The Effects of the Mother's Employment on the Family and the Child

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My talk is going to be on the effects of maternal employment on families and children, with the focus on children. I'm going to present a review of previous research but since I have just completed a large study on this topic I will be drawing also on data from this. The results of the study will be reported in a book, published by Cambridge Press, called *Mothers at Work: Effects on Children's Well-being* by Lois Hoffman and Lise Youngblade, with Rebekah Coley, Allison Fuligni, and Donna Kovacs. Most of the maternal employment research and my own study deal with school-aged children, so the bulk of my talk will be on that age group, but since there is currently a great deal of interest in infants and the impact of maternal employment and nonmaternal care during the early years, I will also summarize findings for that period.

Prior to the review itself, however, we need to place today's maternal employment in its social context. To understand its present effects on families and children, we need to understand how patterns of maternal employment have changed over the years, and how these changes have been accompanied by other social changes that interact with it.

Changing Employment Patterns

At the present time, most mothers in the United States are employed. This is not only true for mothers of school-aged children, as it has been for two decades, but it is also true for mothers of infants less than one-year-old. The pace with which maternal employment rates have increased to this point, however, is so rapid that many people fail to realize its prevalence. Furthermore, attempts to understand its effects often ignore the fact that this change is part of a whole complex of social changes. Both employed mothers and homemakers today live in a very different environment than their counterparts forty or even twenty years ago.

Table 1. Labor Force Participation Rates of Mothers with children under 18, 1946-1996 and 1940

1940	8.6%

1946	18.2%
1956	27.5%
1966	35.8%
1976	48.8%
1986	62.5%
1996	70.0%

There are few social changes that are so easy to document as the increased employment of mothers in the United States. The steady rise in maternal employment rates over the years is clearly illustrated in Table 1. The pattern, rare in 1940, had become modal by 1977. By 1996, seventy percent of the married mothers with children under eighteen were in the labor force.

Table 2. Labor Force Participation Rates for Wives, Husband Present by age of youngest child, 1975-1995

	1975	**1985**	**1995**
1 year or younger	30.8	49.4	59.0
2 years	37.1	54.0	66.7
3 years	41.2	55.1	65.5
4 years	41.2	59.7	67.7
5 years	44.4	62.1	69.6
6-13	51.8	68.2	74.9
14-17	53.5	67.0	79.6

Maternal employment rates still differ by age of the youngest child, but this difference has diminished over the years as the greatest recent increases have occurred among married mothers of infants and preschoolers. The rate of employment for married mothers of infants one or under almost doubled between 1975 and 1995, from 30.8% to 59.0% (Table 2). As Table 3 shows, in 1960 less than 19% of all married mothers of preschoolers were employed, but by 1996, that rate had jumped to 62.7%.

Table 3. Labor Force Participation Rates for Mothers by marital status and age of youngest child, 1960-1996

	Married		**Widowed, divorced, separated**		**Never married**	
	6-17	**<6**	**6-17**	**<6**	**6-17**	**<6**
1960	39.0	18.6	65.9	40.5	(NA)	(NA)
1970	49.2	30.3	66.9	52.2	(NA)	(NA)

1980	61.7	45.1	74.6	60.3	67.6	44.1
1990	73.6	58.9	79.7	63.6	69.7	48.7
1996	76.7	62.7	80.6	69.2	71.8	55.1

Table 3 also indicates another change over the years. Whereas in 1960, employed mothers were more likely to be from single-parent families, this difference has now vanished. For single mothers who have been married, the present employment rates are slightly higher than those of currently married mothers, but for never-married mothers, employment rates are notably lower than for either of the others.

These statistics document a major social change in the United States. But changes of this magnitude do not occur in a vacuum; the change in maternal employment rates have been accompanied by many other changes in family life. Family size is smaller, modern technology has considerably diminished the amount of necessary housework and food preparation, women are more educated, marriages are less stable, life expectancy has increased and youthfulness has been extended, expectations for personal fulfillment have expanded, and traditional gender-role attitudes have been modified and are less widely held. In addition, women's roles have been reconceptualized, childrearing orientations are different, and the adult roles for which children are being socialized are not the same as previously.

In considering the research on the effects of maternal employment, it is important to keep these interrelated social changes in mind. Much of the maternal employment research is built on data that were collected in the 1950's, but it is not reasonable to assume that findings from that period apply today. Some of the effects suggested by earlier studies are not found in more recent research because of changes in family patterns or in the larger society.

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Review of the Research

The research over the last forty years shows that the mother's employment status is not so robust a variable that the simple comparison of the children of employed and nonemployed mothers will reveal meaningful differences. Relationships have had to be examined with attention to other variables that moderated effects; particularly important were social class, the mother's marital status, whether the employment was full- or part-time, the parents' attitudes, and the child's gender. (Effects are different in the middle class than in the lower class and different for boys than for girls.)

In addition, however, the path between the mother's employment status and child outcomes is a long one, there are many steps in between. To understand how maternal employment affects the child, you have to understand how it affects the family because it is through the family that effects take place. Previous research, as well as my own recent study, indicate that the particular aspects of the family that are affected by the mother's employment status and, in turn, affect the child, are the *father's role*, the *mother's sense of well-being*, and the parents' *parenting styles* -- that is, how they interact with their children and the goals they hold for them.

In my review of the research, I'm going to start with a summary of the research which has examined the direct relationship between the mother's employment status and child outcomes and then concentrate on the three aspects of family life that seem to carry the effects: the father's role, the mother's state of well being, and parent-child interaction patterns. Since findings from my recent study will be reported throughout my talk, I'll give you a brief description of it.

The sample is a socio-economically heterogeneous one of third and fourth grade children and their families residing in a large industrial city in the Midwest. It includes one-parent families as well as two-parent, African-American and European American. Because we were interested in effects of the mother's employment status itself, that is -- the effects of having an employed mother in the family -- and not in transitional employment, we selected for analysis only families where the mother's employment status had been stable for at least three years. We also dropped from analysis children who were not living with their mothers. The final sample had 400 families. The data collected were extensive and included questionnaires from mothers, fathers, and children; personal interviews with mothers and children; standard achievement test scores provided by the schools, teachers' ratings of the children's social and academic competence, and ratings by classroom peers of their behavior and how much they were liked. I'm going to refer to this study as the Michigan study because it was conducted by staff and students at the University of Michigan but the site of the research was not in Michigan.

Differences Between Children of Employed and Nonemployed Mothers

Many of the studies that have compared the children of employed and nonemployed mothers on child outcome measures such as indices of cognitive and socioemotional development have failed to find significant differences. The research that has shown reasonably consistent differences has examined the relationships within subgroups based on social class and gender. Patterns that have been revealed over the years include the following:

a. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to have higher academic achievement, greater career success, more nontraditional career choices, and greater occupational commitment.

b. Studies of children in poverty, in both two-parent and single-mother families, found higher cognitive scores for children with employed mothers as well as higher scores on socioemotional indices.

c. A few earlier studies found that sons of employed mothers in the middle class showed lower school performance and lower I.Q. scores during the grade school years than full-time homemakers. About ten years ago, there were three separate studies that looked at that relationship; two of them found no difference, but the third also found lower scores for sons of employed mothers in the middle-class.

   We found no indication of this in the Michigan study. In fact, we found the opposite. In our study, the children of employed mothers obtained higher scores on the three achievement tests, for language, reading, and math, across gender, socioeconomic status, and marital status, middle-class boys included. It was our most robust findings for the child outcome differences. And yes, we controlled on the mother's education.

d. Previous research has also found some social adjustment differences between children with employed and nonemployed mothers, but with less consistency. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to be more independent, particularly in interaction with their peers in a school setting, and to score higher on socioemotional adjustment measures. Results for sons have been quite mixed and vary with social class and with how old the children were when they were tested. One finding from the 1970's was that in the blue-collar class, sons of employed mothers did well academically but there was a strain in the father-son relationship. This was interpreted as reflecting the more traditional gender-role attitudes in the blue collar class. The mother's employment was seen as a sign that the father was an inadequate bread-winner, and if the fathers helped out with housework and child care, they resented it. We did not find this at all and it may reflect the change over the years in gender-role attitudes in the working-class -- the less stereotype views becoming more pervasive across class.

The other social adjustment findings from the recent Michigan study were generally consistent with previous results but extended them. Daughters with employed mothers, across the different groups, showed more positive assertiveness as rated by the teacher (that is, they participated in class discussions, they asked questions when instructions were unclear, they were comfortable in leadership positions), and they showed *less* acting-out behavior. They were less shy, more independent and had a higher sense of efficacy. Working-class boys also showed more positive social adjustment when their mothers were employed, and this was true for both one-parent and two-parent families. For the middle-class boys, although their academic scores were higher, there was little evidence of social adjustment benefits from their mothers' employment. In fact, there was some evidence that those with employed mothers showed more acting-out behavior than the sons of full-time homemakers.

e. There is one more result from previous research which was also found in our study: Sons and daughters of employed mothers have less traditional gender-role attitudes. However, in our research, we used two different measures of gender-role attitudes: one tapped the child's views about whether or not men could do things that were traditionally considered part of women's domain (e.g, take care of children, use a sewing machine, teach school); the other tapped the child's view about whether or not women were capable of doing activities that were traditionally considered part of the male domain (e.g., fix a car, climb a mountain, fly a plane). [The measure consisted of a long list of activities and occupations some of which were male-typed, some female typed, and some neutral. For each, they were asked "Who can--?" They had to choose as their answer women, men, or both. We then constructed two scales, one tapping whether they thought only men could do the male-typed things and the other measuring whether they thought only women could do the female-typed things.]

Girls with employed mothers were more likely than girls whose mothers were full-time homemakers to indicate that women as well as men could do the activities that are usually associated with men; that is, employed mothers' daughters saw women as more competent in the traditionally male domain than the homemakers' daughters did. This result held for girls in two-parent homes and girls in one-parent homes. For boys, however, employment status was not related to the measure of women's competence to do male activities. On the other hand, in two-parent families, both sons and daughters of employed mothers felt that men could do the female activities, while those with full-

time homemakers did not, but this was true only in two-parent families. Subsequent analysis showed that the reason it was only found in two parent families is that, it was carried by the fact that, in the two parent families, fathers' with employed wives were more active in traditionally female tasks and in child care. Thus, maternal employment was linked to the less stereotyped view of what men can do because of the effect of maternal employment on the father's role and, in the absence of a father, the effect did not occur.

The Father's Role

Now the father's role has long been viewed as an important mediator of the link between the mother's employment status and child outcomes. The finding that when mothers are employed, fathers are more active in household tasks and child care was reported in the 1950's and repeatedly through the years. Further, evidence has been provided which suggests that the father's role-sharing is an effect of maternal employment and not just a selective factor. Even when the researcher controls on gender-role attitudes, this effect is found, and the increased involvement of fathers in household tasks and child care is reported by mothers as a change that occurred when they re-entered the labor force. However, two studies, one by Nan Crouter at Penn State and the Michigan study, found that the greater involvement of fathers with children is confined to the functional interactions. Fathers in employed mother families, in general, are not more active in leisure/fun interaction. However, there is an interesting gender effect: fathers in single-wage families interact more with sons than daughters, but fathers in dual-wage families interact with sons and daughters equally.

The father's role was a major variable in the Michigan study and a clear link was shown to daughters' better academic performance and to their greater sense of efficacy. In addition, although maternal employment was directly related to daughters' views that women are competent in activities generally seen as male activities, higher father involvement increased this effect. And the view that women are competent was a major link to girls sense of efficacy and test scores. The fathers' higher involvement in child care, the merging of roles there, was also related directly to both boys' and girls' test scores. The amount of time fathers spent with children in leisure/fun activities, on the other hand, showed no relationship to test scores for either boys or girls.

Thus, there is a path from the mother's employment status to the father's role to the children's academic performance. In accommodation to the mother's employment, fathers take on a larger share of the household tasks and child care. Their higher participation in child care operates to increase the academic competence of both boys and girls, but particularly for girls. We also found a direct link from the mother's employment itself for girls across class and marital status: When mothers are employed, girls view women as more competent and this view mediated the girls' own higher sense of efficacy and their academic performance as rated by teachers as well as by the test scores.

The Mother's Sense of Well-being

The second aspect of family life that is often seen as linking the mother's employment status to effects on the child is the mother's sense of well-being, and numerous studies have compared employed mothers to full-time homemakers on various indices of mental health and

life satisfaction. Most of this research has found a higher level of satisfaction and morale, and lower scores on stress indicators and measures of depressive mood among the employed.

But, while the bulk of the research on employment status and mothers' mental health has found higher morale among employed mothers, some investigators found no significant differences. However, when you sort out which studies find that employed mothers have higher morale and which studies find no difference, it turns out that the studies that find no difference were conducted with middle-class women. None of these studies find the morale of the full-time homemakers higher in either class. We found none and these same conclusions are reported in other reviews. But some studies have found no difference, and all of these were conducted with middle-class mothers. Now this class difference may seem strange. You would think that employment was more likely to up the mothers' morale in the middle class because middle-class jobs are more interesting. But the fact is that the mental health advantage of employment is more consistently found in working class or poverty samples. For working-class women, studies show that the satisfactions from employment are not from the job per se but from the increased social support and stimulation provided by co-workers, the marked advantages that their wages bring to their families, and the greater sense of control they feel over their lives. (In our study, it was the third -- employment gave them a sense of control over their lives-- that was particularly important.)

This social class difference is important because the research looking at the mother's employment status and child outcomes has also shown more consistent advantages of maternal employment for children in the working and poverty classes than in the middle class, particularly for boys. So a viable hypothesis is that the greater advantage of maternal employment for working-class children is because of its more positive effect on the mother's sense of well-being.

Furthermore, the possibility that the mother's well-being carries the relationship between maternal employment and child outcomes is bolstered by the fact that there is a large body of research demonstrating a positive relationship between maternal mental health and both more effective parenting and children's cognitive and emotional adjustment.

We explored the role of maternal well-being in the Michigan study and found that employment did show a positive health advantage in the working class for both single and married mothers. (And in the poverty class.) Employed mothers had lower scores on a measure of depressive mood (the CES-D) and higher scores on a measure of positive morale. No relationship between employment status and either measure was found in the middle-class. We also found that, in the working class, employed mothers were less likely than full-time homemakers to use either authoritarian or permissive parenting styles and more likely to use a style called authoritative. Authoritative parenting refers to a pattern in which the parents exercise control, but provide explanations rather than relying on power assertive controls and harsh discipline. In addition, employed mothers in the working class indicated a higher frequency of positive interactions with their children than did the full-time homemakers. The analysis also indicated that the relationship between the mother's employment and her parenting was carried by the mother's sense of well-being. Furthermore, the parenting variables were related to child outcomes. For example, the permissiveness of the married working-class homemakers was associated with acting out behavior in their sons, and authoritarian control was related to problem behavior in daughters.

Childrearing Patterns

So this brings us to the third route by which the mother's employment status can affect outcomes for school-aged children --- through differences in childrearing. A number of researchers have suggested that the childrearing dimension which includes encouragement of independence, maturity demands, and autonomy granting is particularly important. This is a dimension that can encompass in its extreme overprotection, on the one hand, and neglect on the other. Previous research has presented some evidence that employed mothers encourage independence in their children more than nonemployed mothers do. The encouragement of independence is consistent with the situational demands of the dual role since it enables the family to function more effectively in the mother's absence. Urie Bronfenbrenner has suggested that encouraging independence and granting children autonomy may have a negative effect on boys because it increases the influence of the peer group which, for boys, is more likely to be counter to adult standards. The encouragement of independence and autonomy in girls, on the other hand, would have a positive effect since they are traditionally given too little encouragement for independence.

A number of studies in developmental psychology have documented a pattern of encouraging dependency in girls. Beverly Fagot, for example, has conducted a series of studies of toddlers, based on behavioral observations, which demonstrate this. In one set of studies, she shows that mothers of daughters reward dependency by responding too quickly to their bids for help, while mothers of boys are more likely to encourage them to work the problem out for themselves.

Such gender-based differences in childrearing, however, are less prevalent in employed-mother families. In the Michigan study, we found that, across social class, employed mothers in contrast with full-time homemakers, showed less differentiation between sons and daughters in their discipline style and in their goals for their children. We also found that employed mothers, compared to full-time homemakers, were more likely to cite independence as a goal for their daughters and less likely to indicate that "obedience" or "to be feminine" was their goal. And, mothers who cited the goal of obedience, or the goal "to be feminine", were more likely to have daughters who were shy, nonassertive in the classroom, and had a lower sense of efficacy, while citing the goal of independence showed the opposite effects.

The issue of supervision and monitoring and the concept of "latch key" children is associated with maternal employment, but only a few studies have examined the actual tie to maternal employment. Nan Crouter, at Penn State, with a sample of children from small communities and rural areas, found no relationship between the mother's employment status and how well children were monitored. However, she also found that when children were unmonitored, boys with employed mothers were the ones likely to show negative effects in conduct and school grades. In our urban sample, we found only one effect of maternal employment on supervision and monitoring: Boys in dual-wage working class families were more likely to be left unsupervised and unmonitored. Maternal employment was not related to supervision and monitoring in middle-class families, in single-mother families, or for working-class girls. Being left unsupervised, but monitored by phone, showed no negative effects, but being left unsupervised and unmonitored showed negative effects among lower income children.

Only a limited group of parenting variables have been examined over the years for their

relationship to the mother's employment status. The Michigan study was the first to consider a broad range of parenting attitudes and behaviors to see if they provided a link between the mother's employment and child outcomes. I have already mentioned that, in the working-class, full-time homemakers used more authoritarian control, less authoritative control, and more permissiveness. In addition, across class and marital status, full-time homemakers used more authoritarian control and stronger discipline and stressed obedience as a goal for their children. These differences in parenting, in turn, related to a number of child outcomes. For example, the higher use of authoritative controls by employed mothers in the working class, a style in which the child is given reasons and explanations, was related to their children's higher academic performance, and the more punitive style of the homemakers predicted conduct problems in school.

Mothers also reported the frequencies of their interactions with their children over the previous week. In the middle class, the full-time homemakers indicated more frequent positive and educational activities with their children than the employed mothers; but in the working class, more frequent positive and educational activities with daughters were reported by the employed mothers and there was no difference for sons. However, on a measure of how often mothers expressed overt affection toward their children, employed mothers were higher across class and marital status. In addition, employed married mothers held higher educational goals for their children and this was related to children's test scores.

Now in these analyses, we control for many variables, including the mother's education, but it is possible that there are some self-selection factors involved nevertheless. Thus, it is possible, that mothers who elect to stay home and avoid employment, may be mothers who are particularly committed to obedience and that this difference may not only be a function of employment status but also a precursor. And similarly, higher educational goals for children may be a motivation for employment. We examined these possibilities in our analyses, and the data supported a direction of causality from the mothers' employment status to parenting styles to child outcomes, but there may also be some self-selection involved.

Maternal Employment and Nonmaternal Care During the Early Years

I'm going to turn now from my focus on school-aged children to discuss the research on maternal employment during the child's infancy and toddler years. This has been a topic of considerable interest and controversy.

Whereas most of the maternal employment research on older children has looked mainly at child outcomes, the research on infants and preschoolers has looked directly at parent-child interaction. This is because for infants and young children, valid outcome measures are difficult to obtain. These studies have looked at the quantity and quality of the mother-child interaction, the home environment, and the parent-child attachment relationship.

In general, findings indicate that full-time employed mothers spend less time with their infants and preschoolers than part-time and nonemployed mothers, but this effect diminishes with maternal education and with the age of the child. In addition, the effect is also less when the nature of the interaction is considered. Data indicate that employed mothers tend to compensate for their absence in the proportion of direct interaction and in the amount of time with the child during nonwork hours and on weekends. Several studies that used behavioral observations of mother-infant interaction showed that employed mothers were more highly

interactive with their infants, particularly with respect to verbal stimulation. Some studies have examined the mothers' sensitivity in interactions with their infants and found no difference between the employed and nonemployed mothers.

A particularly active area of maternal employment research since 1980 has involved the comparison of dual-wage and single-wage families with respect to mother-infant attachment. In most of these studies, no significant differences were found. However, in research by Jay Belsky (and in a study by Barglow and his colleagues), although the majority of mother-infant attachments in the full-time employed-mother group was secure, the number of insecure attachments was higher when the mothers were employed full-time. Furthermore, in reviews that combined subjects across studies, full-time employed mothers were more likely than part-time employed and nonemployed mothers to have insecurely attached infants.

The results showing an association between early maternal employment and mother-infant attachment have received a great deal of attention in the media. A problem with this research, however, is that the measure of attachment used is a laboratory measure called the Strange Situation. The measure involves having the mother and toddler enter a room furnished like a waiting room, with children's toys. A young woman comes in and then the mother leaves. There are two maternal departures, and reunions a few minutes later. This measure was set up as a strange situation to observe how the toddler acts toward the mother when anxious. Although this measure has proven useful over the years in predicting subsequent childhood behavior, it's validity had not been established for employed-mother families. The problem is that the situation may not be anxiety-producing for a child who has experienced regular nonmaternal care, thus the behavior may not be a basis on which to judge the attachment relationship. In the studies that found more insecure attachment for the children with full-time employed mothers, the type of insecure attachment found was what is called the "avoidant" pattern. The avoidant infant is one who seems to be independent. This independence may be a defense against anxiety as it has been shown to be in earlier research, but it may also be an appropriate behavior if the child is not anxious in the situation; thus, distinguishing between "avoidant" insecurity and lack of anxiety can be difficult.

The most recent and most extensive investigation of these issues is an on-going study of the effects of nonmaternal care in early childhood conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Development. This is a collaborative effort involving multiple sites and a large team of prominent researchers. Data have been presented which support the validity of the Strange Situation measure as used in this study. In this study, the amount of nonmaternal care (whether the infant received more than thirty hours a week or less than ten) was not related to the security of the attachment, nor was the child's age at onset of the mother's employment. The high quality of this investigation, and the fact that the consortium of investigators included researchers from both sides of this highly politicized issue, may have led to more precise coding operations which eliminated the uncertainties sometimes involved in differentiating less anxiety from insecure-avoidant attachment. The results of this study indicated, that the quality of the mother-child interaction, and particularly her sensitivity to the child's needs, affects the security of the attachment, and the amount of nonmaternal care does not. Neither does the mother's employment status nor the age of the child when the mother resumed work.

This investigation has been following the children since infancy, and their latest reports are based on the data obtained when the children are three-years old. Previous research on the

effects of day care suggested that although day care experience was often associated with higher cognitive competence, it was also associated with less compliance and more assertiveness with peers, both positive and negative. The NICHD study found that on multiple measures of the child's negativity and behavior problems the major variables were again the mother's sensitivity and her psychological adjustment. Both higher quality of nonmaternal care, and greater experience in groups with other children, predicted socially competent behavior. It was also the case, however, that more time in child care and less stable care predicted problematic and noncompliant behavior at 24 months. On the whole, the results of this investigation have indicated that the home environment is the major influence on child outcomes, but the quality and stability of the nonmaternal care does have an effect.

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Conclusions

Twenty years ago, it would have seemed strange to give a talk on maternal employment and not focus on it as a social problem, but there is little in these data to suggest it is. The mother's employment status does have effects on families and children, but few of these effects are negative ones. Indeed, most seem positive -- the higher academic outcomes for children, benefits in their behavioral conduct and social adjustment, and the higher sense of competence and effectiveness in daughters. On the whole, these research results suggest that most families accommodate to the mother's employment and in doing so provide a family environment that works well. In two-parent families, the fathers take on a larger share of the household tasks and child care and this seems to have benefits for the children. In the working class, employed mothers indicated a higher level of well-being than full-time homemakers and this, in turn, affects their parenting in positive ways. Even in the middle-class, where employed mothers did not show a higher level of well-being, neither did they show a lower one. While the quality and stability of nonmaternal care for infants and young children is important, the mother's employment itself does not seem to have the negative effects often proclaimed. We are dealing here with a change in society, and while there are adjustment yet to be made -- more affordable, quality day care; after-school programs; more liberal postpartum leave policies -- even these are slowly responding to the realities of Parenthood in America today.

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The Romantic Life of Brainiacs

College-educated, highly successful women have long had a reputation for marrying less (and having lousier sex). But in a historic reversal of past trends, these women now triumph in matrimony. A marriage historian explains.

the overschooled old maid and the lonely career woman. Highly educated or high-achieving women are less likely to marry and have children than other women. If they do marry, they are more likely to divorce. Even if they don't divorce, their marriages will be less happy. And, oh, yes, they'll be sexually frustrated, too.

These maxims, widely accepted for at least two centuries, are bad news for a state so focused on brainy pursuits. Thirty-five percent of Massachusetts women 25 and older have a bachelor's degree or more, a level of educational attainment almost 10 points higher than the national average. So perhaps it follows that 28 percent of women in the state have never been married. Massachusetts's proportion of never-married females is the third highest in the nation, topped only by the District of Columbia and the state of New York. But are these women really educating themselves out of the marriage market? If a woman reads Proust or computes calculus, is she unable to attract a mate?

Conventional wisdom says the answer to both questions is yes. But a close look at the historical transformation of marriage in America suggests that educated women now have a surprising advantage when it comes to matrimony.

WHEN I WAS IN THE FIFTH GRADE IN 1954, my teacher pulled me aside after a class party to give me some friendly advice. "Stephanie," he said, "the boys would like you more if you didn't use such big words." I still remember his exact words, because they came as such a shock. Until that moment, it had never occurred to me that the boys might not like me. My teacher's advice didn't stop me from using big words or aspiring to academic success. I entered the citywide spelling bee that spring and was more upset by coming in second than I had been by my teacher's warning. But while my disappointment at losing the spelling bee quickly faded, the teacher's words stuck in my head. For the next 20 years, I believed that the things I most liked to do and most wanted to be made me less attractive to men.

I certainly wasn't the first girl to grow up thinking that aspiring to higher education or a fulfilling career meant jeopardizing her chance of marriage, motherhood, and personal happiness. As early as 1778, according to Harvard University historian Nancy F. Cott author of the 2000 book *Public Vows History of Marriage and the Nation*, A gail Adams complained to her husband, John, about the fashion of ridiculing female learning. In 1838, a prominent marriage adviser labeled intellectual women "mental hermaphrodites," less capable of loving a man or bearing a child than a "true" woman. In 1873, Dr. Edward H. Clarke, a prominent professor at Harvard Medical School, noted that the rigors of higher education diverted blood from a woman's uterus to her brain, making her irritable and infertile. Women who pursued careers, he warned, had little chance of marrying and even less chance of bearing a healthy child. Early in the next century, another doctor asserted that when women saw themselves as competent in school or at work, they acquired a "self-assertive, independent character, which renders it impossible to love, honor, and obey." In consequence, he complained, middle- and upper-class males were forced to remain single

Stephanie Coontz, a historian at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and director of research and public education at the Council on Contemporary Families, wrote Marriage, a History: How Love Conquered Marriage. *Send comments to magazine@globe.com.*

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or dip into the lower classes to find an "uneducated wife" who would not scorn to perform the duties of her sex.

But such thinking isn't just a relic from an earlier time. New York City economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett made virtually the same point in her 2002 book *Creating a Life: Professional Women and the Quest for Children*, writing that "the more successful the woman, the less likely it is she will find a husband or bear a child." Maureen Dowd seems to think this is still the case, lamenting in her 2005 book *Are Men Necessary? When Sexes Collide* that she would have done better at landing a man if she had become a maid rather than a high-powered *New York Times* columnist. Or as a forbes.com writer put it in an August 22, 2006, column directed at men: "Don't marry a woman with a career." She won't look up to you, warned author Michael Noer; she won't be happy in marriage; she might even cheat on you.

The main reason that educated and high-achieving women have trouble finding or keeping mates, according to observers past and present, is that they won't play dumb enough to assuage a man's ego or act submissive enough to put up with unfair treatment. In the late 19th century, the British philosopher Herbert Spencer worried that women who stepped out of the domestic sphere would lose the evolutionary advantage conferred by their ability to conceal the "antagonism" created by men's "ill-treatment" of them. This ability to hide resentment, he believed, had previously ensured women's survival. Fast forward to 2007. W. Bradford Wilcox and Steven L. Nock, sociologists at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville, write in next month's issue of the journal *Sociological Forum* that women with husbands who earn more than they do have happi- → PAGE 38

PHOTOGRAPH FROM CYNDI FREEMAN PHOTOGRAPHY

er marriages in part because – unlike feminist-minded women – they view their husbands "through rose-colored lenses." In the authors' view, nontraditional women are less ready to create a "family myth" that the division of housework is fair. Unable to conceal the animosity produced by their perception of unfairness, they cause their husbands to emotionally disengage.

The flip side of the dire warnings aimed at educated or high-achieving women is an astonishing contempt for men, whose egos are deemed too fragile to handle an egalitarian relationship. Educated, high-achieving men get hit from two sides. Social scientists claim they won't accept an equal for a wife. But for a century or more, popular culture has portrayed educated men as nerds who aren't studly enough to sexually satisfy a woman. Noted sex researcher Alfred Kinsey perpetuated this myth in the 1950s, says Robert Nye, a historian of sexuality at Oregon State University in Corvallis, when Kinsey concluded from thousands of interviews that, on the whole, educated middle-class men were far too sexually repressed to satisfy their wives. The notion that a woman needs a cowboy or gardener to unleash her sexuality has been a staple of soap operas ever since.

Quite a dilemma. A man needs to feel intellectually superior to a woman to express his virility. But a woman can't find sexual fulfillment with an intellectual man. So what's an educated woman to do? Even if she finds an educated, high-achieving man secure enough to accept her as an equal, he'll be too uptight to satisfy her.

THE MYTH OF THE BITTER, sexually unsatisfied female college graduate has never been true. Surveys from the 1890s to the present reveal that college-educated women have always been at least as satisfied with their emotional and sexual lives as their less-educated counterparts. But until recently, it *was* true that women who completed the highest levels of education or landed high-status, high-paying jobs were less likely than other women to marry and have children. They were often perfectly happy with their choices, but the fact remains that many women did have to choose between family life and achievement in the public sphere.

One reason for this was that men of the past were more interested in marrying someone who would cook or clean for them than in an intellectual equal. In 2001, University of Texas psychologist David M. Buss and colleagues compared mate preferences based on national surveys taken for several decades beginning in 1939. Their research, published in the *Journal of Marriage and Family*, found that in 1956, education and intelligence ranked 11th among the things men desired in a mate. The respondents were more attracted to someone who was a good cook and housekeeper, had a pleasing disposition, and was refined and neat. By 1967, education and intelligence had moved up only one place, to number 10, and still counted for less than being a good cook or displaying neatness and refinement.

As late as the 1980s, US women with PhDs or the equivalent were significantly less likely to marry than women with high school degrees. But this has changed in the past 25 years.

Another reason for the lower marriage rates of educated women was the fact, still true today, that women tend to postpone marriage while they acquire higher education or establish themselves in a career. And back in the 1950s, a marriage postponed was often a marriage forgone. In 1960, the median age of marriage for women was just 20. Half of all women married before they left their teens, and a woman who was still single at the ripe old age of 24 had much less chance of ever marrying than a single woman that age today. She was what the Japanese called "Christmas Cake," unlikely to find a buyer after the 25th. If she had a graduate degree, her chances of marriage were particularly slim. As late as the 1980s, women with PhDs or the equivalent were significantly less likely to marry than women with high school degrees.

But all this has changed in the past 25 years. For one thing, the age at which people marry has risen considerably. The median age for a first marriage nationally is now 25.5 for women and 27 for men. It is even higher for those with graduate degrees. In Massachusetts, the median age at first marriage is 27.2 for women and 29.2 for men. The state's high proportion of never-married individuals (the country's third highest) primarily reflects the fact that Massachusetts residents marry at an older age – not that they will never marry.

In fact, educated women nationwide now have a better chance of marrying, *especially* at an older age, than other women. In a historic reversal of past trends – one

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that is good news for young girls who like to use big words – college graduates and high-earning women are now more likely to marry than women with less education and lower earnings, although they are older when they do so. Even women with PhDs no longer face a "success penalty" in their nuptial prospects. It might feel that way in their 20s, when women with advanced degrees marry at a lower rate than other women the same age. But by their 30s, women with advanced degrees catch up, marrying at a higher rate than their same-aged counterparts with less education.

The same holds for high-earning women. Economist Heather Boushey of the Center for Economic and Policy Research in Washington, D.C., found that women between the ages of 28 and 35 who work full time and earn more than $55,000 a year or who have a graduate or professional degree are just as likely to be married as other working women of the same age. And among women aged 30 to 44 who earn more than $100,000 a year, 88 percent are married, compared with 82 percent of other women in the same age range.

Despite the many scare stories aimed at educated black women, this is one area in which the usual double jeopardy of being black and female does not apply. True, educated black women are less likely to marry than their white counterparts, reflecting the fact that marriage rates among African-Americans are, in general, lower than marriage rates of whites. But having an advanced degree is not an additional impediment to a black woman's chance of marriage. In fact, says economist Elaina Rose of the University of Washington in Seattle, there is now a "success premium" for highly educated black women, who are more likely to get married and also more likely to stay married than other black women. Fewer than 50 percent of African-American women with a high school education are married, compared with more than 55 percent of African-American women with 19 years of school.

All women with PhDs are still slightly less likely to have children than other women, but the difference has been shrinking rapidly. And high-achieving women in general are as likely as other married working women to have children, although, again, they often do so at an older age.

ONE REASON EDUCATED WOMEN are more likely to marry today than in the past is that modern men are less threatened by equality and more interested in finding a mate who can share the burdens of breadwinning. Many studies show that men now want a wife who is at a similar educational or occupational level. The 2001 *Journal of Marriage and Family* paper found that in mate-preference surveys taken in 1985 and 1996, intelligence and education had moved up to number 5 on men's list of desirable qualities in a mate in both surveys, ahead of good looks. Meanwhile, the desire for a good cook and housekeeper had dropped to 14th place in both surveys, near the bottom of the 18-point scale. And in choosing a spouse, males with a college degree rate good looks much lower in importance than do high school graduates. "In a high-achieving man's definition of an A-list woman, the A increasingly stands for 'accomplished,'" says Deborah Siegel, former director of special projects at the National Council for Research on Women, in New York, and coauthor of the forthcoming book *Sisterhood, Interrupted: From Radical Women to Grrls Gone Wild.*

Furthermore, college-educated couples have lower divorce rates than any other educational group. And in the last 30 years, while the marriages of less-educated women became less stable, the marriages of college-educated women became more stable. College graduates are more likely to have egalitarian ideas about sharing housework and breadwinning, and recent research shows that egalitarian ideas and behaviors improve marital satisfaction for both men and women.

Highly educated women are more likely to work outside the home than less-educated women, even after they become mothers. In the past, employed wives tended to divorce at higher rates than non-employed wives, not because working harmed the marriage, but because women who worked had more options to leave a bad marriage. But just last year, a study discovered that wives' full-time employment is now associated with increased marital stability.

So the doomsayers are wrong. Educated men and women are more likely to marry and less likely to divorce than others. And guess what? They have better sex lives, too. According to sociologist Virginia Rutter of Framingham State College, surveys show that educated couples engage in more variety in their sex lives. They are, for example, more likely to participate in oral sex, and educated women are more likely to receive oral sex as well as perform it. "Education breaks down gender taboos that can be at the heart of a lot of sexual disappointments," notes Rutter, "and education helps men in particular to loosen up sexually." Educated husbands are also more likely to help with housework, which turns out to be a potent aphrodisiac. Psychologist John Gottman, professor emeritus at the University of Washington in Seattle, found that when men do more housework, their wives are more likely to be "in the mood" for sex.

So what's left for the scaremongers who want us to believe that women's education and equality are messing up their prospects for happy marriages? It appears to be a variant of my fifth-grade teacher's advice to not use big words. Columnist Noer writes on forbes.com that if a wife outearns her husband, both will be unhappy. And pundits have seized on the work by sociologists Wilcox and Nock to suggest that wearing rose-colored lenses and maintaining a "family myth" of fairness will help women bolster their marriages more than trying to get husbands to share housework and child care. Today's advice to educated women seems to be, have a job if you want, but don't earn too much money or expect too much help at home.

Wrong, and wrong again. Psychologist Rosalind Barnett of Brandeis University and journalism professor Caryl Rivers of Boston University have found that 42 percent of college-educated married women who work outearn their partners, and their marriages are just as stable as those in which the husband makes more than his wife. In fact, Barnett's new study of dual-earner couples, based on data from the 1990s, found that as the wife worked more, the husband's view of the quality of his marriage actually improved. Surveys also show that the longer a woman holds a job, the more child care and housework her husband is likely to do, and that well-educated men have increased their housework more than less-educated ones.

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How about the suggestion that women tamp down their expectations and create a "family myth" of fairness? That's one way to achieve family harmony. But another way is for men to actually do their fair share at home. Studies have shown that men whose attitudes become more egalitarian during their marriage report higher marital satisfaction, and so do their wives; they also have better sex lives and more socially aware children. Among couples with both partners in the workforce – the majority today – men and women who adopt less egalitarian ideas over the years become more psychologically anxious and depressed than their more progressive peers, according to an analysis of dual-earner couples conducted by Jacquelyn B. James, director of research for the Boston College Center for Work & Family.

It's true that when men don't live up to women's expectations of fairness, contemporary wives often become unhappy. And, as my mom's favorite T-shirt put it, "If mamma ain't happy, ain't nobody happy." But one of the biggest predictors that a marriage will be stable and happy, according to Gottman, the psychologist, is if a husband responds positively when his wife expresses a desire for change. It helps if she asks nicely. But it doesn't help if she avoids the issue and lets her discontent simmer.

Modern couples have more to negotiate than couples in the past, and that sometimes leads to conflict. But healthy conflict is often the way to marital growth. And besides, there's always make-up sex – at which college-educated couples no doubt excel. ■

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FOCUS ON YOU - ELEVEN REASONS TO LOVE BEING A WORKING MOM

Balancing work and family is, well, work. But it also brings many great joys.

*By: Mary Mohler, Photo: Anne Ackermann/Getty Images*When I went back to my editing job after my first child was born, I cried on the ride to work every day for a month. I also missed my youngest son's first piano recital because I had to be away at an industry conference—and a decade later, he still talks about it. And I confess to being so burned out on occasion that I secretly moved the clock hands ahead to make my kids' bedtime an hour earlier.

Like any working mom, I've had the usual fantasies about being "just a housewife." But I'm also not the only one to have ever spent the weekend wishing Monday would arrive a day early so I could escape the family fray. I still wouldn't have traded my job—or my kids—for anything. Despite the constant and often chaotic balancing act, the rewards are sweet and rich. I love the life of a working mom. Here are eleven reasons why.

Work is easier than parenting ?

For me, the constant structuring of days for three small children was like trying to nail jelly to the wall. I'm far better at meeting people and writing about them, and I thrive on the urgency of a deadline. Work not only provides an outlet for my ambition and creativity, it also presents order—and an assistant. Bliss!

? but being a parent makes me a better person

There's a whole part of me I'd never have discovered if I didn't have children—and it's one of the better parts. No other experience in life could have taught me that I'm capable of loving and nurturing another person to such great lengths. Without my three kids, I could have been one of those pinch-faced overachievers still in her office at 8:00 p.m. It wouldn't have made me happy. And I wouldn't have learned how much I actually like Chutes and Ladders.

I'm a good role model

I was delighted to come across a recent study showing that working moms boost their daughters' self-confidence in their later careers. Also, my sons have learned that the effort that goes into running a family is not "women's work." Since they were little, the boys have cleared the table, filled and emptied the dishwasher, made beds and taken turns helping me in the kitchen.

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Now that my kids are in college, they're also proud of what I do as a writer and editor—and my sons, at least, are extremely impressed to find Derek Jeter's phone number in my Rolodex.

Work enriches my marriage
I love sharing my day with my husband, and I'm certain the dialogue would be less fun if my day were all about changing diapers, making playdates and picking up toys numerous times. Sure, kids do say the darndest things, but not enough to keep a couple's intimacy going. When my husband comes home from work armed with tales of office intrigue, I have my own stories, too. That brings a spark and energy to our married life.

I can abandon Stepford-wife standards of housekeeping
I grew up in a home where tables always wore tablecloths, and milk or juice was carefully decanted into a pitcher. Beds did not remain unmade past breakfast, and spring leaning was a holy rite. Happily, because I'm a working mom with multiple children, I am excused from this level of domestic duty. Not that I don't like the look of polished silver and spotless floors. But I'd rather read, hang out with the kids or talk with friends. And if I really need the place spruced up for a special occasion, well, that's why God created Merry Maids.

I bonded with the babysitter (as well as with my kids)
I know women who decided to stay home because they were afraid "the other mommy" would take their place in their children's hearts. I, on the other hand, don't see any competition. I've had a total of four different babysitters, all of them beloved by my children (and me)—proof that kids have an amazing capacity for love. The fact that they adore their caregiver doesn't mean they have less love for Mom. Ultimately, I'm the one who's been there for them for better, for worse, forever. I'm the one who read them bedtime stories, shaped their values, helped with their homework and kissed their boo-boos. Granted, sometimes I kissed the day's boo-boos after the sitter already did, but that just tells you my kiss had the magic. What child asks the sitter to kiss a boo-boo after Mommy?

My kids spend more time with Dad
My working means my husband has been more involved in day-to-day family routines.

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Balancing work and family is, well, work. But it also brings many great joys.

Not that he doesn't love the kids, but let's be real: Most men I know opt for Fun Duty as opposed to Diaper Detail or Get-Ready-for-School Tasks. Because I have a job that requires at least as many hours as my husband's, he knew he had to contribute more than just horsey-back rides to the household. Men shouldn't get extra credit for child-care, but they often do. As a working mom, I can more easily negotiate these responsibilities on a level playing field.

At the office, good work gets recognized

A 3-year-old doesn't give you an annual review, a raise or a promotion. And a teenager will be happy to give you feedback, but I've found it's seldom the kind that will bolster your sense of self-worth. It's not that raising children doesn't bring enormous rewards, but work provides a tangible sense of accomplishment that you can't get from child rearing until you harvest the joy of grandkids. Also, I get an excuse to wear really nice shoes.

I'm more disciplined now

I'm a closet slacker. Left to my own devices, I'd probably never get out of my pj's. But you know the old saying: "If you want something done, ask a busy person." Some people have that scheduling and prioritizing gene, but I'm not one of them. Going to work and having deadlines force me to mimic those military-precision moms and be ruthlessly efficient in order to fit everything in.

I can afford a little luxury

My idea of heaven is an hour-long massage or pedicure. The fact that I bring money into the household makes me feel better about the occasional splurge. Staying home is no less taxing or fatiguing than going to an office—and probably more so—but when we earn an income, we don't have to ask anybody's permission to indulge ourselves now and then.

My kids are more than all right

My kids did not grow up believing that they were the center of the universe. They had responsibilities—for themselves, for each other and for the household. Sometimes, I confess, I felt bad about that, especially when I saw how catered to some of their classmates were. But in spite of the alarmist headlines linking working moms to kids' slower learning or day-care aggression, my children have developed just fine.

Elizabeth, an activist on campus, will soon graduate from Georgetown University. David's studying archeology and girls at the University of Arizona. Ted plays guitar like a rock star, which he'll probably become one day. I have every hope that they will continue to thrive and even find future gainful employment. But it's not their success in the world's terms that pleases me most—it's that my kids are well adjusted, kind, adventurous, generous and maddeningly independent.

A couple of weeks ago, I heard Elizabeth comparing her brothers favorably to two cousins whose views of women, she thinks, are slightly to the right of Neanderthal. "I think the difference is that they didn't grow up with a working mom," she said, "so they have no idea what women are really like." Right on!

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THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

The Faculty

From the issue dated December 5, 2003

http://chronicle.com/free/v50/i15/15a00101.htm

How Babies Alter Careers for Academics

Having children often bumps women off the tenure track, a new study shows

By ROBIN WILSON

Last year Jenny Spinner, an aspiring English professor, landed four job interviews, a feat that would make any graduate student proud. But as a nursing mother with a 5-month-old son at home, what should have been a happy time turned harrowing.

On each campus trip, Ms. Spinner brought along her curriculum vitae, a suitcase, and a breast pump, which she used every few hours around the clock. She pumped wherever she could -- in a faculty conference room while a secretary guarded the door and in a bathroom stall of a classroom building. Then she kept the milk on ice to take home.

Faculty members arranged dinners for times when, as a new mother, Ms. Spinner would normally have been heading to bed. When she found herself nearly dozing off during an interview with a vice provost one afternoon, she knew something had to change.

"I went home and told my husband: 'That's it. I'm not applying for any more jobs now. It's just too much,'" recalls Ms. Spinner, who got one job offer but turned it down because she says the campus wasn't a good "fit" for her. She is 33 and will earn her doctorate in English from the University of Connecticut next spring.

Her son, Aidan, is now 16 months old and she is starting to cut back on breast-feeding in preparation for a new round of job interviews. But Ms. Spinner's problems negotiating the academic world with a child in tow are just beginning, according to a new study, which says that having children wreaks havoc on the careers of academic women.

The study provides what is believed to be the first national data on how professors with children fare in academe. While having children, particularly early on, can severely damage the job prospects of women, fatherhood is actually a boon to academic men, it found.

Mary Ann Mason, dean of the graduate division at the University of California at Berkeley and the study's director, dubbed her project: "Do Babies Matter?" It is based on data collected until 1999 by the federal government from 160,000 people who earned their doctorates between 1978 and 1984, and continued working in academe.

Ms. Mason completed the study with Marc Goulden, a research analyst at Berkeley. She delivered a paper based on the study at a conference in October, and it will be published in the *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* next year. She says she wanted "to address the question my women graduate students always ask me, Is there a good time to have a baby?"

Kids After Tenure

The worst time for women who pursue careers in academe to have a baby is within five years of earning a Ph.D., the study found. Women who do have babies then are nearly 30 percent less likely than women without babies ever to snag a tenure-track position. And of those women in the study who had babies early on, only 56 percent earned tenure within 14 years after receiving their Ph.D. Of men who became fathers early on, 77 percent earned tenure. Of men who never had babies, 71 percent got tenure.

"Women are doing part-time things, or staying at home for a while, which is quite appropriate when children are small," says Ms. Mason. But jumping back onto the tenure track after a few years off frequently proves impossible, she says.

The study also looked at how putting an academic career first, at least for a while, affected the chances that academic men and women would eventually have a family. "What happens to the men and women who secure that first assistant-professor job before becoming parents?" Ms. Mason asks in her paper. "Will they still have a baby?" The answer, she says, is that "men