalent in our culture. However, from the moment that women become mothers, as most women do (Gottschalk, 1996), their lives begin to diverge in core ways from the lives of men, including the men that were instrumental in producing these very children. Parenthood appears to send men and women down markedly different life pathways, pathways towards roles that many of us thought we had left far behind, the gendered roles of "mothers" and "fathers" (see Belsky & Kelly, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, 1988; cited in Walzer, 1998).

Becoming a mother or a father is not an uncomplicated occurrence. There are major changes, good and bad, associated with this particular life event. Some of the less desirable changes (changes on which I will expand below) that currently accompany becoming a mother (and not a father) include changes in work patterns and wages that are often detrimental to women's careers and financial stability (Issacharoff & Rosenblum, 1994; Rotella, 1998; Waite, Haggstrom, &
Kanouse, 1985; Waldfogel, 1997); high levels of lone parenting, with its attendant financial and personal difficulties (Ahlburg & DeVita, 1992; Lugaila, 1998); increased risk of living in poverty (Ahlburg & DeVita, 1992; Lugaila, 1998); high levels of responsibility for childcare and housework (Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1989; McMahon, 1995; Walzer, 1998); and increased risk of marital dissatisfaction and psychological dysfunction (Belsky & Kelly, 1994; and Cowan & Cowan, 1988; cited in Walzer, 1998; also Zelkowitz, 1982). So it is clear that parenthood means very different things for mothers and fathers. Parenthood has extremely gendered associations, associations that are not always positive, associations that are inequitable as well as simply gendered. Parenthood, indeed, appears to sustain and reinforce gender inequality.

In this paper (which comprises an analysis and synthesis of existing literature) I explore gender inequality in parenting from psychological, sociological, and political perspectives. I attempt to come to an understanding of the features of our society that contribute to the "gendering" of parenthood. I also attempt to identify particular facets of society that, if changed, would possibly render parenting a more gender-neutral and gender-equitable experience. I begin with an examination of the identity of mother from a psychological perspective, in an attempt to discover whether there is something unique about the identity of mother that could explain the gendered nature of parenting. I then look at some of the particular behaviors undertaken almost exclusively by mothers, and examine whether and how these behaviors are linked to the identity of mother. I then examine whether and in what ways gendered parenting arrangements are sustained through interactions with other people and with society as a whole. I address whether and how workplace structures function to maintain gendered parental arrangements. And finally I address possible avenues for positive change.
I conclude that the identity of parent as experienced by mothers is an overwhelmingly positive one, involving feelings of love, care, and connectedness. There is nothing immutably sex-linked, i.e. particularly female, about any aspect of this identity. Furthermore, there is nothing essentially sex-linked, nothing immutably female (once, of course, the baby has been delivered, and excluding the obviously sex-linked activity of breastfeeding) about any aspect of parental behavior, about loving, caring, cleaning, cooking, supporting, or teaching. A culturally created and sustained link has, however, been forged between parental behaviors and the identity of mother (and not father) such that the identity of mother and the behaviors engaged in by mothers have a common underlying meaning. The culturally created meaning of motherhood, incorporating both identity and behavior, is encouraged, lauded, validated, and sustained through the interactions of mothers with every aspect of our society, including other family members, the media, the academic community, and the feminist community. It serves to render certain behaviors the almost exclusive responsibility of mothers - to give parental behaviors a gender - and therefore to maintain parenting arrangements that are both gendered and inequitable.

Certain features of the workplace as currently constructed function in particular to sustain gendered parenting arrangements. The lack of comprehensive state policies addressing pregnancy in the workplace means that women are devalued and financially burdened by the simple fact of their physical ability to produce children. Furthermore, the segregation of the workforce by sex (with women occupying the lower rungs of the work ladder) both sustains the notion that certain parenting-related tasks such as cleaning, teaching, and supporting are women's domain and thus mothers' domain, and also ensures that women's wages remain lower than men's. Such workplace inequities influence how men and women make decisions about parenting responsibilities, making it easier
for women to step back from primary work commitment and take on primary family responsibility, and thereby sustaining gendered and inequitable parenting arrangements.

Changing the situation in favor of more gender-neutral parenting arrangements whereby an adult's role in a family could be determined, not by his or her gender, but rather by his or her desires and capabilities, is clearly (based on the multifactorial nature of the problem) a daunting prospect. Work on the part of individual women to change an already positive identity is not likely either to occur or to effect real change. Rather, it is the link between the "mother" identity and the behaviors of parenting that needs to be changed, the meanings of motherhood and of fatherhood that need to be made more similar.

Changes in things as ephemeral as cultural attitudes and meanings are, however, difficult to maintain in sight as clear, tangible goals. Working towards equalizing the concrete circumstances of men and women, the circumstances within which they make parenting decisions, seems a more tangible goal toward which to strive. We should work towards ensuring that women are no longer financially burdened, no longer devalued in the workplace, because of their ability to carry and bear children. We should ensure that the jobs performed by women in the workplace are valued financially to the same extent as the jobs performed by men. Changes in these concrete workplace conditions would equalize the environment within which men and women make parenting decisions, making men more likely to take on parenting responsibilities. Such changes may simultaneously change commitments, attitudes, and the cultural meanings attached to being a parent, and render parenting a more gender-equitable institution.

The layout of the paper is as follows. In Chapter II, I suggest that the identity of mother involves characteristics that are overwhelmingly positive and
not exclusive to one sex. Furthermore, the identity of mother (like all identities), far from being a fixed, immutable entity, is rather fluid and contextual, and relates to the society within which it is formed and enacted. There appears to be nothing unique to the identity of mother to set it apart from other identities. In chapter III, I analyze literature which examines the processes involved in linking the identity of mother to the behaviors undertaken by mothers. The identity of "mother" and the behaviors undertaken by mothers have come in our society to have common underlying meanings, such that the identity of mother can only exist in concert with certain parental behavior patterns, patterns that are therefore gendered and inequitable. In chapter IV, I review existing literature which shows how the link between the identity of mother and the behaviors undertaken by mothers is created and sustained through interaction with others, and with society as a whole; how society sustains gendered parenting arrangements.

In Chapter V, I review certain concrete, objective structural factors which apply in the workplace, in particular factors relating to pregnancy, occupational segregation by sex, and wage gaps between men and women. These factors serve to marginalize women in general, and mothers in particular, in the workplace, further facilitating the process whereby mothers (and not fathers) take on primary responsibility for childrearing, and whereby gendered parenting arrangements are sustained. In Chapter VI, I address avenues for change. I suggest that, while change in the cultural meaning of motherhood may be a worthy goal in theory, it can only be effected by bringing about change in the concrete conditions applying to men and women in the workplace. Equalizing the status of men and women in the workplace will level the playing field on which men and women make decisions about parenting responsibilities, and will work towards making the parental behavior patterns of men and women more similar.
Structural workplace changes, therefore, by encouraging change in the way men and women make parenting decisions, may ultimately change the cultural meanings attached to motherhood, and may render parenting a more gender-equitable and gender-neutral institution.
Chapter II.

Motherhood and Identity.

In this chapter, I review literature which addresses the individual, psychological processes involved in becoming a mother to assess whether there is something specific to the identity of "mother" that can help explain the gendered nature of parenting arrangements in our society. Much of the psychological research on identity formation and maintenance concentrates on cognitive and social processes occurring during childhood (for reviews of processes involved particularly in acquisition of gender identity see Beall & Sternberg, 1993; Golombok & Fivush, 1994). In some (particularly older) psychological literature, identities are considered to have fixed, immutable characteristics (McCrae & Costa, 1984; Piaget, 1926; cited in Anderson & Hayes, 1996). Recent research has, however, placed more emphasis on the fluid nature of identities, on identity formation and reformation throughout the life-cycle (Anderson & Hayes, 1996; Beall & Sternberg, 1993), on the existence of multiple hierarchically organized identities (Rosenberg & Gara, 1985), and on differentiations and interactions between personal and social identities (Reid and Deaux, 1996).

The literature I review on identity processes suggests that identity in general - and the specific identity of "mother", therefore - far from being immutable and fixed, is rather a fluid, changeable, and highly context-dependent entity. While the identity of "mother" is an important and positive one, there is nothing immutably sex-linked about any aspect of this identity, since the feelings
comprising it (overwhelmingly positive, loving, caring, connected feelings) are feelings also experienced by men in many contexts. There is nothing, therefore, about the individual psychological processes involved in becoming a parent that explains why parenting is such a gendered institution.

The Psychology of Identity.

Before addressing the specific identity of "mother", it helps to lay the groundwork by reviewing some features of identity in general. Rosenberg and Gara (1985) define personal identity (in cognitive terms) as "an amalgam of features - personal characteristics, feelings, values, intentions, and images - experienced by the individual" (p. 90). Multiple identities can co-exist within each individual, and various models have been proposed to explain the organization of "identity structures". In one such model, identities are organized hierarchically, with separate hierarchies existing for different domains (such as work and family domains). In an alternative "building-block" model (the model preferred by the authors) certain features of identity are felt to be organized into discrete classes, the basic "self-categories" of identity structure; an identity, then, is a combination of one or more basic categories.

Social identity theory is concerned more with those aspects of identity that derive from membership in groups - groups which stand in status and power relations to one another (for a review of the major features of social identity theory see Skevington & Baker, 1989, pp. 1-14). In formulating a theory of social identity, Tajfel postulated that identity formation rested on the dual processes of social comparison (self-evaluation by comparison with similar others) and intergroup comparison (comparison with members of another group) (Tajfel, 1978; cited in Skevington & Baker, 1989). The primary motivation behind intergroup
comparison is the need for a positive social identity, an identity which will establish "self" and "ingroup" as positively distinct on the relative dimensions of comparison (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; cited in Skevington & Baker, 1989). The degree to which a positive identity can be achieved, however, depends on the relative power and status of the groups being compared.

Deaux (1993) feels that the distinction frequently made between personal and social identities is misleading. Rather than being distinct, both identities are fundamentally interrelated. She conceptualizes social identities as "those roles or membership categories that a person claims as representative" (such as Hispanic, Catholic, medical patient), whereas personal identities (sometimes referred to as "attributes") refer to "those traits and behaviors that the person finds self-descriptive" (such as busy, happy, angry). Clearly, each identity is necessary to give the other meaning (p. 6).

Burke and Reitzes (1981) add another dimension to the conceptualization of identities, in the tradition of symbolic interaction theorists such as McCall and Simmons (1978). Burke and Reitzes consider identities to be "meanings one attributes to oneself in a role". Identities, seen from this perspective, are both self-meanings (formed in particular situations, related to counter-roles, and organized hierarchically to produce the self), and social products (involving naming, interaction with others, confirmation and validation); and they are symbolic and reflexive in character (integrating self-as-subject with self-as-object). The authors emphasize that it is through interaction with others, and, more specifically, through the responses of others to one's own actions, that the meanings of the self come to be known and understood by the individual.

Research into the personal, social, and symbolic nature of identity has left many questions unanswered, and Deaux (1993) has identified some key areas that need further work in the study of identity. Firstly, the structure of the identity
hierarchy of an individual is crucial to determining the importance of any particular identity and its enactment. Simply knowing what identities a person claims, Deaux notes, is not enough. Information about the position of the identity within the overall identity structure may be "an important predictor of affective state, behavioral choice, and response to interventions" (p. 8). Secondly, it is important to elucidate clearly the function served by the identities a person claims. Identities can serve to enhance self-esteem, to provide social support and self-insight, and to allow for comparison with others. They can provide cognitive consistency and self-efficacy. They can also fulfill needs for wealth, power and control. Thirdly, the importance of context in modifying patterns of identity needs to be addressed - how individual factors play out in a macrostructural framework, and what factors mediate between these levels of analysis. Fourthly, a longitudinal perspective is important to allow us gain insight into the processes involved in identity acquisition, modification, and loss over time, and the response of identity to threat.

Identities, then, far from being fixed and immutable, appear to be fluid and changeable entities. They are created and maintained only in relation to other personal and social identities; they fulfill various functions; they are sustained in the context of the power and the status of the groups involved; and they have symbolic meaning, both to the individual and to society. The identity of "mother" should presumably also exhibit these characteristics of functionality, mutability and context-dependence. So when we examine the identity of "mother", an identity clearly associated with the highly gendered parenting arrangements currently prevailing in our society, we need to think about how important the identity of "mother" is, what functions it serves, how it is modified by context - all with the purpose of seeing if the particular identity process can help explain the gendered
nature of parental arrangements. In the next section, I examine current literature on the identity of "mother".

**The Identity of "Mother".**

There is relatively little psychological literature dealing with motherhood from the perspectives of either personal or social identity theory. Ethier (1995), using hierarchical class analysis, examined the identity acquisition of women during the transition to motherhood. She interviewed fifty-one women (mainly well-educated and white) during the early stages of their first pregnancies, again during the late stages of their pregnancies, and finally at three months after delivery.

Over the course of the study, the women were asked to list all the identities they claimed. At three months following delivery of the baby, all women (obviously!) claimed the identity of mother. They continued to claim other family-oriented identities such as sister, daughter, and wife. Other previously claimed identities, however, appeared to have lessened in importance, or indeed been ousted altogether, by the acquisition of the "mother" identity. Group identities such as religious and political affiliation, as well as personal identity characteristics, were claimed far less frequently by the women once they became mothers. Significantly, "work" identities were claimed far less frequently following childbirth (Table 15, p. 112).

Ethier's study demonstrates that, from a personal identity hierarchy point of view, motherhood is an extremely important identity. Indeed, it appears that it may replace many other identities (including identities that may have previously been of considerable importance), or at least cause them to be temporarily overshadowed. (The study does not address what happened to the identities
claimed by these women over time. It is quite possible that the position of the maternal identity in the overall identity structure changed, and that other identities regained their importance. Furthermore, it does not address the effect of context or structural factors, such as income, marital status, or availability of family or financial support, on maternal identity).

Working more within the parameters of social identity theory, Baker (1989) examined the identity of new mothers, using a repertory grid technique (described in detail in the study). Baker interviewed sixty-three first-time mothers, first during their pregnancies and again during the early months of motherhood. In compiling the grid, Baker began by making the assumption that "since becoming a mother for the first time involves the transition from the role of working, then social identity will rest on identification with the ingroup 'mothers' as distinct from the outgroup 'working women'". She therefore chose the elements "a good mother" and "a career-oriented woman" to represent prototypical ingroup and outgroup members.

There was considerable consensus as to the social categorizations underlying group membership. "Self" and "ideal self" were most closely identified with "a good mother". Outgroup elements included "a career-oriented woman" and "not a good mother". Constructs (comparison terms) used for intergroup comparison further confirmed the perceived distinctiveness between "mother" and "working woman" groups. "Self", "ideal self", and "good mother" were all described using positive "maternal" constructs such as "patient", "caring", "tender", and "unselfish". In contrast, "a career-oriented woman" was described using constructs such as "not interested in children", "quick-tempered", and "selfish".

Motherhood, then, certainly appears to have been perceived positively by all of the mothers in Baker's study. There are, however, a number of problems with the study. The technique used provides only limited possibilities for
intergroup comparison, with the use of the outgroup "working women" constituting a major "prescriptive" flaw in the study. Such a choice of outgroups serves to validate (and even to falsely create) a dichotomy between working women and mothers, a dichotomy which is not valid, with large numbers of women currently occupying both categories (Rotella, 1998). (It may, however, be a somewhat more relevant "outgroup" in the early months of motherhood. In Britain, where the study was performed, paid maternity leave is the norm, as it is in most developed countries (Harvard Women's Law Journal, 1988). Most mothers, therefore, are not working women in the early months of motherhood). In addition (as with the Ethier personal identity study), interviewing women in the early stages of motherhood provides only a limited look at the longterm processes involved in identity acquisition and maintenance. Notwithstanding these problems, however, Baker's study provides a glimpse of the importance of the social identity of "mother".

In contrast to these studies, McMahon (1995) uses an open-ended interview technique to provide detailed analysis, from a symbolic interactionist perspective, of the components of maternal identity. Such a technique allows for a detailed and more expressive exposition of maternal identity; in addition, the fifty-nine women she interviewed were mothers of pre-school children (with longer and presumably more settled experiences of motherhood than the new mothers interviewed above) and were employed full-time, negating Baker's assumption that work and motherhood are mutually exclusive.

The most striking feature to emerge from McMahon's interviews was the depth and intensity of the personal change the women felt they had undergone on becoming mothers. All the women felt that, by becoming mothers, they had become new persons - in a profound sense rather than in the sense of learning a new role. Most of the women were surprised by the feelings they experienced,
feelings of falling in love and of being loved. Feelings of love, attachment, and connectedness were, in fact, central to the women's descriptions of motherhood, and central to their new experiences and conceptions of self. When describing the personal transformation associated with motherhood, the women used imagery describing acceptance of limitations, lack of choice, self-denial, and moral testing; sacrifice or death of earlier selves and emergence of new selves through moral reform; redemption; increased self-awareness and self-worth, and transformation in personal qualities; and changed relationships to humanity and to the universe (Chs. 5, 6).

McMahon notes that the feelings the women in her study associated with motherhood - love, caring, connectedness - are feelings that, in our society at least, are considered characteristically feminine. However, she suggests that the process of becoming a mother did not simply allow women to express a feminine or female identity, but rather allowed them to actually accomplish an adult female identity. Having children allowed the women to claim the character of mother, rather than simply express the role; becoming a mother allowed the women to achieve, not express, a feminine, maternal identity as a loving, caring person.

To understand more fully the nature of connectedness, and the emergence of a new self and a new identity, McMahon questioned the women about their views of childless women (a more realistic "outgroup" than Baker's working women). The potential absence of children was perceived as a loss, a failure, a violation of the integrity of the self, a disruption of the experience of self. Many of the women indicated that the absence of children would leave them feeling empty, depressed, and sad; they would feel a sense of failure, feel like incomplete women. In other words, motherhood was crucial to enable a highly valued identity to be found and expressed by these women.
In a literature review and study of childless women, Woollett (1991) confirms the tremendous importance of the mother identity to women, noting that the values of children to parents include the opportunity to form primary group ties and to give and receive affection and love; expansion of the self; validation of adult status and identity; and contribution to personal development. Having children, Woollett notes, allows women to become both mothers and adults (as noted by McMahon); it demonstrates their "physical and psychological adequacy and...gives them identifiable social functions" (p. 53); and it allows them to share a common (social) identity. Furthermore, in a profoundly pronatalist culture such as ours, motherhood allows women a release from a potentially negative identity, that of childless woman.

It is clear from the studies addressed above that the identity of "mother" is an important one; that it is highly placed in the overall identity hierarchy; that it is overwhelmingly a positive identity; that it serves to enhance self-esteem and to allow mothers access to group membership; and that its position in the identity hierarchy may change over time. None of these features, however, explains why parenting is such a gendered institution in our society. There is nothing particular, nothing outstanding, nothing immutable or essentially sex-linked about any aspect of the identity of "mother". Indeed, men are clearly perfectly capable of feeling and expressing all the components of parental identity felt and expressed by these women, and indeed frequently do feel and express them with respect to their children (see, for example, Hewlett, 1987; Lamb, 1997; Radin, 1994; Rosaldo, 1974; Yogman, 1990).

It appears, therefore, that there is indeed nothing particular about the identity of "mother" that serves to render it apart from the fluid context-dependent nature of identities in general. There is nothing specifically female about the identity of "mother". Such an analysis does not, then, help us
understand why parenting is such a gendered experience, why the lives of mothers are so different from those of fathers. It does, however, point to the necessity of concentrating on the context within which the identity of mother is enacted, of examining how the "mother" identity becomes inextricably linked to the behaviors currently undertaken specifically by mothers. And it is to the link between identity and behavior that I turn in the next chapter.
Chapter III.

"Mother" Identity and Mothers' Behaviors: Common Underlying Meanings.

If examining the identity of "mother" does not help explain gendered parenting arrangements, it therefore becomes important to examine the enactment of the identity of "mother". It is necessary to address what the behaviors are that are undertaken by women when they become parents, how these behaviors relate to the identity of "mother", and how they come to be so heavily gendered. In this chapter, I suggest that the identity of "mother" has, in our society, become inextricably linked to the behaviors undertaken by mothers; that a gender-neutral loving parental identity has been transformed in its enactment into a pattern of gendered and inequitable parental behaviors. A link between "mother" identity and mothers' behaviors occurs because, in our society, the identity and the behaviors have common underlying meanings; being a mother and behaving in certain ways essentially mean the same thing.

Identity and Behavior.

Before specifically addressing the link between identity and behavior in mothers, it is again helpful to lay some groundwork by examining literature dealing with identity/behavior links in general. Rosenberg and Gara (1985), when addressing the functional relations between identities and their enactments (their
associated behaviors), note that an identity serves to select and filter specific situations for its enactment; identity determines behavior in a given situation. How an identity is enacted depends on the position it occupies in the hierarchy, and how it is contrasted with other identities. In certain situations, selection of identity enactments may not necessarily require conscious deliberation, but may be more related to a "repertoire of habits" (p. 92); the authors cite the example of the traditional business executive who unconsciously dresses in a business suit and adopts a certain posture at work. On the other hand, identities may be accessed "from the bottom up"; the authors consider how a person, after dressing up in dancing clothes, begins to access the identity of "night person" (p. 93).

From a social identity perspective, it is the need for positive social identity, with its attendant comparison between groups of differing power and status, that affects behavioral patterns (Skevington & Baker, 1989). Members of low-status groups attempt to change their position to attain positive distinctiveness, whereas members of high-status groups act to maintain superiority. Members of low-status groups may attempt to move into high status groups if the boundaries are permeable (referred to as social mobility). If group boundaries are perceived to be impermeable, other strategies may be employed to create a more positive identity for the group - strategies encompassed by the term social change. The term social change incorporates three types of activity. The first type is termed assimilation, whereby low-status group members adopt the positive features of the high-status group (this strategy requiring cooperation between groups). The second type of activity is termed social creativity, whereby the low-status group seeks to create a new and positive image of itself - a strategy which may involve reinterpretation of negative characteristics, thereby reducing the need for comparison with the high-status group. And the third type of activity is termed
social competition, when the subordinate group challenges the basis of the status hierarchy and seeks to change the relative power and status of groups.

Reid and Deaux (1996), elaborating on their model integrating personal and social identities, suggest that personal attributes and behaviors and social identities are inextricably linked. "In claiming a social identity", the authors note, "people use attributes, traits, and behaviors to say what the category is and what it means to be a member of the category" (p. 1089, my italics). In a study of student identities designed to test the links between identities and behaviors, the authors found that certain behaviors did indeed cluster around certain social identities. The process whereby social identities and attributes come to be linked, however, is not clear. The authors suggest that further research is needed to examine the fluidity or rigidity of identity-attribute linkages, and to sort out the relative weight of individual experience versus cultural representations in defining social identity and personal behavior.

Burke and Reitzes (1981), in examining the link between identity and behavior, note that the self maintains control over identity by altering performance or behavior until there is some degree of conformity or congruence between one's internalized identity standard and the identity implied by one's actions. The relationship between identity and behavior is therefore reciprocal, in that while the sense of self dictates patterns of behavior, the sense of self is also an outcome of behavior choices or patterns. People, then, are motivated to behave in ways that "reinforce, support, and confirm their identities" (p. 84); and this two-way process of mutual verification - of identity by behavior, and of behavior by identity - occurs because identities and behaviors have common underlying meanings. Appropriate behaviors, then, have meanings that "correspond to, reinforce, and display the identity meanings of the individual". And identity can be
likened to a compass, "helping to steer a course of interaction in a sea of social meaning" (p. 91).

Identity enactment, or behavior, then, is modified by the position of the identity in the overall identity structure of the individual, by its relation to other identities, and by the status and power of the social identity group. More importantly, perhaps, identity enactment appears to be influenced by the *symbolic meaning*, both personal and social/cultural, ascribed to both the identity and the behavior - by the common meanings underlying both identity and behavior. Identity and behavior are, according to this formulation, inextricably linked.

When examining how the identity of mother, then, is played out in our society - how an essentially gender-neutral positive identity translates into a set of gendered and not always advantageous behaviors - it is useful to apply the general research outlined above to the question at hand, the question as to why mothers behave differently than fathers. We need to consider the possibility that "mother" identity and mothers' behaviors have come to have the same meanings - that, in other words, one cannot claim the identity of "mother" and not engage in particular sets of behaviors. I address this possibility by outlining certain behaviors that are undertaken almost exclusively by mothers, and by examining the links between these behaviors and the identity of "mother".

**Behaviors Associated with Mothers.**

In this section, I outline some particular behaviors that are undertaken almost exclusively by mothers in our society. I address three particular behaviors - workplace behaviors, custodial behaviors, and household behaviors. Although it has been noted that today the typical woman, like the typical man, is in the paid
labor force (Renzetti & Curran, 1999), there are in fact important differences in the work behaviors of men and women, many of which center around the onset of parenthood. Despite the increased labor force participation of women, their participation is still not equal to that of men. Women's labor force participation rate was fifty-nine percent in 1995, compared to a male rate of seventy-five percent (Rotella, 1998). And far more women - thirty-four percent, as opposed to eighteen percent of men - work part-time and part-year (Rotella, 1998).

Women are also dramatically more likely than men to modify their employment behavior on becoming parents. Waite, Haggstrom, and Kanouse (1985), using data collected from a large sample of young adults to compare the employment activities of parents and non-parents, found the percentage of mothers who were employed two years after the birth of a first child to be approximately 45% - a drop from 75% in the twelve months before the birth. In the absence of children, the expected employment rate at the same time point would have been about 80%. These changes stand in stark contrast to the virtually complete lack of employment changes noted for new fathers. Another large study of work and family commitment among dual-earner couples (Bielby & Bielby, 1989) found that married women gave precedence to family when balancing work and family commitments, while men had the discretion to build identification with either role without having to trade one off against the other.

The discontinuous labor force participation of women who are parents also contributes to the divergence in male and female wage patterns seen after marriage and parenthood (reviewed in Issacharoff & Rosenblum, 1994). So it is clear that many women, and virtually no men, modify their employment patterns on becoming parents.

Regarding the custodial activities and responsibilities of parents, again it is abundantly clear that mothers engage in different custodial behaviors than
fathers. In 1991 women were five times more likely than men to be raising children alone (Ahlburg & DeVita, 1992). And out of 19,777 children under the age of eighteen living with only one parent in March 1998, 16,634 of these were living with the mother, while only 3,143 lived with the father (Lugaila, 1998). (This pattern of parenting is, of course, also associated with a high degree of poverty among female householders - see, for example, Eller, 1996, and Rotella, 1998).

When we address parenting behaviors occurring within the home - basically the performance of childcare and household labor - yet again it is clear that mothers, as a group, engage in a different set of behaviors than fathers. Many studies dealing with the division of childcare responsibilities and household tasks have demonstrated that these tasks are primarily undertaken by women, regardless of their employment status (see, for example, Hays, 1996; Hochschild, 1989; Pleck, 1997; Walzer, 1998). Hays (1996) interviewed thirty-eight mothers (of two- to four-year-old children) of varying work status and financial background. Mothers took responsibility for feeding and cleaning up after children in four-fifths of the families in her sample; they took primary responsibility for every childrearing duty in over half the families. In none of the households did fathers take primary responsibility for all childrearing tasks. Indeed, men rarely took primary responsibility for any childrearing tasks (p. 99).

Walzer (1998), in another study addressing parental behavior and its associated meanings, interviewed twenty-five couples (parents of one-year-old first children) with a diversity of work experiences and financial status. She found in behavior patterns (as well as in consciousness or identity) what she calls "one basic dichotomy: mothers and fathers" (p. 16). Two-thirds of the couples in her study reported having an unequal division of household labor, with the mothers performing the greater amount. Mothers were more frequently in charge of daycare arrangements, and worked harder at childcare and chores at home even when
fathers were also at home. A central aspect of the mother role was the sense of it being very difficult to perform adequately. The sense that the women were running at full capacity, and "full capacity not being enough" (p. 31), pervaded many of the mothers' accounts. Mothers, even when they did not perform all household tasks, had to delegate, to actively transfer the responsibility to the fathers, who were perceived as the "secondary line of defense". Fathers were willing to share the work involved in childcare and housework, but this "sharing" of tasks was achieved only when mothers asked fathers to "share". Indeed, Walzer notes that essentially all the mothers in her study interpreted the father's involvement as "help" - the default position being that mothers were on call unless they specifically asked for assistance (pp. 41-2).

In addition to management of the division of household labor, Walzer addresses the other "invisible" mental work associated with parenting - the work of worrying, and the work of processing information about childrearing (Ch. 2). All the mothers worried about their children, regardless of their work status. Processing information relevant to childcare (i.e. reading childcare manuals) was done to a large extent by the women, with twenty-three of twenty-five women as opposed to only five of twenty-five men locating and reading some type of advice manuals (see also Deutsch, Brooks-Gunn, Fleming, Ruble, & Stangor, 1988).

In McMahon's study, mothers did half or more of the household work in approximately four-fifths of the families (Ch. 8). In a study of the work of feeding families by DeVault (1991), in only three out of thirty families were men involved at all in any of the work involved in feeding their families. And in a recent review of paternal involvement in childrearing, Pleck (1997) notes that, across studies from the 1980's and 1990's, fathers' involvement with children was two-fifths that of mothers'. He cites a number of studies which show that fathers' average share of responsibility is substantially lower than mothers'. Indeed, he notes that
"research has yet to identify any childcare task for which fathers have primary responsibility" (pp. 71-73).

It is abundantly clear, therefore, that women take primary responsibility for essentially all of the work—mental and physical—involved in raising their children, and indeed personally undertake much of that work themselves. Women rearrange their work lives in response to their status as parents; in situations where only one parent is willing or able to take care of children, that parent is virtually always female; and even when both parents are present, women shoulder most of the responsibility for childcare and household tasks in the home. Women, therefore, undertake sets of parental behaviors that are both highly gendered and highly inequitable.

Having examined the literature which demonstrates that mothers do indeed behave differently than fathers, in the next section I suggest that, as formulated in a general sense by Reid and Deaux (1996) and Burke and Reitzes (1981), the behaviors undertaken by mothers are linked to the identity of "mother" through a common underlying meaning, such that the identity of "mother" cannot currently exist apart from the behaviors undertaken by mothers. The behaviors declare, both to the individual and to society, what it means to be a mother; they give meaning to the identity.

**Linking the Identity and Behavior of Mothers.**

McMahon (1995) has examined the link between identity and behavior in the mothers she interviewed. The circumstances shared by all the women in her study (as noted above) included responsibility for the children's well-being, responsibility for the practical work involved in caring for the children, and responsibility for the juggling of family and paid work. McMahon notes that, when
asked about their everyday lives as mothers, the women in her study found the work of caring to be, at an immediate level, far from enjoyable. The practical demands of motherhood and the lack of personal time available were seen as the major disadvantages of motherhood. In particular, the lack of "help" from a partner seemed to increase the frustration involved in performing the routine tasks associated with childcare and household maintenance.

When talking about the day-to-day realities of parenting, however, the women frequently turned to their feelings for interpretations, their feelings (feelings comprising the identity "mother") apparently providing the context within which they interpreted their parental behavior. The women, McMahon notes, tended to conflate caring about their children with caring for their children, and had difficulty separating the work of caring from the feelings of care. In other words, the identity (mother) and the behavior (the work of worrying about and practically caring for children) appeared to be inextricably linked. The conflation of "caring for" and "caring about" - the link between identity and behavior - resulted in feelings of guilt or inadequacy for many of the women when they could not live up to the standards they had internalized (feelings, as noted, also expressed by the women in Walzer's study). On a more positive note, however, the association between the practical work involved in raising children and the identity of "mother" appeared to give the unenjoyable work a sense of purpose for the women when looked at from a more global perspective. The work involved for mothers in parenting - the behavior associated with the maternal identity - was seen as practically unenjoyable, but ultimately rewarding. The behaviors, therefore, were associated meaningfully with the identity "mother", and thus carried symbolic significance for the women (Ch. 7).

DeVault (1991) also addresses the link between identity and behavior in mothers, concentrating specifically on the work involved in feeding families. For
the mothers in her sample, all the work involved in feeding the family (planning, shopping, preparing food, taking into account differing tastes of various family members, working meals into fluid and hectic family schedules) was symbolically linked to the identity of mother. For the women, DeVault notes, there was a sense that "certain activities are associated with the very fundamental cultural categories......'woman'/ 'wife'/ 'mother'" (p. 148), that the work of caring for a family is somehow an expression of love and personality (or identity) (p. 142). The behaviors undertaken by the mothers, in other words, were culturally and symbolically linked to the identity of "mother". Catering to a family, DeVault notes, "is built into a cultural definition of 'woman' that includes caring activity and the work of feeding" (p. 161). And the idea of a mother who does not cater to her family, or (more specifically) the idea of a man catering to his wife and family, is profoundly "dissonant with prevailing cultural meanings" (p. 162). The symbolic meaning of the identity of "mother", therefore, automatically links it to the behaviors of caring, with all the associated practical work involved.

Walzer (1998) also addresses the link between the identity of mother and the behaviors engaged in by mothers. For the women she interviewed, the behaviors undertaken were heavily linked to the identity of "mother". For example, worrying was such an expected part of mothering, such a central part of being a mother, that "the absence of it might challenge one's definition of a good mother" (p. 33). And among the women interviewed by Hays, the author was struck by the fact that, given the wide diversity in the social circumstances and backgrounds of the women, the consistency in their understandings of "mothering" (incorporating, of course, both identity and behavior) was so marked (p. 98). Whatever the women's life circumstances, whether they were working "outside the home", whether they employed nannies or put their children in daycare, all their behaviors were interpreted in relation to their primary family obligations, all
their actions justified by linking them somehow to an appropriate "mother" identity. Thus, stay-at-home mothers felt that what they were doing - forsaking career, salary etc. - was best for the children, was an appropriate behavior for the maternal identity. Similarly, "working" mothers coped with their ambivalence about leaving their children with other people to care for them by reasoning that, ultimately, the mother's participation in the labor force was good for the children - again, that it was appropriate maternal behavior. All the mothers, though, made it clear that, whatever behaviors they were undertaking, they were undertaking them with the children's best interests at heart, with a caring, responsible, maternal identity firmly in the forefront of their minds (Ch. 6). All behaviors were "linked" for the mothers to the maternal identity.

It appears clear, then, that specific behavior patterns engaged in by women - work patterns, custody patterns, and patterns of responsibility, work, and worry in the home - are linked closely to the identity of "mother". Indeed, these behaviors appear to be linked to the identity of "mother" so closely that the identity and the behaviors are virtually indistinguishable. It is difficult to apply the general psychological research on identity/behavior links (outlined above) specifically to the behaviors undertaken by mothers, since, to my knowledge, empirical research has not been undertaken in this specific area. For example, we cannot say, from the perspective of personal identity enactment (Rosenberg and Gara, 1985), whether or not the behaviors are largely unconscious, and related to a "repertoire of habits". We cannot say, from the social identity standpoint (Skevington & Baker, 1989), how the behavior of mothers relates to their status as a group. Although it could be postulated that mothers engage in "social creativity" (see above) - creating a positive group image in the face of low social status - it is not clear that mothers perceive themselves as being of low social
status. Indeed, in Baker's study (1989), mothers attached little or no importance to relative status as a means of evaluating their identity.

What is clear, however, is that the behavior of mothers and the identity of "mother" are inextricably linked; that, as noted in a general context by Reid and Deaux (1996) and Burke and Reitzes (1981), the behaviors undertaken by mothers state what it means to be a member of the social group "mother"; that the behaviors give concrete meaning (for both the individual and others) to the category and the identity "mother". "Mother" identity and mothers' behaviors are mutually reinforcing, because they, in fact, have common underlying meanings; the behaviors display (to the individual and to society) the meaning of the identity.

If the identity of "mother" and the behavior of mothers have common underlying meanings, an important issue thus becomes, when attempting to explain gendered parenting arrangements, where and how common meanings are generated. From where do mothers receive the message that being a mother means what it currently means, that the "mother" identity must be inextricably linked to the behaviors outlined above? What is the larger social context, the macrostructural framework within which the identity of "mother" is linked to specific behaviors? Where do the "culturally shared social representations" (Reid and Deaux, 1996), the "prevailing cultural meanings" (DeVault, 1991) of maternal identity and behavior, come from? In the next chapter I address the larger interactional framework, the cultural meanings, which appear to create and sustain the links outlined above between identity and behavior in mothers, and thus to maintain gendered parenting arrangements.
Chapter IV.

Mothers in Interaction: Navigating the Sea of Social Meaning.

In this chapter, I suggest that the link between the positive identity of "mother" and its associated gendered behavior patterns is created and sustained through interaction with others, with society as a whole; is sustained because the category of "mother" has a social, interactional, cultural meaning. Indeed, the current construction of motherhood is so unified and so ubiquitous that it would seem almost impossible to be a mother and not absorb this meaning, impossible to be a mother and not act like a mother. I begin the chapter by addressing research examining the interactional nature of identity and behavior in general, and of gendered identity and behavior in particular. I then show how the interactions mothers engage in on a daily basis create and sustain prevailing gendered meanings of motherhood; sustain the link between mothers and primary responsibility for childrearing; and sustain, therefore, gendered parenting arrangements.

Gender in Interaction.

A number of authors have examined the interactional, contextual aspects of identity and behavior in general. Burke (1991), in addressing the contextual factors involved in linking identity and behavior, notes that a feedback loop is
established whenever an identity is activated. The loop has four components: an identity standard (the set of self-meanings); an input from the environment or social situation (i.e. responses to the actor's behavior); a process that compares the input with the standard (a comparator); and an output - meaningful behavior - that occurs in response to the comparison. The goal of the feedback loop (which, Burke notes, has been empirically tested and validated) is to maintain congruence between input from the environment and the internal identity standard. People, then, continually modify their own behavior, in order to change the behavioral responses of others, so that their internalized identity standards are not challenged. Identities, behaviors, and the larger social, interactional context, therefore, are intimately related.

Rosaldo (1980) has also addressed the idea that the meaning of identity (in particular gendered identity) is grounded in social structure and interaction. She considers it essential that we approach gender relations in social and historical terms, as "the product of social relationships in concrete (and changeable) societies" (p. 393, my italics). Aspects of gender relations such as male dominance and sexual asymmetry can then be seen, not as isolated sets of immutable facts, but rather as aspects of collective life, as a "patterning of expectations and beliefs" which gives rise to "imbalance in the ways people interpret, evaluate, and respond to particular forms of male and female action" (p. 394). And woman's place in human social life, therefore, can be seen not a product of things she does (or what she biologically "is") but more of "the meanings her activities acquire through concrete social interactions" (p. 400, my italics).

Rosaldo believes that approaching gender in this way allows us (indeed compels us), instead of simply accepting gender difference and working towards equality between different genders, rather to ask how such differences between genders are actually created by social relations. In particular, it allows us to think
about some features of gender arrangements, such as the female premium on love, altruism, nurturance, and kinship (all very mother-related terms), in a social/political context, as opposed to in individualistic terms. Sexual asymmetry, then, and, for our purposes, asymmetrical parenting arrangements, become political and social facts, less concerned with individual traits, and more concerned with "relationships and claims that guide the ways that people act and shape their understandings" (p. 414).

West and Zimmerman (1987) take gender theory somewhat further, suggesting that not only is gender social, political, and interactional, but that it is a "recurring accomplishment" - something that we actively "do" on a daily basis. They claim that, rather than the meaning of gender being created through human action, gender itself is actually constituted through human interaction. In other words, gender is constructed rather than merely situated, and constructed by individuals who manage their conduct "in light of normative conceptions of attitudes and activities appropriate for one's sex category" - in other words, within an institutional framework which prescribes for people the forms that the gendered identity they construct should take. We produce, or "do", gender because our competence as members of society is "hostage to its production". Essentially all actions undertaken by men and women, then, are held accountable as appropriate for a man or for a woman (since sex categorization is so fundamental in our society), and virtually any activity - including, of course, parental activity or behavior - can be assessed as to its womanly or manly nature. "Being" a woman, then, and being a mother, become ongoing tasks.

According to these sociological formulations, links between identity and behavior (and between gendered identities and behaviors in particular) are constantly redefined and reinforced in social interactions; are created, constructed, and played out through interactions between institutions and the individuals
within them. This approach to identity, behavior, and social interaction forces us to consider that the link between the identity of "mother" and the behaviors undertaken by mothers outlined in previous chapters is not an immutable "given". Rather, it is reinforced, strengthened, sustained, and even created, both through interpersonal interaction and through interactions with institutional structures that forge different meanings of parenthood for men and women. In the next section I show how the specific link between identity and behavior in mothers does indeed appear to be sustained through interactions with various facets of society.

Mothers in Interaction.

While it seems intuitively obvious that there is cultural imagery "out there" influencing how we behave as mothers and fathers, that "society" tells us how parents should behave, that somehow everything seems to maintain the links between identities and behaviors discussed above, it is somewhat more difficult to pinpoint specific areas within which motherhood and fatherhood are constructed, within which gendered parenting arrangements are sustained. It is difficult to define "society" as a concrete object, as something with which mothers and fathers interact.

Walzer (1998) attempts to break down the components of "society", of the imagery "out there" that maintains gendered parenting arrangements. She pinpoints components of our culture that construct for us gendered definitions of "mother" and "father". Her analysis examines how the interactions between men and women within relationships - interactions between mothers and fathers - work to maintain the notion that women are responsible for, accountable to, and involved with children in a way that men are not. She also examines how both
mothers and fathers interact with larger frameworks which maintain these arrangements and reinforce the gendered identities and behaviors of parents.

Walzer notes that the differences in consciousness (identity) and behaviors between mothers and fathers in her study were upheld and strengthened through interactions within the couples. The interactions were often not undertaken at a conscious level, and were not manifested necessarily only in behavioral ways. Rather, both men and women seemed to harbor deeply held but somehow unconscious convictions that mothers were ultimately more responsible for, and therefore more responsive to, children than fathers were - and that the work was somehow more rewarding for mothers than fathers. Walzer describes, for example, one couple in which both members had well-paying jobs and commitments to their respective careers. Both the mother's decision to scale back on her career, to put her job "into perspective", to make sure the baby understood that she was the mother - "whatever that means", and also the somewhat unconscious decision which resulted in an unequal division of household labor, were made by the mother in interaction with the father. It was the interaction between mother and father that reproduced the standard, and highly gendered, parenting arrangement (Ch. 2). Financial decisions were also made by the couples in concert, in interaction, and tended to reproduce the form within which the father was perceived as the primary breadwinner, and the mother was perceived as being responsible for the emotional wellbeing of the baby and the running of the house, regardless of her work status or actual financial contribution.

It is the convergence of mothers' and fathers' notions of appropriate parental behavior that is most striking in these accounts. There did not appear to be much dissent involved in parental decisions. And while there was some discomfort about the level of paternal involvement with housework or childcare,
there did not appear to be any dissent involved in the overall decisions about the basic structure of the parenting arrangement. Rather than the men and women having different consciousnesses of parenting, then, their views on parenting largely converged - around the traditional image of fathers as "doers", as financial providers, as peripheral in terms of emotion, and of mothers as "feelers", bearing ultimate responsibility for the emotional and practical work of the family. So, as well as mothers "doing" motherhood and fathers "doing" fatherhood in very traditional ways, fathers were, though their interactions with their spouses, also "doing" motherhood, and mothers were similarly "doing" fatherhood (for large scale studies demonstrating similar patterns, see, for example, Cowan & Cowan, 1988; Belsky & Kelly, 1994; cited in Walzer, 1998).

Furthermore, the beliefs of the parents about appropriate consciousnesses and behaviors for mothers and fathers - about appropriate (and appropriately gendered) parental arrangements - were reinforced at every turn, particularly in interactions with other family members. Physical closeness to extended family members seemed in particular to pressure new parents to conform to more traditional, stereotyped, notions of what constituted appropriate behavior for mothers and fathers (Ch. 6) (see also Coltrane, 1996).

Interaction, of course, does not only occur at an interpersonal, family level. Hays (1996) notes that mothers receive information about parenting (and thus receive a kind of cultural blueprint for maternal identity and behavior) from a wide variety of sources - their own parents, reflections on their own childhoods, friends (especially other mothers), pediatricians, books, magazines, and television. Walzer notes also that gendered roles within marriage prior to the arrival of children, where a certain degree of deference to a man and accommodation to him are accepted notions of what constitutes a good marriage (see also DeVault, 1991), contributed to the gendered parenting arrangements noted in her study.
In addition, for the parents in her study, copious literature promoting a biological tie between mother and baby, and the sanctification of breastfeeding by various experts (in the absence, it must be noted, of any attempt to address ways to link breastfeeding with work) were interpreted (by both mothers and fathers) as necessitating more closeness of mother to baby (Ch. 4). (For other studies that address the heavily gendered message contained in popular childcare manuals, see Hays, 1996; Marshall, 1991).

Media images, as noted by Walzer (Ch. 6), also abound with images of appropriately gendered parental behavior. For some examples from recent television, radio and newspaper offerings, consider the following stories. The television show "E.R." (one of the most popular shows on television) currently features a female doctor who, despite the presence of her husband in her life and in her baby's life, is apparently unable to stop thinking about her baby while she is at work, having to phone home from work (luckily with the permission, indeed the encouragement, of her boss) to see if Dad and baby are managing alright. When the baby develops a fever, Mom discards her stethoscope and heads for home - where we are later treated to a view of Mom contentedly cooing to her (patently not very ill) baby ("E.R.", Thursday November 4, 1999). Three weeks later, having barely managed to show up for work in the meantime, Mom, announcing that she has "never been happier", hands in her resignation, poignantly removes the baby pictures from her locker, and heads for home. In the meantime, another male doctor, despite the tearful proclamation that he loves his son enough to "lie down under a train" for him, has his work life interrupted not at all ("E.R.", Thursday, November 11, 1999).

Another recent TV program ("Extra", Oct. 27, 1999) detailed the harrowing but true story of a female police officer who had been jailed, but whose sentence had been commuted by the Governor of New York so that she could return home
to be re-united with her children (apparently, male police officers either have no children or do not care to be with them). While it is quite possible that this police officer should not have been jailed, the framing of the issue by the producers of the program around the separation of a mother from her children clearly sends (like "E.R.") a clear message about gendered parental identity and behavior.

The New York Times newspaper recently (Wed Oct. 27, 1999) featured a set of articles dealing with work/family intersections. One article (dealing with the almost incredible grind involved in working in the electronic communications industry) brings us the story of one man who, unable to take the pace necessitated by being a senior vice president at Microsoft, took a sabbatical to "decompress" after a particularly busy year. Luckily for him, his sabbatical gave him the freedom, in addition to spending time with his wife and two children and thinking about all the personal things that had been shunted aside for work, to take a solo bicycle trip through the Canadian Rockies (Lohr, 1999).

In another lead article on the same page, we read about a mother and business owner who, far from preparing for a solo bicycle trip anywhere, was rather preparing to let her business fall into "chaotic limbo" so that she could attend a court case involving the doctors who may have contributed to her son's handicap. The trial was expected to last for weeks. "No question," said the mother. "I will be there." (Belkin, 1999). While these articles detail the realities of life for this particular mother and father, they also serve as blueprints for all the other mothers and fathers who read the New York Times. So current "reality" - gendered parental reality - is thereby reinforced and maintained. And neither newspaper author thinks to address the different, highly gendered, "realities" faced by these parents.

National Public Radio recently celebrated (on November 5, 1999), on its radio program "Morning Edition", the twentieth anniversary of the program's lead
commentator, Bob Edwards. A taped piece by Edwards' wife, Sharon, gave us some insight into their lives over the past twenty years. Her duties over the years, Sharon told us, included heading off Christmas carolers at the corner, pacifying trick-or-treaters, not having a dog, and raising kids "as boisterous as monks" - because Bob went to bed at 6 p.m. and woke at 1 a.m. to go to work. Bob signed off his wife's piece noting that Sharon had "for twenty years managed our household, raised our children, and made it possible for me to have a career" - as stark a description of gendered parental behaviors as any sociologist could hope for.

By citing these examples from the media, all of which laud, promote, and sustain gendered parental arrangements, I do not intend to blame any of the individual people involved in these stories. Rather, I cite the examples to show how prevalent the notion is that women are, and should be, attached to their children in a way that men are not, in a way that allows men to pursue their outside careers and their lives while Moms keep the home fires burning. Interaction with these messages on a constant basis clearly serves to maintain and support, for readers, listeners, and viewers, the arrangements the media messages so relentlessly validate.

In addition to populist fare such as television, radio, and newspapers, gendered messages about appropriate parenting methods and responsibilities are also generated from many more academic, and theoretically impartial, sources. For example, a recent major psychological child development study (reported in the Farmington Daily Times, Aug. 22, 1999) measured the quality of the family environment based on "such factors as...a mother's education, how sensitively the mother handles her child's needs, and how well she plays with her child" (my italics) - as if fathers were simply irrelevant, and mothers, of course, essential, to child well-being. Indeed, the psychological community has come under intense criticism
from feminists for its active construction and maintenance of gender differences (Hare-Mustin and Maracek, 1998). Even in reports from the Census Bureau, biases are obvious. In one report dealing with childcare arrangements for preschoolers, the discussion is framed in terms of who was minding the "9.9 million children under age 5 who were in need of care while their mothers were working" (Casper, 1996, my italics).

Perhaps most disturbing is the current trend within some strands of the feminist community to reinforce gendered parental identity and behavior. Within these strands, female expressivity and women’s ways of knowing are celebrated. In particular, parental nurturance is seen as uniquely female. For example, in a recent text dealing with issues relating to mothering, Evelyn Nakano Glenn (1994) proposes, as a working definition, looking at mothering as "a historically and culturally variable relationship in which one individual nurtures and cares for another". This, to me, is an astounding definition of mothering. While I understand that Glenn intends with the definition to move away from biological determinism, she is in fact ensuring (unless we are to completely eradicate even the commonsense definition of "mother" as female) that nurturing remains rooted in femaleness, that "female" is conflated with "caring". Other examples of feminist literature in which a conflation of femaleness and caring behavior occurs include texts with titles like "When Men and Women Mother" (Ehrensaft, 1984), "Can Men 'Mother'?" (Risman, 1986), and "Maternal Thinking" (Ruddick, 1989).

It is clear, then, that the link between mothers and primary responsibility for childrearing is created, sustained, and reinforced in virtually every corner of our culture, in every interaction with every facet of society. Wherever we turn - to our mates, to our families, to popular culture, to the academic community, even to the feminist community - we are bombarded with images that reinforce for us the
gendered nature of parenthood, that reinforce for us the way mothers should - and
do - behave.

Given the ubiquitous nature of the imagery, it would indeed be extraordinary
if women did not absorb and act on prescriptions for appropriately gendered
parenting; for women to go against these cultural prescriptions would be, to say
the least, extremely difficult. The fact that the identity of "mother" (if not the
practical behaviors associated with this identity) is such a source of strength,
pride, comfort, and security for so many women makes going against current
constructions of motherhood almost unthinkable for mothers. While mothers
clearly wish to receive more help with the practical details of parenting
(particularly from fathers), the prospect of questioning or dismantling
"motherhood" as we know it is clearly much more complex and even frightening.
Dismantling motherhood as currently constructed is not a desirable course of
action for many women, women who (as outlined in Chapter II) perceive
motherhood as a positive experience, indeed even as a central component of adult
female identity.

Furthermore, the status accorded motherhood is a source of strength that
is currently unique to women, a strength that is still outside the bailiwick of the
men who have power in so many other areas. Anne Roiphe (1996) suggests that
it is difficult for women to give up their special privileged status as mothers
because "if we share with men our momminess, we feel we might be exchanging
what little turf we have in return for a handful of nothing". Dismantling
motherhood as we know it, then, would clearly cause major individual
psychological turmoil, upset marital arrangements, and disturb the overall status
quo. And because of these difficulties, the status quo is maintained, and parenting
remains a highly gendered experience.
In addition to the sociocultural creation and maintenance of a link between the identity of "mother" and the primary responsibility of mothers for childrearing outlined in this chapter, certain concrete objective conditions (conditions applying in the workplace) serve to further maintain gendered parenting arrangements. And it is to some of these concrete objective conditions within which men and women play out their parental roles that I turn in the next chapter.
Chapter V.

Mothers in the Workplace: Confronting Objective Conditions.

In contrast to the somewhat ephemeral (albeit very real) nature of the issues discussed in previous chapters, in this chapter I examine the concrete, tangible conditions which apply in the workplace - conditions which affect how men and women make decisions about parenting and which work to maintain gendered parenting arrangements.

The simple reality is that, once people have children, they must find a way to balance the practical demands of those children against the demands of the workplace. This balancing act is particularly difficult in the United States, a country with no governmental commitment to state-funded and state-administered childcare, and in which, therefore, each family must privately negotiate childcare arrangements and the intersection of work and family concerns. For an extreme example of just how demanding the workplace can be, a recent report in the New York Times (Lohr, 1999) tells the story of a twenty-five year-old male who took a job with a Silicon Valley start-up company - a job that necessitated eighteen hours a day, seven days a week, of his time, at a point in his life when his son was nine weeks old (interestingly, far from expressing horror at the amount of time the job took away from his family life, the employee perceived his job to be "exhilarating").
Given such demanding workplace structures and the lack of state involvement in childrearing, it clearly may frequently simply make good sense, or indeed even be absolutely necessary, in order to meet the demands of childrearing, for one parent (assuming that two parents are present) to scale back on work commitment. Scaling back may mean taking on a more "flexible" job, taking on a job that does not demand as much attention and devotion, a job that can be abandoned if necessary, a job that can indeed be considered "secondary". As discussed in Chapter III, it is overwhelmingly women who make changes in work commitment to take on primary family commitment. It is essential, therefore, to examine workplace structures, and governmental policies that affect those structures, to see if they may be facilitating the process whereby mothers (and not fathers) modify their work situations in response to the demands of children, thereby facilitating gendered parenting arrangements.

There are a number of issues to be addressed in this area, including (but not restricted to) approaches to pregnancy in the workplace, intersections between parental leave and work, government policies relating to childcare funding, and the remuneration women receive for their work. Some issues, such as the lack of fit between family life and the workplace as it is currently constructed, and the lack of government funding of childcare facilities and parental leave programs, are problems that (in theory at least) have no gender, problems that should affect equally how mothers and fathers make decisions about balancing family and work.

In this chapter, however, I suggest that there are certain features of the workplace that work to specifically reinforce the link between mothers and primary responsibility for childrearing, that upset the balance between men's and women's decisions regarding family responsibility once they become parents. Such workplace features facilitate women's movement from work commitment to family commitment, and have the effect of maintaining gendered parenting
arrangements. These features of the workplace, which I will address individually below, include the inadequate state involvement in the issue of pregnancy in the workplace; the inequity in earnings between men and women; and the segregation of the workplace by sex, with women almost exclusively performing jobs that have particular relevance to parenting.

**Pregnancy in the Workplace.**

Employment problems related to pregnancy and childbirth clearly relate exclusively to women workers, eighty-five percent of whom will become pregnant at least once during their working lives (Gottschalk, 1996). Currently, pregnancy has profound, and frequently negative, consequences for many women workers.

The Pregnancy Discrimination Act (PDA), which was passed into law in 1978, represents the first attempt on the part of the U.S. government to enact a national policy for pregnant workers. This is in stark contrast to virtually all other developed countries, which have had comprehensive plans in place to deal with pregnancy and parental leave for many years (Harvard Women's Law Journal, 1988). The PDA treats discrimination against pregnant workers as sex discrimination actionable under Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. It prohibits discrimination against pregnant women in all aspects of employment, including hiring, firing, security, seniority, and benefits. It also requires that employers who provide disability and health plan coverage extend that coverage to include pregnancy (Stetson, 1997).

As government policy, however, the PDA represents a seriously limited approach to the issue of pregnancy in the workplace. One problem is that the PDA applies only to workers already covered by Title VII (employers and unions engaged in interstate commerce and employing more than fifteen people). Many
women, therefore, who are disproportionately represented in small businesses, are not covered by the PDA at all. The major problem, however, with the PDA is that it mandates only that employers treat pregnant employees in the same way they treat all other employees. The PDA, therefore, ensures temporary disability coverage for pregnant workers only in situations where employers have chosen to provide temporary disability insurance for the rest of their workers. In the absence of such a scheme being provided by the employer, therefore, pregnancy-related disabilities will be unfunded. Since a high proportion of women workers will become pregnant, and a proportion of those will become temporarily disabled in some way related to the pregnancy, the absence of temporary disability insurance will have a particularly negative impact on pregnant women workers.

So the PDA, in the absence of a government commitment to a temporary disability insurance scheme, loses its teeth, and provides scant comfort for the millions of women who become economically disadvantaged by pregnancy. Current estimates of women who have no income-protected leave for pregnancy run as high as sixty percent (Stetson, 1997). Furthermore, by placing the burden of providing temporary disability insurance for pregnant women with employers rather than with the state, the PDA does nothing to discourage statistical discrimination on the part of employers against women of childbearing age, who continue to be (correctly) perceived as posing greater financial risk to the employer (Issacharoff & Rosenblum, 1994).

It is not simply the physical act of carrying and producing a child, therefore, that pushes mothers into primary responsibility for childrearing. It is rather the devaluation of this biological reality in the workplace and its attendant costs for women in terms of financial stability and employment security (in concert, of course, with the other realities outlined in previous chapters) that serve to bolster the already ubiquitous notion that women, once they become parents, should
devote less attention to their work commitments and more time to their children. The current approach to pregnancy in the workplace, therefore, serves to maintain gendered parenting arrangements.

**Differential Earnings of Men and Women.**

In this section, I consider how the lesser earning power of women relative to men further marginalizes women in the workplace, again making it easier for them to relinquish primary work commitment and take on primary family commitment, and facilitating the maintenance of gendered parenting arrangements. In addition to the poor reception accorded many pregnant women in the workplace, clearly the amount of money women earn will influence how they make decisions about balancing the demands of family and work. In particular, the earnings of women relative to men will affect whether mothers or fathers remain primarily attached to the workplace, or take on primary family commitment.

It is of interest to note, then, that a considerable wage gap still exists between men and women; women, quite simply, earn less than men. Although the gap between male and female earnings, which has always existed, has narrowed in the years since 1980 (Rotella, 1998), there is still a significant difference between men's and women's earnings. In the first quarter of 1998, women who were employed fulltime, year-round, earned seventy-six cents for every dollar earned by men (Renzetti and Curran, 1999). Consequently, in a majority of two-parent families in which both adults are collecting a salary, the female is earning less than the male.

The causes of the wage gap have been, and continue to be, the subject of considerable debate. Since statistics for part-time or part-year workers are not
included in the calculations, the fact that, as noted in Chapter III, more women than men engage in these work behaviors does not explain the earnings gap between men and women. In addition, since women's education, training and job experience have been rapidly increasing over the past thirty years, these differences currently account for only a small part of the gap in earnings between men and women. A major part of the wage gap appears to reflect discrimination against women in the labor market. Discrimination takes the form of lower pay for equal work, exclusion of women from certain jobs or training, and statistical discrimination against women as members of a class (for example, not hiring them or giving them tenure or training because they might become pregnant and leave) (Rotella, 1998). In most studies, this kind of discrimination appears to account for about half of the wage gap. However, the biggest cause of the wage gap between men and women is the fact that men and women are, by and large, employed in different occupations - that they indeed occupy separate working worlds - coupled with the fact that the pay in women's occupations is lower than the pay in men's occupations (Renzetti & Curran, 1999; Rotella, 1998).

Regardless of cause, however, one result of the wage gap is that women are more likely to be pushed, or to push themselves, away from primary work commitment and towards primary family commitment. Gendered parenting arrangements, therefore, are likely to be maintained.

**Occupational Sex Segregation.**

Occupational sex segregation is the term used to describe the different work worlds occupied by men and women, and in this section I address how occupational sex segregation works to maintain gendered parenting arrangements. In the United States, as in all industrialized countries, there are essentially two separate
labor markets - one for women, and one for men. Some examples of jobs which are heavily sex-segregated include construction worker (98% male), engineer (91% male), vehicle/mobile equipment mechanic or repairer (99% male), teacher, except college and university (75% female), secretary (99% female), registered nurse (93% female), house cleaner (96% female), child care worker (97% female), and miscellaneous administrative support worker such as office clerk or bank teller (83% female) (Renzetti & Curran, 1999; Rotella, 1998). Not only are women concentrated in a relatively small number of jobs, but many of these jobs are held almost exclusively by women. And, as evidenced by the wage gap, the jobs held by women pay less than the jobs held by men (see Table 7.5, p. 215, Renzetti & Curran, 1999).

The reasons behind the differential in wages between jobs occupied by women and jobs occupied by men is not clear. Some employers, economists, and policy makers suggest that women, because of their primary commitment to home and family, choose the jobs they choose because they offer the flexibility and lack of commitment women need in order to combine family and paid work. Such a theory, of course, totally fails to distinguish between voluntary job restrictions and structurally imposed ones (for example, the failure of the government to enact a comprehensive childcare policy). It fails to consider that women, because of their primary commitment to family (and in the absence of men's similar commitment to family), may simply have to take on more flexible jobs that demand less commitment, and that pay less.

A more plausible explanation for the wage differential between men's jobs and women's jobs is, as Reskin (1997) has suggested, that certain jobs are devalued simply because women do them. This explanation is given weight by the observation that, while women's and men's jobs are frequently similarly evaluated in job evaluation plans, men are still paid more (see, for example, Kahn & Grune,
And women are paid less than men across all educational levels (Table 7.6, p. 220, Renzetti & Curran, 1999). Indeed, studies have documented a strong inverse relationship between female representation in any given job and the job's median earnings. As women's share of an occupation rises, a fall in wages, coupled with a resegregation such that the job becomes predominantly female, occurs (Renzetti & Curran, 1999). It appears, then that jobs performed predominantly by men and women are differentially valued.

When we relate occupational segregation of jobs and the differential valuation of segregated jobs to our concern with gendered parental arrangements, it is of further interest to note that women are clustered in jobs that closely relate to many aspects of parenting - cleaning, cooking, supporting, nursing, and teaching young children. It has been suggested that "parenting" jobs are undervalued because they are considered extensions of women's work in the home, and therefore not skills worthy of fair financial reward (Renzetti & Curran, 1999). The clustering of women in these jobs serves to reinforce stereotypical notions of what men and women are capable of doing, and reinforces the notion that caring for, teaching, supporting, and cleaning up after other people (major aspects of parenting) is women's work.

The key point to emerge from a discussion of workplace policies, for our purposes, is that women are simply worth less in the workplace than men. They therefore have less to lose by decreasing their commitment to the workplace and by taking on more family responsibility. The factors discussed above - inadequate policies regarding pregnancy, wage gaps and occupational segregation in the workplace, and the particular feminization and devaluation of jobs that have relevance to the practical aspects of parenting - all clearly combine to push women to the margins of the workforce. They reinforce the notion that parent-
related jobs are women's work - and that parenting, then, is also women's work. And they push women away from primary work commitment and towards primary family commitment, thereby maintaining gendered parenting arrangements.

Marginalization and devaluation of working women clearly contributes (as a number of studies have shown) to shaping the decisions that take place in the home - decisions that reproduce standard, gendered ways of dividing childcare and housework responsibilities. Gerson (1985), in a study of how women make decisions about work and motherhood, notes how workplace structures powerfully affected the choices the women in her sample made about work and motherhood. Many of the women in her study were frustrated by limited job opportunities (jobs in pink collar ghettos with limited opportunity for advancement and upward mobility), and their frustration tended to push them towards domesticity (i.e. childbearing and giving up or scaling back on jobs). Women's exposure to satisfying employment options, on the other hand, strongly influenced their motivation to remain in the workplace. If work experiences and financial rewards were good, this influenced both the decision to have children, and the decision to return to the workplace. The movement towards motherhood or towards work, then, was rooted in the work experience - and it is sad to note that the difficulties perceived by many of the women in Gerson's study tended to push them away from parenthood altogether.

In another study of employment patterns of 2,918 young mothers, Wenk and Garrett (1992) found that the rate of exit from the labor force (temporary or permanent) was higher for women with less education, and for those in low-status jobs. Furthermore, the rate of exit was dependent on the proportion of the total family income earned by the mother, rather than the absolute amount of their
earnings. If the mother's income was low relative to that of her spouse, she was more likely to exit the labor force.

In summary, then, certain concrete objective factors operating in the workplace, involving pregnancy policies, differential earnings of men and women, occupational segregation by sex, and economic devaluation of jobs involving parenting-related tasks, specifically affect women's job security, the rewards they receive for their work performance, and their commitment to the workplace. Factors operating in the workplace clearly influence the environment within which men and women, when they become parents, make decisions about responsibility for childrearing, making it easier for women to move towards increased responsibility for childcare and family concerns and away from continued dedication to the workplace. Workplace structures, therefore, reinforce and maintain gendered parenting arrangements.
Chapter VI.

Turning the Tide.

It is overwhelming to speculate about where to begin to stem the tide that pushes men and women towards maintaining gendered parenting arrangements. It seems that everything, from the links between individual identity and behavior, through every facet of society, through workplace structures, and on through governmental philosophy, would have to be changed to effect gender-neutrality in parenting.

While this scenario is obviously extremely unlikely, I suggest in this chapter that it is more useful, when working towards achieving gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements, to concentrate on structural rather than individual change. I believe that certain specific changes within the workplace - specifically, state funding of pregnancy disability insurance, elimination of occupational segregation by sex, and elimination of the wage gap between men and women - could, by virtue of rendering the advantages and disadvantages of taking on primary responsibility for childrearing more similar for men and women, at least in some measure bring us closer to achieving gender-neutral and gender-equitable parenting arrangements. Such structural changes, by forcing behavioral change, may, in addition to equalizing the status of men and women in the workplace (a worthy goal in itself) help to break the link between mothers and primary responsibility for childrearing, forge a link between men and childrearing
responsibility, and thereby change the cultural meaning of parenthood, rendering it more gender-neutral.

**Individual versus Structural Change.**

Before addressing avenues for change, it is useful to summarize the main features of the current gender inequity in parenting arrangements. The identity of "mother" is a loving and positive one. There is nothing uniquely female about the "mother" identity. Rather, it is the cultural meaning that has been attached to the "mother" identity - the link between this identity and the behaviors associated with primary responsibility for childrearing - which renders mothers' lives so different from fathers', which renders parenting such a gendered experience. The cultural meaning of motherhood is sustained through its reinforcement in virtually every facet of society. In particular, certain features of the workplace work to strengthen the link between mothers and primary family commitment and to further sustain gendered parenting arrangements.

Such a conceptualization of the problem suggests that individual change on the part of women will prove both difficult and unrewarding. There is nothing about the positive identity of mother that needs changing. Indeed, motherhood is a source of strength and security for many women (see Chapters II and IV). Furthermore, asking individual men to change, to take on parental responsibilities, to forge a link between paternal identity and primary parental behavior, is unlikely to be rewarding, in the face of both a cultural mandate against this, and in the face of the disadvantages in terms of job security, financial wellbeing, and status (addressed in Chapter V) that go along with primary responsibility for childrearing. As noted by Lamb (1983), "men are unlikely to relinquish social roles that accord them power and free them of time-consuming family responsibilities.
unless they believe that changes in these roles are likely to be advantageous to them" (p. 4). Resistance to change on the part of men has been addressed in detail by Goode (1992), Polatnick (1983), and Segal (1990).

May and Cooper (1995) also address the danger of losing sight of material conditions in theoretical debates about identity and subjectivity; the danger of disconnecting the subject from the social and political context within which the subject operates. So when we think about the identity of "mother", the behavior of mothers, and the cultural meaning of motherhood with a view to change, it is, I believe, important to focus on material conditions and political context. It is important to address the harsh economic reality of lower women's wages and of women's raw deal in the workplace, important to understand how these realities may thwart the efforts of even the most willing couples in their quest for gender-neutrality in parenting. The political reality of the market simply does not promote paternal involvement in parenting. Indeed, even Coltrane (1996), who is optimistic about change, feels that the major factor currently driving some men into taking more responsibility for childcare is the simple economic fact of a drop in their wages (p. 216). We need, then, in any discussion of parenting arrangements, to think about substantive economic, political changes that would equalize the value of mothers and fathers when it comes to decisions about parenting, equalize what women and men have to gain and lose by taking on primary responsibility for childrearing.

Clearly, simply equalizing the economic status of women and men is only one part of what needs to change in order to render parenting a gender-neutral experience. Men's and women's attitudes, the attitudes of the academic community, the feminist community, and the media, and even the basic philosophy of government all contribute to the problem of gender inequity in parenting arrangements and must, therefore, be part of the solution. I choose in
this chapter to focus on concrete workplace changes for two reasons. Firstly, I believe that concrete structural goals (such as the goal of equalizing the economic status of men and women) are easier to work towards than intangible goals (such as the goal of changing attitudes of men and women towards parenting responsibilities). Secondly, I believe it is possible (see below) that changing structural conditions may have the effect of changing attitudes, roles, and commitments such that beliefs about parenting may change; structural change may actually force attitudinal change.

Equalizing the Status of Women and Men in the Workplace.

When addressing workplace changes that would bring us closer to effecting gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements, it is important to identify which changes in the workplace would specifically render parenting more gender-neutral. Changing the workplace to make balancing the demands of family and work easier is certainly a worthy goal, and one that has been the subject of much discussion, particularly in the debate surrounding passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act. Abrams (1989) and Littleton (1987) have addressed the issue in some detail. Their approach (which puts forward asymmetrical models of equality as acceptance of difference) is that women, because of family concerns, do indeed have different lives and different workplace needs than men. The different needs of men and women in the workplace should not be ignored, and should not be merely tolerated. Rather, they should be actively accepted; the needs of women with family demands should be embraced as equal to the needs of the prototypical male worker.

From the perspective of achieving gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements, however, such a "difference" approach is flawed. While acceptance
of difference would increase the value attached to women in the workplace who also have a commitment to childrearing, it would not specifically effect a change in the *gendered* nature of parenting arrangements, but rather ensure its continuation, albeit in an improved form. Indeed, data from Sweden reviewed by Acker (1994) suggest that gender-neutral policies aimed at making the combination of work and family life easier (such as paid parental leave, part-time options for parents, etc.) have, while making the lives of working mothers easier, done little to increase paternal participation in childrearing, done little to render parenting really gender-neutral.

Another approach, adopted by Freeman (1982), is to work towards recognizing the principle that "all adults should have responsibility for the support of themselves and their children, regardless of their individual living situation, and that all are entitled to policies that will facilitate carrying out this responsibility regardless of sex, marital or parental status" (p. 63). Revision of existing policies in favor of those that would focus on the individual rather than the family, eradicate the sexual division of labor both in the family and in the labor force, and institutionalize the support services necessary to achieve this, have the potential, Freeman feels, to create major change in the entire fabric of our society.

Yet another, somewhat different, approach is to work towards radically restructuring the workplace such that work becomes less a central part of people's lives. The prototypical worker would then be less a male with a wife to support him and look after his children and more a person who is a worker but *also* a member of a family and a community to which he or she has commitments, regardless of gender or status as a parent. The potential that either or both of these approaches would involve major changes in our society is, however, a potential that makes enactment of policies facilitating this kind of change highly unlikely.
I choose, therefore, in this chapter to concentrate on workplace changes which would simply equalize the economic status of men and women. I concentrate on changes which would specifically equalize the factors affecting how decisions are made by men and women with respect to taking on primary family commitment. Changes in the areas I discuss would level the playing field for men and women, the playing field on which they make decisions about parenting responsibilities. Such changes would make it equally advantageous or disadvantageous for men and women to take on primary responsibility for childrearing, and would thereby render parenting a more gender-neutral experience. Such changes could also, by forcing changes in behavior on the part of both men and women, simultaneously force changes in attitudes and in the cultural meanings attached to parenthood. The specific changes which I believe would help effect gender-neutrality in parenting include elimination of the disadvantages currently attached to pregnancy in the workplace; elimination of occupational segregation of the workforce by sex; and elimination of the gap in earnings between men and women.

**Pregnancy in the Workplace.**

The ideal approach to pregnancy in the workplace would basically adhere to equal treatment theory, whereby pregnant women are not treated differently from other employees, and whereby special protective legislation is not necessary (Williams, 1984-5). However, such an "equality" approach would differ markedly from the "equal treatment" women now suffer at the hands of their employers under the PDA. For equal treatment of pregnant women only promises job security if it is accompanied by state involvement in the funding of temporary disability insurance. The goal of a fair pregnancy policy would be to provide
employment security through a comprehensive state-funded disability insurance scheme for women of childbearing age - and for all other employees. The scheme would be broad enough to encompass potentially extended disability periods such as those encountered in complicated pregnancies. Under such a scheme, all disabilities which rendered employees temporarily unable to work would be covered, so that no employee, pregnant or not, would be at risk of an unfunded disability leave.

There are specific advantages to women inherent in an equality approach. By virtue of its state funding, it shifts the burden of cost for pregnancy-related disabilities from the employer to the state, thereby greatly reducing employer bias against hiring fertile women, and also eliminating the economic burden currently carried by many pregnant women. In addition, it highlights the difference between events that occur during the period of the pregnancy (covered under the state-funded disability scheme) and events that occur after the delivery of the baby, events that should be considered separately. In a gender-free society, therefore, pregnancy would simply be considered a physical event resulting in the production of a child (obviously, this is rather simplistically stated, given the obvious tempestuous changes that occur in people's lives following pregnancy. However, for the purposes of the discussion here, I believe it is appropriate). The conceptualization of pregnancy-related work interruptions as disabilities would therefore be of no consequence, since interruptions would be covered on the same basis as other work interruptions.

Changes in the approach to pregnancy in the workplace could eliminate the devaluation of pregnant women workers, and would lessen the financial disadvantages and worries about job security currently faced by many pregnant women workers. Such changes could work towards leveling the playing field on which men and women make decisions about parenting responsibilities, could
make men and women at least somewhat more likely to face similar obstacles when confronting decisions about parenting, and could work, therefore, towards rendering parenting more gender-neutral.

**Equalizing the Earnings of Women and Men.**

Even if pregnancy were no longer devalued and punished in the workplace, occupational segregation by sex and the gap in earnings between men and women would still affect women's decisions in favor of taking on primary responsibility for childrearing, and so these issues also need to be addressed. Three federal laws are currently in existence which in theory prohibit employment discrimination on the basis of sex. They are the Equal Pay Act of 1963 (which provides for equal pay for equal work), Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (which prohibits employment discrimination on the basis of sex), and Executive Order 11246, subsequently amended by Executive Order 11375 (which promotes affirmative action for protected groups, including women, among federal contractors).

Given the profound degree of occupational segregation that currently exists in the labor force, the Equal Pay Act is clearly going to have little impact on earning differentials between men and women. A policy that should have more effectiveness in increasing women's wages is the policy of comparable worth - an initiative which states that when women's jobs and men's jobs are similarly evaluated by a job evaluation plan (are of comparable worth), then those women and men should receive the same wages. Despite some early successes in the courts, active disinterest on the part of the Reagan and Bush administrations combined with a number of decisions at the lower Court level that make "market forces" a legitimate rebuttal to a claim of disparate treatment (reviewed in
Sorensen, 1994) has effectively meant that the issue of comparable worth has, in recent years, faded from the forefront of the feminist agenda.

However, I believe that reactivation of a push for comparable worth under existing law, if it were effective, would achieve a lot. Firstly, it would increase women's wages and decrease the gap in earnings between men and women. Secondly (and I believe just as importantly), it would increase the monetary value attached to jobs traditionally associated with women. This would in turn increase the status attached to jobs that involve the parenting skills of cleaning, cooking, teaching, and supporting, thereby encouraging more men to take on "parent-related" tasks, resulting in an eventual redistribution of males and females both in the workforce and in the household.

All the changes addressed above in concert should work to make men and women, mothers and fathers, more equal players in the workforce; should make decisions about parenting responsibilities of more equal importance to men and women, since the advantages of opting for or against taking on primary responsibility for childrearing would impact equally on men and women; and should therefore bring us at least in some measure closer to gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements. And if more equitable workplace conditions simply forced more equitable, gender-neutral distribution of parenting responsibilities, then it is possible that this equitable distribution would in turn force a reshaping of the meanings attached to motherhood (and fatherhood), a breaking of the links between the identity of "mothers" and the behaviors currently undertaken by mothers, and a forging of a new link between the identity of "father" and parenting behaviors and responsibilities.
From Structural Change to Cultural Change.

It is quite possible that the workplace changes described above could actually effect a change in the attitudes, behaviors and meanings surrounding parenting. A number of studies have addressed the idea that simply opting to take on a particular role (or, presumably, being forced to take it on) will influence identity structure and behavior. Bielby & Bielby (1989) note that as individuals allocate time and energy to family or work roles, they come to identify with those roles, and to develop commitment to the roles. If fathers were forced by economic factors to engage in more of the behaviors traditionally associated with mothers, then, they might come to have an identity and commitment to parenting similar to that currently demonstrated by mothers. And Burke and Cast (1997) found that, insofar as husbands and wives take on the role of the other, their gender identity also changes in that direction.

Workplace changes that force men to take on parenting roles, then, may help work towards forging a link between fathers and primary parental responsibilities, between the identity of "father" and the behaviors involved in parenting; and may help to loosen the link between mothers and primary parental behaviors, thereby rendering parenting more gender-neutral.

Coltrane (1996), in attempting to address whether role reversal will help move us towards gender equity, specifically sought out parents who demonstrated more equitable sharing of childcare and household tasks. Although Coltrane concedes that the division of labor inside contemporary American families has been "remarkably resistant to change" (p. 46), he suggests that if both parents share the practical details involved in running a family, the meaning of the roles within the family, in particular of the "mother" and "father" roles, will change. He found in his study that, if fathers and mothers rigorously negotiated and shared the household and childcare tasks, "significant personal changes" occurred in
many of the fathers he interviewed. The fathers reported increased sensitivity to their children, more attention to the details of their children's lives, an increased understanding of the "drudgery" of housework, and adoption of "a vocabulary of motives and feelings similar to mothers" (pp. 76-79). While parenting was essentially still a "learned" skill for the men (p. 78), fathers could indeed "learn how to nurture" (p. 60), and this increased the sense of the comparability of mothers' and fathers' parenting skills and similarities in their relationships with their children (p. 81). Identity/behavior links in these parents, then, appeared to become more gender-neutral.

If workplace changes, then, can somehow force men to take on primary responsibility for childrearing, such that men and women are equally likely to become primarily responsible for parenting, it is possible that these structural changes will result in cultural change such that parenting will eventually be considered a gender-neutral institution.

**Conclusion.**

Although the forces in our society pushing us towards gendered parenting arrangements may appear overwhelming and immutable as well as somewhat intangible, there are, I believe, certain structural aspects of the workplace that are amenable to change, and that may result in a more equitable sharing of the work involved in being a parent. It is important to pursue enactment and enforcement of policies that would ensure state underwriting of pregnancy disability insurance plans, eliminate segregation of the workforce by sex, ensure equal pay for jobs of comparable worth, and, in particular, increase the economic value associated with occupations involving "caring" and its associated menial tasks. Changes in these areas will make life easier for the millions of women who
currently undertake primary responsibility for parenting and for navigating the interface between work and family, a worthy goal even for those who do not specifically believe in the particular value of gender-neutral parenting. In addition, however, such changes in workplace structures would, while not guaranteeing gender-neutrality in parenting arrangements, at least go a long way towards facilitating a more gender-neutral approach to the allocation of parenting responsibilities.

In addition, these changes may, by forcing a redistribution of primary parenting responsibilities between men and women, actually promote changes in parental identity and behavior, such that eventually parenting identities and behaviors may become more gender-neutral, and mothers and fathers may come to play less gender-constrained and more equitable parental roles in their lives.
References.


