# THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

## Census 2000

# Women, Men, and Work

*By Liana C. Sayer, Philip N. Cohen, and Lynne M. Casper*

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# FOREWORD

In December 1862, Abraham Lincoln struggled to maintain support for the Civil War. Several months before, he had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, a key step in transforming a war to save the Union into a war to end slavery. This was a deeply unpopular move among many, even on the Union side. The war itself was becoming a disaster. The president had recently fired the cautious George McClellan, commander of the largest Union army. His replacement, Ambrose Burnside, was in the process of leading that army to its costly and demoralizing defeat at Fredericksburg, just 30 miles away from the White House, where President Lincoln was revising his annual message to Congress.

Not, one would have thought, a moment when the Commander-in-Chief's mind would be on long-range demographic projections. But that 1862 annual message devoted several paragraphs to a summary of the growth of the American population, with tabular data from decennial censuses from 1790 through 1860, calculations of the growth rate, and projections for 70 years into the future. This was not, of course, an academic exercise. Lincoln was concerned to show the feasibility of a major peace proposal, to borrow enough money to compensate Southern slaveholders for the emancipation of the human beings they considered their "property." With the expected growth of the population, Lincoln argued, there would be plenty of prosperous Americans to share the burden of the national debt.

Today, we face dilemmas of our own—in political, social, and economic life; in our families and neighborhoods and workplaces. None of these, certainly, is so great as the agonizing choices faced by Lincoln. But his example is still valid. Now, as then, a deep understanding of the American population, and how it is changing, is an essential underpinning for decisions of all sorts. Now, as then, the first source to consult is the decennial census, our national record of two centuries of growth, transformation, and movement.

This series of reports from the Russell Sage Foundation and the Population Reference Bureau, The American People, sets the results of Census 2000 in context. Growth of the overall population is only one part of the story. The transformation of our experience of race, the growth of new minorities, immigration of millions from Latin America and Asia, the aging of the largest-ever generation (the baby boomers), migration to the West and South, the growth of outlying suburbs, the transformation of family and work, the well-being of children—all these build the national stage on which our dramas of the next few decades will be enacted.

The reports in this series cover all these issues, using the census and other data sources, collectively providing a portrait of the American people in a new century. The first in the series looks at the census itself, a technical triumph of applied social science in an increasingly politicized environment. Subsequent reports in the series investigate the experiences of major racial and ethnic groups, immigrants, and Americans of different generations, the growth of new regions, and changes in household life. Each is written by an author or team of authors selected for their expertise with the data and broad understanding of the implications of demographic trends.

The Russell Sage Foundation and the Population Reference Bureau were both founded in the early decades of the 20th century, closer to Lincoln's time than to our own. Both are dedicated to bringing the results of first-rate social science to those who can use the results for practical improvements in public life. Both institutions, in particular, have a long record of elucidating the results of the decennial censuses.

President Lincoln, by the way, brilliant as he was, did not turn out to be much of a forecaster. He expected an American population in 1930 of 252 million; the number actually enumerated that year was just under half that size. The population of the United States did not exceed the number he expected by 1930 until the 1990 Census. We no longer expect U.S. presidents to do their own demography; that is probably progress.

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# Women, Men, and Work

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## INTRODUCTION

In 1997, Robert Reich made what he described as one of the most painful decisions of his life. He resigned from his job as the United States Secretary of Labor. Why? He wanted to spend more time at his other job: being a good dad to his two teenage boys in Boston.

Two years earlier and a quarter of the way around the globe, Penny Hughes, then president of Coca-Cola U.K. and Ireland, resigned from her job to care for her two young sons and pursue other interests.

These two examples represent choices made by two people at the pinnacle of their careers in order to strike a more reasonable balance between work and family. These are of course unusually rich and successful people who can afford to resolve work and family conflict by withdrawing from paid work. But difficult work and family choices are also made by families of more modest means.

In April 2004, Zoila and Manuel Martínez testified in front of the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Subcommittee on Children and Families about the difficulties they face arranging their lives to earn enough to support their family and to provide adequate care for their two school-age children and Zoila's diabetic mother. Zoila and Manuel work the equivalent of three full-time jobs to make ends meet; with the help of their employer, they organize their paid work schedules to maximize the time one of them can care for their children and to minimize child-care costs. While these choices are not necessarily available to all women and men, they illustrate solutions to the dilemma faced by the vast majority of people in this country as they arrange and rearrange their lives to accommodate the demands of work and family.

Work and family are the two most important domains of adulthood, and both involve time and labor. Paid work outside the home is necessary for the income it provides to purchase food, shelter, health care, and other goods and services on which individuals and families rely. Paid work also provides people with a sense of purpose and satisfaction, although it can produce stress. Unpaid work within the home—cooking, cleaning, shopping, home maintenance, and caring for children—is also necessary for the health and well-being of individuals and families. As with paid work, unpaid work provides satisfaction and fulfillment, but much of this work is mundane and tedious.

In the United States paid and unpaid work have been historically divided along gender lines. For example, in the 1950s men were typically breadwinners who worked outside the home for pay, and women were homemakers who worked at home to ensure the smooth functioning of everyday life. Even when families differed from this "separate spheres" arrangement, men still had primary responsibility for supporting the family whereas women had primary responsibility for childrearing and housekeeping. This arrangement was well suited to a time in which the vast majority of women and men were married, could maintain a comfortable standard of living on one salary, and could count on their partner to provide that part of work they were not doing themselves. In stark contrast, today many women and men such as Robert Reich, Penny Hughes, and the Martínezes participate in both work spheres. Increases in divorce and single parenthood, changes in attitudes

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**Note: The authors contributed equally to this report and are listed in reverse alphabetical order. The findings and opinions expressed are attributable to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the National Institute of Child Health and Human Development.**

about appropriate adult roles for women and men, changes in the economy, and rising demands for consumer goods have impelled more women and men to combine paid work and unpaid work. Although this arrangement yields positives—increased satisfaction for women from paying jobs and for men from participating more in family life—it also yields negatives, including increased time pressures, stress, and poor health outcomes.

The shift in the gender division of labor has created new work and family challenges throughout society. On an individual level, every man and woman is confronted with the challenge of arranging their lives to meet both types of work demands, and the decisions they make affect their co-workers, spouses, children, other family members, and even employers. According to a recent study, eight of 10 American adults say they have problems and stress in their lives and nearly two of three say their stress level is higher than they would like it to be.[1] Women and men who said that they are stressed out reported feeling more stress in their lives than they did even five years ago, and both blame trying to integrate work and family. Women are more likely to claim their lives are stressed than men, and the primary source of stress differs: Women blame family work more and men blame paid work more.[2] Stress weakens the body's ability to fight off sickness and also causes or worsens hypertension, cardiovascular disorders, migraine headaches, cancer, arthritis, respiratory disease, ulcers, colitis, and muscle tension. Stress is a source of anxiety, panic attacks, depression, eating disorders, hypochondria, and alcoholism, and is the second most disabling illness for workers after heart disease.[3]

Employers are aware of work-family conflicts and their effects on worker absenteeism, productivity, and turnover. Some have adopted policies and practices to deal with them such as providing onsite elder care and child care, flextime and flexible work arrangements, and paid leave banks. Policymakers too, have begun to focus on the problem and in 2003 introduced various bills related to work and family issues including the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2003, the Family Time and Workplace Flexibility Act, and the Family and Medical Leave Expansion Act. Nonetheless, the United States still lags behind other countries in the support it provides for women and men trying to integrate work and family responsibilities.

For several decades, conflicts between work and family were defined as women's issues because, since 1950, women's work and family roles have changed more dramatically than men's. Women in the 1950s, such as Marion Cunningham on "Happy Days" or June Cleaver on "Leave It to Beaver," got married and had children soon after they graduated from high school and devoted their work time exclusively to unpaid work in the home. By contrast, women in the new millennium, such as Monica, Phoebe, and Rachel on the popular television series "Friends," hold down jobs and live on their own before getting married and most remain in the labor force even after starting a family.

Compared with women, men's work lives have changed relatively little; the vast majority of men in both time periods were employed full time. Recent evidence suggests, however, that men are beginning to change their behavior in unpaid work within the home. The 1990s saw the emergence of a new "fatherhood" movement, questioning assumptions that men's family responsibilities were only financial. Many men have increased their share of family work and some have even given up their jobs entirely to become at-home-dads. Additionally, in a recent study, more than four of five young men declared that having a job schedule that allows for family time is more important to them than money, power, or prestige.[4] Yet important gender differences still exist in the time devoted to work and the type of work done, suggesting that inequalities still remain. Women continue to be less likely to work for pay, and when they do they work fewer hours than men. Women are also more likely to do unpaid family work and devote more hours to this type of work than men do.

Why has this situation changed so dramatically over such a short period of time? Far-reaching shifts in gender relations, family structure, and the economy have altered the context in which work occurs. Changing attitudes about the appropriate roles for men and women have made it more acceptable for women to engage in paid work outside the home and for men to participate in unpaid domestic work within the home. Delays in marriage, declines in fertility, and increases in cohabitation and divorce mean adults, especially women, are spending less time married and raising children and more time working for pay.[5] Increased educational levels of women, shifts in the skills required and valued by firms, and a greater demand for "female" labor have made it easier for women to find and keep good jobs. At the same time, declining wages for men with less than a college education and the loss of manufacturing jobs (usually held by men) have increased the need for women to work for pay.[6] The demand for consumer goods and services has risen dramatically over the past several decades. For many families, no longer is one car or television enough. Home computers and CD and DVD players are now considered a must. Fifty years ago these things did not even exist.

In past decades, most research on gender and work focused on the causes and consequences of women's dramatic increase in paid work. But now that changing patterns of unpaid work among men are garnering increased attention, scholars have turned toward examining women's and men's paid and unpaid labor. Issues of gender equality, gender differences, and "appropriate" adult roles for women and men are fundamental to questions about the changing nature of work. Whether the issue is the division of labor in and out of the home, the breakdown of the traditional family and its future, the entry of women into previously male-dominated occupations, or welfare reform, the debate inevitably returns to the question of gender equality.

Sociologists and demographers have long recognized the interconnectedness of people's family and work lives. A decade ago, prominent demographer and sociologist Andrew Cherlin noted that the steady movement of married women into the labor force is the "only constant" in the turbulent work and family landscape of the last 50 years.[7] In the past decade, the pace of change in work and family lives has slowed considerably,[8] suggesting that the decisions people make about with whom to live and how, whether to work in the labor market, and how much—and the context of opportunities and constraints in which they make these decisions—are related in fundamental ways. But have we reached a plateau in the pervasive increase in women's paid work and is this connected to a slowdown in the transformation of work and family lives as well? Did the trend toward greater gender similarity in employment and household labor continue through the 1990s? Has the story of gender equality changed over recent cohorts and does it differ for people in different types of families with different skills? What has had the most impact on changing gender equality in paid and unpaid work?

In this report, we begin by describing changes in society that set the context for changes in women's and men's paid and unpaid labor. We then assess how women's and men's work lives have changed over the past three decades and whether they are becoming more or less equal. We describe some of the leading theories proposed to explain the allocation across gender lines between paid and unpaid work. Because changes in family structure and skill levels have affected men and women differently, we then investigate how they have altered men and women's paid and unpaid work. Finally, because population change occurs in part because of shifts in the composition of the population, such as in the percent of people in various family statuses, and partly because of changes in people's behaviors, we attempt to sort out which factor is the most important in driving change in women's and men's work and in reducing the gender gap in both work domains.

We concentrate mainly on the 1980 to 2000 time period because this affords the most comparable data on paid and unpaid work and family arrangements and because trends for earlier periods are well documented elsewhere.[9] Unless otherwise noted, we restrict our analysis to adults between the ages of 25 and 54 because this is the age range during which women and men are most likely to be combining work and family responsibilities in their own households.

## A CHANGING ECONOMY AND SOCIETY

Young women today begin their lives much differently than women did in the mid-20th century. Consider the life of a young woman reaching adulthood in the 1950s or early 1960s. Such a woman was likely to marry straight out of high school or take a clerical or retail sales job until she married—and was not likely to go to college. She would have moved out of her parents' home only after she married. She was likely to have children soon after she married and in the unlikely event that she was working when she became pregnant, she would probably have quit her job and stayed home to care for her children while her husband had a steady job that paid enough to support the entire family.

Young women's lives follow a very different course today. A young woman reaching adulthood in the early 2000s is not likely to marry before her 25th birthday. She is likely to strike out on her own before marrying and may live with a partner or live on her own or with roommates before she marries. She is more likely than not to attend college and work at a paid job before and after marrying. She is not likely to drop out of the labor force after she has children, although she may curtail the number of hours she is employed to balance work and family responsibilities. She is also much more likely to divorce compared with a young woman in the 1950s, increasing the chances that she will need to work for pay to support herself and perhaps her children. Even if she remains married and prefers not to have a job, she may find she needs to work outside of the home so that the family can makes ends meet. Similar to her counterpart in the 1950s, this woman is likely to bear the responsibility for unpaid work within the home, although she is likely to devote fewer hours to housework.

Men's lives have not changed nearly as drastically, although they have experienced many of the same changes with regard to family patterns. Compared with the 1950s and 1960s, men are marrying later, having fewer children later in their lives, and are more likely to divorce. However, unlike women, most men were employed full time in the 1950s and 1960s and continue to be employed full time today. The big changes in men's lives have occurred in terms of household labor. More men today do not have spouses to perform unpaid work within the home, so they are doing it themselves. Even among married men, the amount of time spent caring for their children and doing housework has increased, in part because their wives are spending more time in paid work and thus have less time available for household work.

Although these scenarios depicting change in people's lives are truer for white and middle-class men and women than for minorities and the poor, most of these differences are matters of degree; the norms described here have been remarkably widely held. This sketch shows in broad strokes how life has changed for women and men in recent generations.

Many of the changes in when women and men finish their education, marry, have children, and enter the labor force reflect changed economic circumstances since the 1950s. After World War II, the United States enjoyed an economic boom characterized by rapid economic growth, nearly full employment, rising productivity, higher wages, low inflation, and increasing earnings. The economic realities of the 1970s and 1980s were quite different. The two decades following the 1973 oil crisis were decades of economic uncertainty marked by a shift away from manufacturing and toward services, stagnating or declining wages (especially for less-educated workers), high inflation, and a slowdown in productivity. The 1990s were just as remarkable for the turnaround: sustained prosperity, low unemployment, albeit with increased inequality in wages, but with economic growth that seems to have reached many in the poorest segments of society.[10]

Material aspirations were lower during the mid-20th century, following 15 years of reduced consumption during the Great Depression of the 1930s and the war years of the early 1940s, than they are now. Despite the labor force difficulties for unskilled workers in the 1970s and 1980s, rising affluence continued in the United States. Per capita income and family income rose even as men's wages stagnated because women contributed earnings in a growing number of families. Demand for consumer goods continued to increase despite the labor force difficulties that many less-educated workers faced. Expectations of "minimal standards of living" continued to rise and were substantially higher than at mid-20th century. These rising expectations created additional pressures for more market work on the part of women to meet families' consumption goals.

## Changing Work and Family Norms

In 1950, there was one dominant and socially acceptable way for adults to live their lives. Those who deviated could expect to be censured and stigmatized. First and foremost, adults were expected to form a family. The idealized family consisted of a homemaker-wife, a breadwinner-father, and two or more children. Most Americans shared an image of what a family should look like and how everyone should behave. These shared values reinforced the importance of the family, the institution of marriage, and the division of paid and unpaid labor along gender lines.[11] This vision of family life showed amazing staying power, even as its economic underpinnings were eroding.

For this 1950s-style family to thrive, Americans had to support distinct gender roles and the economy had to be strong enough for a man to financially support a family on his own.[12] Government policies and business practices perpetuated this family type by reserving the best jobs for men and discriminating against working women when they married or had a baby. After 1960, women and minorities gained legal protections in the workplace and discriminatory practices began to recede. A transformation in attitudes toward family behaviors also occurred. People became more accepting of divorce, cohabitation, nonmarital childbearing, voluntary childlessness, and sex outside marriage; less certain about the universality and permanence of marriage; and more tolerant of blurred gender roles.[13] The realization that marriage is no longer the only avenue to certain benefits such as companionship, raising children, and income pooling, has made marriage more of an individual choice and less a requirement for adulthood. Among many adults, cohabitation and nonmarital childbearing are now seen as acceptable alternatives.

As women have become more similar to men in the labor market, attitudes about women's labor force participation have become increasingly liberal. Since the 1970s there has been a relatively steady increase in approval of women's paid work. Nonetheless, disapproval remains of *mothers* working outside the home, more so among men than among women and particularly when young children are involved. That is, popular ideas about women's place in the workforce have become much more supportive of paid work for women, but many people are still concerned about the consequences for children of both parents combining paid work with family responsibilities.

Data from the General Social Survey show that the percent of Americans, men or women, who disapprove of a married women working even if her husband can support her declined from about one-third to under one-fifth between 1977 and 1998 (see Table 1). A dramatic decline also occurred in the percent agreeing it is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself. In 1977, more women than men (61 percent and 53 percent, respectively) agreed with the statement, but by 1998 agreement slipped to 19 percent for both men and women.

Men and women disagree to a greater extent as to whether it is better if a man achieves outside the home and a woman cares for home and family. Although both women and men are much less likely to agree with this gendered division of labor in 1998 than they were in 1977, slightly more men (36 percent) than women (34 percent) continue to favor specialization.

Fewer people are concerned about women combining paid work and childrearing than in the past, as

*Table 1*

### CHANGE IN ATTITUDES ABOUT WOMEN'S ROLES AS WIFE, MOTHER, AND WORKER, 1977 AND 1998

| | 1977 | | 1998 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attitudes about gender roles** | **% women** | **% men** | **% women** | **% men** |
| Disapprove of married woman working if her husband can support her. | 35 | 32 | 18 | 17 |
| Agree it is more important for a wife to help her husband's career than to have one herself. | 61 | 53 | 19 | 19 |
| Agree it is better for everyone if man achieves outside home and woman takes care of home and family. | 63 | 69 | 34 | 36 |

| | 1977 | | 1998 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Attitudes about mother's paid work and childrearing** | **% women** | **% men** | **% women** | **% men** |
| Say a working mother cannot have as warm and secure relationship with child as nonworking mother. | 45 | 58 | 25 | 41 |
| Say a preschool child is likely to suffer if mother works. | 63 | 73 | 37 | 49 |

Source: Authors' tabulations of the General Social Survey (GSS), 1977 and 1998.

smaller percentages of both women and men think children will suffer if a mother is employed outside the home. A large gender difference exists, however, in these responses, and a relatively high proportion of men still question whether children do as well when their mother works for pay. Forty-one percent of men, compared with 25 percent of women, feel a working mother cannot have as warm and secure a relationship with her child as a mother who is not employed. And nearly half of men and more than one-third of women still feel that a preschool child is likely to suffer if a mother works for pay. By 1998, women and men seemed to hold similar attitudes about the desirability of women holding a job but differed when it came to believing children would suffer negative effects if their mothers worked, with men expressing greater concern about the costs to children and family life.

While the transformation of many of these attitudes occurred throughout the 20th century, the pace of change accelerated in the 1960s and 1970s. A new ideology was emerging during these years that stressed personal freedom, self-fulfillment, and individual choice in living arrangements and family commitments.

# CHANGES IN PAID AND UNPAID WORK

People seek employment out of economic need, because work provides a sense of purpose and an arena for social contact—and because of cultural beliefs that assign prestige to people who are employed. Employment rates and levels are also influenced by life course stage and, increasingly, education.

## Paid Work

Paid work tends to be less common among women and men under age 25, many of whom are still in college, and for those over age 55, many of whom are retired. More highly educated women and men are more likely to work for pay than are less educated women and men. Gender is also related to workforce participation, but it matters less than it used to because sharply demarcated adult roles associated with marriage and parenting have eroded since the 1970s and women have become more educated and skilled over time. As such "supply" factors and cultural attitudes toward employment shift, so too does the pattern of opportunities and constraints people face when they decide whether to work and then try to get a job. For example, many employers depend on female employees and workplaces have become more hospitable to women.

Without a doubt, the most remarkable transformation in work in the last century was the increase in women's paid work. Women's employment rates climbed throughout the 20th century, but then skyrocketed between the 1950s and the 1980s with the surge of women with children entering the labor force.[14] Between 1950 and the mid-1960s, older women who had completed childbearing (and in many cases childrearing) accounted for most of the increase, in part because high rates of early marriage and fertility over this period limited the labor supply of young women.[15] Since the late 1960s, however, paid work has increased fastest among younger women, in particular among mothers with young children.[16] Substantial increases continued through the 1980s but have slowed over the past decade to an incremental trickle, as shown in Table 2 (page 6). Thus, after decades of monumental progress toward narrowing the gender gap in paid work, the revolution in women's paid work appears to have stalled.

The proportion of women ages 25 to 54 who were employed increased 16 percent in the 1980s, from 67 percent to 78 percent, but grew only an additional 1 percent in the 1990s. Over the same period, the proportion of men who were employed in the previous year fell slightly, from 93 percent in 1980 to 90 percent in 2000. Consequently, the gap separating women's and men's employment rates narrowed more sharply in the 1980s

*Table 2*

**PAID WORK FOR WOMEN AND MEN AGES 25–54, 1980–2000**

| | Women | | | Men | | | Ratio women/men (per 100) | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Paid work** | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** |
| Percent employed previous year* | 67 | 78 | 79 | 93 | 92 | 90 | 72 | 85 | 88 |
| Percent employed full-time/year-round** | 32 | 42 | 46 | 69 | 68 | 68 | 46 | 62 | 68 |
| Average annual hours employed*** | 1,037 | 1,305 | 1,396 | 1,955 | 1,951 | 1,950 | 53 | 67 | 72 |

* Ratios are the number of women employed in the previous year for every 100 men employed in the previous year.

** Ratios are the number of women employed full-time/year-round for every 100 men employed full-time/year-round.

*** For those employed, ratios are the number of hours women work for pay for every 100 hours men work.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

than in the 1990s: 72 women were employed for every 100 men in 1980, increasing to 85 per 100 in 1990, and to 88 per 100 in 2000.

Although examining employment differences in the past year provides us with valuable information about the continued transformation in women's labor force participation, it is perhaps not the most relevant indicator of women's progress in paid work in this day and age. Because women continue to be more responsible for home and family, they have less time to devote to paid work. The inability to work full time can have deleterious consequences for women's careers by reducing the amount of experience they gain over their lifetimes and forcing them into less desirable jobs. Employers may view part-time employees, who are mostly women, as less dedicated and may therefore be less likely to promote them and bestow other work related privileges upon them. Thus, a more relevant approach for examining women's recent progress in paid work is to examine the degree of attachment or commitment to paid work by considering the amount of time spent on the job. Time commitment can be measured by the average annual hours of work among those who are employed or the percent of women and men who are employed full-time/year-round. Perhaps the best measure of equality in paid work is that of full-time/year-round employment since it captures those with the greatest investment in paid work.

Not only are women more likely to be employed than they were two decades earlier, but they also spend more time working for pay. Table 2 shows that the percent of women who were employed full-time/year-round rose from 32 percent in 1980 to 46 percent in 2000, with the majority of change occurring in the 1980s. Here we use the official definition of full-time/year-round work: at least 35 hours per week for 50 weeks. The number of average annual hours women worked (among those who worked) also increased the most between 1980 and 1990—from 1,037 hours to 1,305 hours. By 2000, women worked 1,396 hours per year, an average of 27 hours per week. Over the same period, only slightly more than two-thirds of men worked full-time/year-round and average annual hours declined slightly between 1980 and 2000, again with the majority of this small change occurring in the 1980s.

As the gender gap in employment declined over this period, so did the gap in time spent working for pay. In 1980, there were only 46 women working full-time/year-round for every 100 men, but by 2000 the gap had narrowed to 68 women for every 100 men. Similarly, in 1980 women worked 53 hours for every 100 hours men did, but by 2000 they were putting in 72 hours for every 100 hours men did. Note again that the majority of change occurred in the 1980s.

Employment rates have risen among women and declined among men of all races and ethnicities. Nonetheless, racial and ethnic differentials in employment levels among adults persist, as shown in Box 1.

## Unpaid Work

In the previous section we documented the tremendous increase in women's labor force participation and in the amount of time worked for pay, but the pace of change in the 1990s was much slower than in the 1980s. Has women's and men's unpaid labor in the home also become more similar, and does the pace of change parallel that for paid employment?

While women's entrance into the labor force garnered the attention of researchers for the past 40 years, in the last two decades much attention has also been paid to the trends and gender differentials in unpaid household work. Why? Because time is finite. That is, the amount of time women spend doing household chores takes away from the time they could spend working for pay. In addition, gender specialization in families across the domains of paid and unpaid work is linked to a variety of negative labor market outcomes for women, including lower wages, lower lifetime earnings, diminished career advancement, and occupational segregation. Hence, it is important to know the extent to which women's time continues to be invested more in the family than in the economic sphere and whether the opposite remains true for men.

Decennial census data are well suited to examining gender differences in employment but do not provide information on women's and men's time in unpaid work at home. However, information collected in time diary surveys can fill this gap (see Box 2, page 8).[17] Data on the time adults spend in unpaid work were collected in time diary surveys in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1998-1999, and we use this data to describe differences in women's and men's time spent on unpaid housework

Figure 1 (page 8) shows changes in housework and child care in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999 for women and men ages 25 to 54. Women's total household work—housework and child care—declined from 37.8 hours in 1965 to 23.8 hours in 1999. The entire decline, however, was concentrated in housework, which dropped 13.6 hours per week over the period (from 30.4 hours to 16.8 hours). Although dipping slightly between 1965, 1975, and 1985, time caring for children was nearly the same in 1965 and 1999 (about seven hours per week) despite declines in fertility. Hence, women have balanced increased time in paid work with decreased time in unpaid housework, but have preserved time with children.

*Box 1*

## RACIAL AND ETHNIC DIFFERENCES IN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S EMPLOYMENT

In 2000, 81 percent of white women, 79 percent of black women, 68 percent of Latino women, and 74 percent of Asian women were employed in the previous year (see table). The slightly higher employment rate among white women relative to black women represents a reversal from the historical trend, as throughout the 20th century full-time domesticity was more common among white women than black women.[1] What explains these trends?

Many people assume that women's increased employment results from a drop in men's earnings. That would fit with the historical pattern of black women having higher employment rates than white women. However, we also saw booms in both women's employment and men's earnings simultaneously in the post-World War II period. Moreover, women's employment rates increased faster during the 1980s than they did in the 1990s, even as men's employment rates fell faster during the 1990s.

A closer look at the trends by race/ethnicity shows that white women had the fastest increases in the 1980s. In the 1990s, however, white women's employment increases cooled off, and black women actually had steeper increases, although no group approaches the increases white women had in the 1980s.

One possible reason for white women's higher employment rates could be their more favorable labor "supply" characteristics, particularly higher levels of education. But that has long been the case. A more promising explanation is that the demand for jobs in which white women are concentrated increased more quickly than the demand for jobs typically held by black women. In a separate analysis, sociologist Philip Cohen has shown that in the late 1970s black women were about twice as likely as white women to work in those occupations that subsequently declined at the fastest rates in the following 20 years—and white women were twice as likely to work in the fastest-growing occupations.[2] Thus, economic development was concentrated in those sectors of the economy in which white women were already employed.

As shown in the table, men's employment levels also vary across racial and ethnic groups. In 2000, 93 percent of white men, 79 percent of black men, 87 percent of Latino men, and 90 percent of Asian men were employed during the previous year. Over recent decades, black men's employment rates have declined more than those of other groups. The employment gap between white men and black men increased from 12 percentage points to 14 percentage points between 1980 and 2000. Racial inequality in employment is linked with changes in the industrial structure of the U.S. economy, which has reduced the supply of blue-collar manufacturing jobs and relocated jobs away from areas of black residential concentration.[3] Industrial restructuring has also increased the premium employers place on higher education, and black men continue to lag behind white men in college attainment.

The end result is that gender differences in employment rates have decreased for all groups, although the changes were more modest in the 1990s for all groups except blacks. The employment gender gap has been eliminated among blacks, not because black women's employment rate outstrips that of other women, but because of black men's relatively low levels of employment. The gap is largest among Latinos, but in contrast to blacks this results from Latina women's weak employment picture. Nonetheless, women's and men's economic roles have become much more similar over recent decades for all major racial and ethnic groups.

**Percent of Women and Men Employed Previous Year by Race/Ethnicity, 1980–2000**

| | Women | | | Men | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 | 1980 | 1990 | 2000 |
| White | 68 | 79 | 81 | 95 | 94 | 93 |
| Black | 69 | 75 | 79 | 83 | 82 | 79 |
| Latino | 59 | 66 | 68 | 90 | 89 | 87 |
| Asian/Pacific Islander | 69 | 72 | 74 | 91 | 90 | 90 |

Note: Race/ethnic groups are mutually exclusive, with descending selection: Latino, black, Asian/Pacific Islander, white.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

**References**

1. Bart Landry, *Black Working Wives: Pioneers of the American Family Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000).

2. Philip N. Cohen, "Demanding Work: Black and White Women's Employment, 1976-2000" (unpublished manuscript).

3. Ted Mouw, "Job Relocation and the Racial Gap in Unemployment in Detroit and Chicago, 1980 to 1990," *American Sociological Review* 65, no. 5 (2000): 730-53.

*Box 2*

## TIME DIARY DATA

In time diary studies, respondents are asked to provide a chronological accounting of the previous day's activities from midnight to midnight, including what they were doing, what time the activity started and stopped, where they were, whether they were doing anything else, and who else was present. We use these data to calculate weekly hours of housework and child care. Considerable research has established that estimates of unpaid work from time diary studies are more accurate than estimates from stylized survey questions such as "how much time do you typically spend in [activity] over an average day/week?"[1]

Trends over time in market work are more readily measured than trends in unpaid work. Federal data collections (most important, the Current Population Survey) monitor paid work on a monthly basis in order to produce estimates of unemployment for the system of national accounts. Work done in the home for one's family has never been included in measures of national wealth, such as the gross domestic product, and therefore the measurement of household work has been far less systematic and frequent.

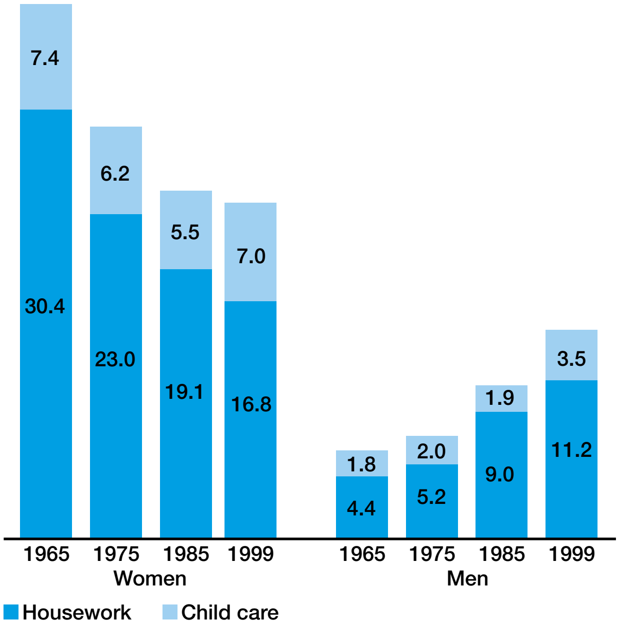
The federal government is currently collecting time diary information in one module of the Current Population Survey. This is the first federal time diary study conducted in the United States; earlier studies were conducted at the University of Michigan (1965 and 1975) and the University of Maryland (1985 and 1998-1999). As a result, existing time use studies have relatively small samples that do not allow examination of time in household labor by detailed family status, race and ethnicity, and socioeconomic differences. They do allow researchers, however, to look at gender differences and change over time.

**Reference**

1. F. Thomas Juster, "The Validity and Quality of Time Use Estimates Obtained From Recall Diaries," in *Time, Goods, and Well-Being*, ed. F. Thomas Juster and Frank P. Stafford (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Survey Research Center, 1995); Margaret M. Marini and Beth A. Shelton, "Measuring Household Work: Recent Experience in the United States," *Social Science Research* 22, no. 4 (1993): 361-82; and John P. Robinson, "The Validity and Reliability of Diaries Versus Alternative Time Use Measures," in *Time, Goods, and Well-Being*, ed. F. Thomas Juster and Frank P. Stafford (Ann Arbor, MI: The University of Michigan Survey Research Center, 1995).

*Figure 1*

## CHANGES IN WOMEN'S AND MEN'S WEEKLY HOURS OF UNPAID WORK, AGES 25–54, 1965–1999



Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

Men's time doing housework and taking care of children more than doubled over the period, rising from 6.2 hours in 1965 to 14.7 hours in 1999. Nonetheless, although the gap is smaller today than in 1965, women continue to do about 40 percent more unpaid work than men. For women, time in unpaid labor declined the most between 1965 and 1975, with slower declines occurring thereafter. For men the story is quite different: Unpaid labor increased the least between 1965 and 1975, while the greatest gains were realized between 1975 and 1985. Increases in men's unpaid labor continued into the 1990s but at a slower pace. Of course the number of hours spent caring for children depends in part on family status—whether one is married or has young children. (We will narrow our focus to examine how gender differences in family status affect unpaid work later in this report.)

Table 3 reports the types of housework women and men did in 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999. Housework is separated into core tasks (cooking meals, meal cleanup, housecleaning, and laundry) and more discretionary and less time-consuming tasks (outdoor chores and repairs, gardening/animal care, and bill-paying).

Most housework time is spent cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry, and women continue to spend more time in these core tasks than do men. Nevertheless, the gap between women's and men's core housework has shrunk substantially. Whereas women put in 12 hours per week for every one hour men spent cooking and cleaning up after meals in 1965, by 1999 women were spending only twice as much time in these activities as men. The ratio of women's to men's time in routine housecleaning and laundry also declined significantly over the period, falling from 18.8 to 1.8 and 29.0 to 4.5, respectively. The dwindling difference between women's and men's cooking and cleaning time is due both to men's increased time in these activities as well as to women's decreased time. Sociologist Liana Sayer finds that two factors contribute to these changes: Fewer women are spending time cooking and cleaning and their average time has declined, whereas more men are spending some time cooking and

*Table 3*

### Trends in Average Weekly Housework Hours for Women and Men Ages 25–54, 1965–1999

| | Women | | | | Men | | | | Ratio women's hours to men's hours | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 1965 | 1975 | 1985 | 1999 | 1965 | 1975 | 1985 | 1999 | 1965 | 1975 | 1985 | 1999 |
| Total housework | 30.4 | 23.0 | 19.1 | 16.8 | 4.4 | 5.2 | 9.0 | 11.2 | 6.9 | 4.4 | 2.1 | 1.5 |
| Core housework (total) | 27.4 | 20.8 | 15.7 | 13.2 | 1.7 | 1.8 | 3.8 | 5.7 | 16.1 | 11.6 | 4.1 | 2.3 |
| Cooking meals | 9.5 | 8.4 | 6.6 | 5.4 | 0.8 | 1.0 | 1.9 | 2.3 | 11.9 | 8.4 | 3.5 | 2.3 |
| Meal cleanup | 4.6 | 2.5 | 1.8 | 1.0 | 0.4 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 11.5 | 12.5 | 6.0 | 1.7 |
| Housecleaning | 7.5 | 6.4 | 5.0 | 4.1 | 0.4 | 0.4 | 1.2 | 2.3 | 18.8 | 16.0 | 4.2 | 1.8 |
| Laundry, ironing | 5.8 | 3.5 | 2.3 | 2.7 | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.6 | 29.0 | 35.0 | 7.7 | 4.5 |
| Other housework (total) | 3.0 | 2.2 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 2.7 | 3.5 | 5.2 | 5.5 | 1.1 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.7 |
| Outdoor chores | 0.2 | 0.6 | 0.4 | 1.0 | 0.5 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 2.2 | 0.4 | 0.7 | 0.4 | 0.5 |
| Repairs | 0.4 | 0.6 | 0.6 | 0.5 | 1.3 | 1.6 | 1.9 | 1.5 | 0.3 | 0.4 | 0.3 | 0.3 |
| Gardening, animal care | 0.6 | 0.5 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.8 | 0.8 | 3.0 | 1.7 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Bills, other financial | 1.7 | 0.6 | 1.6 | 1.3 | 0.7 | 0.7 | 1.6 | 0.9 | 2.4 | 0.9 | 1.0 | 1.4 |

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

cleaning and their average cooking and cleaning times have increased.[18] Laundry appears to be the household task men resist the most. Declines in the gender "laundry" gap are mostly due to the three-hour drop in women's time, likely because of decreased ironing rather than larger increases in men's time. The introduction of permanent-press clothing has reduced the need to iron some clothes. Women today may also be more willing to send clothes to the cleaners for pressing, in contrast to the 1950s when housekeeping standards mandated careful ironing of family members' clothes and even bed linens. Despite lingering differences in laundry, the growing similarity in women's and men's core unpaid work parallels growing similarity in paid work.

In terms of other housework, there was a marginal increase in the time women devoted to these tasks, from 3.0 hours in 1965 to 3.6 hours in 1999; and a larger increase among men, from 2.7 to 5.5 hours over the same period. Except in 1965, when women and men were putting in about the same amount of time, women have spent about 60 percent as much time in noncore housework as men. The distribution of time across tasks has changed somewhat. Since 1985, women and men have been more equal with regard to gardening and animal care than other tasks. In 1999, compared with men, women spent less time doing outdoor chores and repairs and more time paying bills and dealing with other financial matters.

## Change Across Cohorts

As discussed earlier, women's and men's decisions about whether and how much to work both in and outside the home are influenced by the demographic, economic, legislative, and normative environments they experience as they enter adulthood. The societal context in which young women and men evaluate alternative work and family paths (and the array of options available) varies tremendously over time. Consequently, a useful way of examining changing patterns of work given these varied environments is to look at the experiences of different cohorts or generations. A cohort consists of a group of individuals who share a unique constellation of circumstances and is often defined by year of birth. Table 4 (page 10) describes the birth cohorts used in this report—adults ages 25 to 54 in 1980, 1990, and 2000—and details the social and economic circumstances occurring at the time they reached adulthood.

The World War II cohort consists of women and men born from 1936 to 1945 who came of age from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s. The post-World War II period was one of sustained economic growth fueled by an unprecedented expansion of consumption. The G.I. Bill allowed many men to attend college and buy homes in suburban developments that were once farmland. Even among less-educated men, the growth of stable and well-paying blue-collar jobs meant they too could earn a wage sufficient to support a family in middle-class style. Marriage was early and nearly universal. Good economic prospects for the majority of men, in tandem with employment discrimination against married women, also meant this was a period of unusually high fertility and gender specialization, with women tending to the house and children while men provided financially. Despite the economic good times, a family consisting of a breadwinner husband and a caregiving wife was more common among whites than minorities. The growing Civil Rights Movement was demanding that the benefits of economic prosperity be shared more equally among all racial and ethnic groups. Additionally, a revitalized women's movement was gaining strength, calling into question the desirability of the extreme gender specialization characteristic of the 1950s. Both developments set

*Table 4*

## Birth Cohorts by Period of Adult Transitions and Age in 1980, 1990, and 2000

| | | | | Age at U.S. census in | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Birth cohort** | **Description** | **Transition to adulthood** | **Work and family societal context** | **1980** | **1990** | **2000** |
| 1926-1935 | Parents of Baby Boom | Mid-1940s/mid-1950s | Idealization of separate spheres; sustained economic expansion | 45–54 | 55–64 | 65–74 |
| 1936-1945 | World War II | Mid-1950s/mid-1960s | Questioning gender specialization; economic expansion | 35–44 | 45–54 | 55–64 |
| 1946-1955 | Early Baby Boom | Mid-1960s/mid-1970s | Civil Rights Act; sexual freedom; economic restructuring begins | 25–34 | 35–44 | 45–54 |
| 1956-1965 | Late Baby Boom | Mid-1970s/mid-1980s | Demise of male breadwinner model; economic restructuring and downsizing | 15–24 | 25–34 | 35–44 |
| 1966-1975 | Generation X | Mid-1980s/mid-1990s | Shared breadwinning/caregiving; fatherhood rights; economic turbulence; welfare reform | 5–14 | 15–24 | 25–34 |

the stage for a different work and family context experienced by subsequent generations.

The early baby-boom cohort consists of the large numbers of people born from 1946 to 1955 who came of age from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s. This was a period of heady social transformation and continued economic prosperity. The renewed feminist movement was in full swing, supported by passage of landmark legislation such as Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibited firms with 15 or more employees from discriminating on the basis of sex, race, national origin, and religion; passage of Title IX in 1973, which prohibited discrimination against women in federally funded educational institutions; and the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1967, which prohibited discrimination in hiring and firing pregnant women. Additionally, the introduction of the birth control pill and the legalization of abortion helped liberalize attitudes on premarital sex. Together, these shifts led to major expansions in women's educational and economic opportunities and further questioning of sharply differentiated male and female adult roles.

The late baby-boom cohort consists of individuals born from 1956 to 1965. This generation came of age in the mid-1970s to the mid-1980s during economic conditions quite different from those enjoyed by prior generations. When baby boomers hit working age in the 1970s, the economy was not as hospitable as it had been for their parents. These late baby boomers postponed entry into marriage, delayed having children, and found it difficult to establish themselves in the labor market. They came face to face with industrial restructuring and downsizing. Many of the jobs being created replaced or at least complemented work previously done by women at home—cooking and cleaning, caring for the elderly and the sick—and most of these jobs were filled by women who were pouring into the paid labor market.[19] The shift from manufacturing to service industries meant men's job opportunities and wages stagnated while demand for women's labor increased. The necessity of women contributing economically to the family increased over the period, in particular among working-class and nonwhite families. Social change also quieted among increasingly strident claims that women's growing employment opportunities were threatening the future of the family. The optimism of the feminist movement that women could "have it all" was being replaced by growing recognition of the "second shift" of household labor many women experienced after putting in a first shift of paid work.

Finally, the Generation X cohort consists of women and men born from 1966 to 1975 who entered adulthood in the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s. These young adults came of age during more favorable economic times than the late baby-boom cohort but also during times of rapid swings in the business cycle. In general, wage growth was slow, job markets tight, job security shaky, housing costs soaring ever upward, yet unemployment was also low. Times were also better for some groups than others; economic fortunes were increasingly dependent on educational attainment. College-educated workers experienced rising wages and favorable employment opportunities, whereas industrial shifts eroded less-educated men's economic circumstances and meant they could no longer provide a middle-class standard of living for their families on their wages alone. Poor single mothers, facing the slipping economic prospects of potential spouses—and then punitive welfare reform that required paid work—entered employment in increasing numbers. Finally, this generation grew up in an environment of legal and normative equality in opportunity (if not yet equal outcomes) between women and men, and most

*Table 5*

### PERCENT OF WOMEN AND MEN WHO ARE FULL-TIME/YEAR-ROUND WORKERS, BY AGE AND COHORT

| Cohort | Ages 25–34 | Ages 35–44 | Ages 45–54 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Women** | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 44 | — | — |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 42 | 46 | — |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 32 | 43 | 47 |
| 1936-1945 World War II | — | 32 | 41 |
| 1926-1935 Parents of Baby Boom | — | — | 31 |
| **Men** | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 64 | — | — |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 65 | 70 | — |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 66 | 71 | 69 |
| 1936-1945 World War II | — | 73 | 70 |
| 1926-1935 Parents of Baby Boom | — | — | 71 |
| **Ratio women/men (per 100)** | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 69 | — | — |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 65 | 66 | — |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 48 | 61 | 68 |
| 1936-1945 World War II | — | 44 | 59 |
| 1926-1935 Parents of Baby Boom | — | — | 44 |

— Not applicable.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

people in Generation X have reached adulthood expecting to combine employment, marriage, and parenting. While behavior lags normative changes, work and family have been redefined as men's issues too, in part because of the growing cultural emphasis on father's daily involvement with children.

Table 5 shows the percent of women and men who worked full-time/year-round for the parents of the baby-boom, World War II, early baby-boom, late baby-boom, and Generation X cohorts. The rows show changes in labor force attachment as each birth cohort ages; the columns show how labor force attachment has changed across birth cohorts.

The table shows that each succeeding cohort of women had higher rates of full-time/year-round employment. The greatest change for young women occurred between the early baby-boom and the late baby-boom cohorts, with the latter group having a 10-point higher rate of full-time/year-round employment. Among young women, change between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts is relatively small by comparison (only 2 percentage points). Note that large gains were made for women ages 35 to 44 between the World War II and early baby-boom cohorts and for older women between each successive cohort shown in the table. The patterns are the same regardless of whether one examines full-time/year-round employment, labor force participation in the previous year, or the average annual number of hours worked.

Sociologist Suzanne Bianchi's analysis of cohorts through the late baby boom indicated that the replacement of cohorts was an important aspect of women's growing labor force attachment, as younger cohorts with higher rates of full-time/year-round employment "replaced" older cohorts with lower rates of full-time/year-round employment.[20] However, women in one cohort—early baby boomers who brought the feminist movement into the workplace—dramatically increased their employment rates as they moved from early to mid-adulthood. The late baby boomers, despite starting out at higher rates, have not shown the same pattern of increase. Finally, women in the last cohort, Generation X, have started their young adulthoods with only slightly higher rates of employment than previous generations. The patterns of these last two cohorts account for the slower employment growth among women in the 1990s.

Table 5 confirms that men's labor force attachment has remained quite similar across generations. This pattern also holds regardless of whether one examines full-time/year-round work, labor force participation in the past year, or average annual hours worked. This trend, along with the slowing pace of generational change among women, means that gender differences in employment diminished only slightly between the late baby-boom cohort and the Generation X cohort. Despite economic and cultural changes, women's labor force participation, full-time/year-round employment, and hours in the labor force continue to be less than men's. On the one hand, these data make it clear that in the past decade the revolution in women's paid work has sputtered; consequently gender specialization has weakened only slightly and significant gaps in men's and women's labor force attachment still remain. On the other hand, they also indicate that Generation X has not "solved" the problem of managing both work and family responsibilities by retreating to the 1950s pattern of separate spheres because women continue to make small gains relative to men in the sphere of paid work.

Generational changes also occurred in unpaid labor. Table 6 (page 12) shows changes in the number of hours per week women and men spent doing housework. Because the data for this table are from 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999, the cohorts are not exactly the same as those presented in Table 4. With the exception of Generation X, each birth cohort range is actually five years later than the range in Table 4. We could have presented numbers for the exact cohorts in the table, but this would have changed the age ranges. For example, the same group of people who were ages 25 to 34 in the 1980 Census would have been 20 to 29 in the 1975 time diary data. Because both paid and unpaid labor are sensitive to age categories, we kept the age categories the same and used the same cohort labels.

*Table 6*

**AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS OF HOUSEWORK BY AGE, SEX, AND COHORT**

| Cohort* | Ages 25–34 | Ages 35–44 | Ages 45–54 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Women** | | | |
| Generation X | 16.9 | — | — |
| Late Baby Boom | 17.3 | 18.3 | — |
| Early Baby Boom | 20.7 | 20.3 | 14.9 |
| World War II | 30.2 | 23.2 | 20.3 |
| Parents of Baby Boom | — | 31.2 | 26.1 |
| **Men** | | | |
| Generation X | 8.4 | — | — |
| Late Baby Boom | 7.2 | 13.1 | — |
| Early Baby Boom | 4.3 | 10.3 | 12.1 |
| World War II | 3.7 | 5.0 | 10.1 |
| Parents of Baby Boom | — | 4.5 | 7.2 |
| **Ratio women's hours/men's hours** | | | |
| Generation X | 2.0 | — | — |
| Late Baby Boom | 2.4 | 1.4 | — |
| Early Baby Boom | 4.8 | 2.0 | 1.2 |
| World War II | 8.2 | 4.6 | 2.0 |
| Parents of Baby Boom | — | 6.9 | 3.6 |

— Not applicable.

* Birth cohort ranges are five years later than ranges shown in Table 4.

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1965, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

Table 6 shows that, with the exception of Generation X, women are spending appreciably less time doing housework across each successive cohort. Compared with their World War II counterparts, Generation X women are spending about 13 fewer hours per week on housework. Among young women, however, most declines in housework occurred between the World War II and early baby-boom cohorts, concurrent with declines in fertility and the rise of the women's movement. The drop-off in housework seems to have stalled among young women in Generation X; these women are doing nearly the same amount of housework as their late baby-boom counterparts.

In contrast, men in each successive cohort are spending substantially more hours doing housework, with the most substantial gains occurring between the early and late baby-boom cohorts. Generation X men continued the trend toward doing more unpaid labor, but the relative increases were less than they had been in previous generations. Additionally, whereas women reduce housework time as they age, men spend more time in household chores over their life course. For example, whereas the housework gap is 16 hours per week comparing early baby-boom women with men ages 25 to 34, the gap is only three hours per week comparing early baby-boom women and men at ages 45 to 54. Women reduce housework later in their adult lives because the demand for child-generated housework such as daily laundry and frequent housecleaning drops as children grow older. Men may increase housework over their life course because fewer of them at ages 25 to 34 are married and raising children, and those who are married are becoming established in their careers. Empirical research suggests that some couples integrate work and family responsibilities when their children are young by adopting a traditional division of labor, but specialization decreases once children enter school.[21] This pattern may be more common among more recent cohorts, however, as women's greater investments in housework vis-à-vis men continue into older ages for earlier cohorts. Nevertheless, because men are doing more housework and women less, women's and men's housework time is becoming more equal across successive cohorts, although the gains registered by Generation X are relatively small in comparison to previous cohorts.

## Explaining Allocation of Time Between Paid and Unpaid Work

Researchers have advanced three different theories to explain how women and men divide their time between paid and unpaid work. Economic and bargaining perspectives emphasize rationality and relative resources and why allocations should have changed in response to demographic, economic, and normative shifts. The gender perspective emphasizes the resiliency of the gender system and elements that work against change in the division of labor.

Economic models of time use posit that households rationally and efficiently allocate time, typically through specialization of one partner in paid work and the other in unpaid work. The reason specialization is more efficient and the reason men specialize in paid work while women specialize in unpaid work is because of human capital and biological differences. Since women are the ones who bear and care for infants, they are more productive in unpaid work than are men. Since men generally have more education and work experience than women, they are more productive in paid work than are women.[22]

The second perspective focuses on bargaining or exchange among partners. The idea is that the person with more power will do less unpaid work because household labor is less desirable than paid work. People act in their self-interest and use resources such as education and income to strike the best bargain they can. Husbands' higher resources mean they have more leverage to buy out of tasks they do not wish to perform, such as unpleasant domestic chores, and to engage in things they prefer, such as leisure.[23] Additionally, whereas women's education and employment have increased over the past 30 years, they continue to earn less than men; once married, women are more dependent on the economic resources provided by men. As a result, women have less bargaining power and less leverage to negotiate higher levels of housework and child care from husbands. Empirical evidence suggests that men do more unpaid work in the home when their wives earn a higher percent of the household income, especially if women are defined as co-providers.[24]

The third perspective rests on the premise that the purpose of the gendered division of labor is not simply to produce household goods and services but also to define and express gender relations within families. This perspective was developed to explain why women and men in married or cohabiting relationships appear not to simply trade off time spent in paid and unpaid work.[25] Housework and child care are not neutral chores but instead are "symbolic enactments" of unequal gender relations. Women display femininity and family caring by cooking, cleaning, and raising children; men display masculinity by avoiding these same tasks.[26]

Studies show that women and men in marital households, compared with other household types, have the greatest gap in housework time.[27] When couples marry, women's housework hours go up while men's decline.[28] In other words, wives and husbands are displaying their "proper" gender roles through the amount and type of housework they perform.

What do these theories have in common? All suggest that family status—that is, whether one is married, cohabiting, and a parent—affects how women and men allocate their time between paid and unpaid labor. In the next section we narrow our focus to how family status affects paid and unpaid work among women and men.

## FAMILY STATUS

All women and men need to attend to the basics of life: securing money to buy necessities and maintaining their health and well-being and that of their families. Yet the options for meeting these needs are altered by whether one has a partner who can help to meet these needs and whether one is also responsible for children. Because the number of hours in a day is fixed, the work and family roles associated with meeting these needs compete for men's and women's time and energy. Work affects family formation decisions and family formation affects work decisions. Recent evidence suggests that work also exerts a strong influence on the scheduling of day-to-day activities and the organization of family life.[29] Marriage can make things easier because theoretically there are two people available to do the two types of work that need to be done. Historically, many married women specialized in the family sphere by taking primary responsibility for housework and child care, whereas many married men specialized in the work sphere by taking primary responsibility for providing financially for the family. Today, marriage still increases a woman's unpaid labor because she has a new husband to care for, and increases a man's paid labor because he has a new wife to provide for. Children mean more unpaid work because they require regular care and increase the amount of housework a family has to do. Children also increase the paid work needed to cover additional food, clothing, and health care costs. Hence, in married-couple families children tend to increase women's unpaid work and increase men's paid work. Gender roles have become less rigid, and today more couples expect to share responsibility for both work and family spheres. There are also more single-parent families who must manage work and family roles, more couples without children, and more individuals living by themselves. How have these changes affected women's and men's work, and have they led to more or less gender equality across work spheres?

An adequate answer to these questions hinges on understanding how the family has changed. In recent decades the family share of U.S. households has been declining. In 1960, 85 percent of households were family households—households having two or more individuals related by marriage, birth, or adoption; by 2000, just 69 percent of households were family households.[30] At the same time, nonfamily households, which consist primarily of people who live alone or who share a residence with roommates or with a partner, have been on the rise. The fastest growth was among those living alone. The proportion of households with just one person doubled from 13 percent to 26 percent between 1960 and 2000. These changes are important to consider in examining trends in women's and men's work overall because a shift from married-couple households to one-person households affects the choices people have in allocating time between paid and unpaid work and because single childless women and men tend to have more similar paid and unpaid work patterns. Not taking these changes into account could lead one to mistakenly conclude that work allocation has changed when changes are really due to these demographic shifts.

Most of the decline in the number of family households reflects the decrease in the share of married-couple households with children. Declines in fertility within marriage between 1960 and 1975, later marriage, and frequent divorce help explain the shrinking proportion of households consisting of married couples with children. The divorce rate rose sharply between 1960 and 1980 and then eased, while the rate of first marriages declined steadily after 1970. Two-parent family households with children dropped from 44 percent to 24 percent of all households between 1960 and 2000, while single-parent family households grew from 4 percent to 9 percent of all households.[31] These shifts have implications for examining changes in women's and men's work overall because now fewer people have children to care for and women are more likely to be single parents. Again, if we do not take these changes into account, we cannot know whether changes in work are due to changes in work behavior or shifting demographics.

Paralleling changes in work, change in household composition began slowly in the 1960s as society was facing some of the most radical social changes in U.S. history and the leading edge of the huge baby-boom generation was reaching adulthood. The steepest decline in the share of family households was in the 1970s when the first baby boomers entered their 20s. By the 1980s, change was still occurring but at a much slower pace. By the mid-1990s, household composition apparently stabilized.

Television shows reflect the norms and culture of the time periods in which they are set and can help illustrate the changes just described. "Happy Days," a popular sitcom from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s, was set in the 1950s and reflected a time in which young men and women got married relatively young, presumably had children shortly after, and most likely stayed married for life. Although some young women on the show postponed marriage and childbearing, they did not cohabit, live with male roommates, or have children outside of marriage. In stark contrast, the award-winning sitcom Friends, set in the 1990s and the early years of 2000, depicts young adult lives that involved multiple marriages and divorces, opposite-sex roommates, cohabitation, and children born out of wedlock.

To get a better idea of how these two television shows stack up against reality, we can examine changing family statuses among young adults who are just beginning to adopt family and work roles. Table 7 shows the percent of women and men ages 25 to 34 who have remained single (have never been married) and childless (not living in the same house with an own child under age 18) across cohorts. Both women and men are remaining single longer in recent cohorts. For example, 22 percent of Generation X women ages 30 to 34 have never married, compared with only 10 percent of early baby-boom women. Men experienced a similar increase in singlehood. About 29 percent of Generation X men were not married by ages 30 to 34, almost double the percent never married of early baby-boom men.

Generation X women and men are also more likely than past generations to remain childless or delay parenthood well into their 30s. Among women ages 30 to 34, less than one-quarter of early baby-boom women were childless (not living with their own biological, step, or adopted children), compared with nearly one-third of Generation X women. Many Generation X women are simply delaying parenthood until their late 30s, but some will never become mothers. About twice as many women ages 40 to 44 in 2000 (the ages at which most childbearing has occurred) were childless in 2000 compared with 1980 (19 percent versus 10 percent). Higher rates of childlessness as well as delays in becoming a mother appear to be a common strategy among women to increase their chance of landing and keeping a good job and establishing their economic independence.[32] Generational increases in childlessness or delayed parenthood are also apparent among men. As with trends in work, the majority of the increases among men and women who remain single and childless occurred between the early and late baby-boom generations. Change continued to occur between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts, but at a much slower pace.

*Table 7*

### Women and Men Who Have Remained Single and Childless, by Age and Cohort

| | % never married* | | % childless* | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Cohort** | **Ages 25–29** | **Ages 30–34** | **Ages 25–29** | **Ages 30–34** |
| **Women** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 38 | 22 | 49 | 32 |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 32 | 18 | 47 | 30 |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 21 | 10 | 41 | 23 |
| **Men** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 49 | 29 | 69 | 51 |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 45 | 25 | 67 | 47 |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 32 | 15 | 60 | 38 |
| **Ratio women/men (per 100)** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 Generation X | 78 | 76 | 71 | 63 |
| 1956-1965 Late Baby Boom | 71 | 72 | 70 | 64 |
| 1946-1955 Early Baby Boom | 66 | 67 | 68 | 61 |

* Percent remaining single are the percent who have never married. Percent childless are the percent not living with any children under age 18.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

How do young women and men compare in adopting family roles? Simply put, at any given age men are less likely to have these responsibilities than women, but the gap is closing. For example, among 25-to-29-year-olds, men are more likely to remain single than women within each generation. But whereas in the early baby-boom generation there were only 66 never-married women for every 100 never-married men, in Generation X the number increased to 78 women for every 100 men. The patterns are similar for childlessness; more men than women are childless.

Comparing gender differences in remaining single and remaining childless highlights an important finding. Although women and men have become more similar in terms of singlehood, more women than men are raising children and gender differences are quite similar across cohorts. For example, among 30-to-34-year-olds, there were 61 childless women for every 100 men in the early baby boom, compared with 63 per 100 in Generation X. These findings have important implications for women's

*Table 8*

## WOMEN AND MEN AGES 25–34 IN DIFFERENT FAMILY STATUSES, BY COHORT

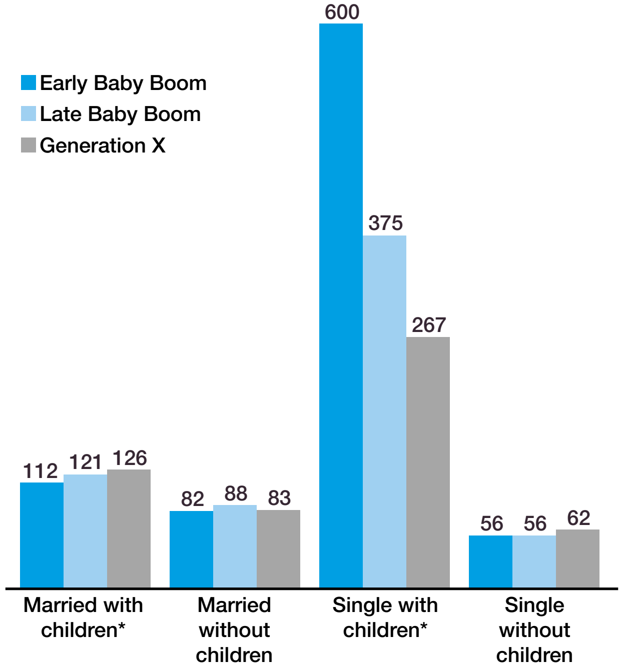
| Cohort | % married with children* | % married without children | % single with children* | % single without children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women** | | | | |
| 1966–1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 43 | 15 | 16 | 26 |
| 1956–1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 47 | 15 | 15 | 23 |
| 1946–1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 55 | 14 | 12 | 18 |
| **Men** | | | | |
| 1966–1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 34 | 18 | 6 | 42 |
| 1956–1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 39 | 17 | 4 | 41 |
| 1946–1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 49 | 17 | 2 | 32 |

* Living with at least one child under age 18.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

*Figure 2*

## NUMBER OF WOMEN AGES 25–34 IN EACH FAMILY STATUS FOR EVERY 100 MEN



* Living with at least one child under age 18.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

and men's paid and unpaid work. The longer people remain single and without children, the fewer family responsibilities they have and the more time they have to get an advanced education and to devote to their careers. The data in Table 7 show that young women continue to be disadvantaged comparatively in terms of parenthood; they are more likely to raise children and are younger when they do so.

Table 7 gives us an idea of how two important domains of family—marriage and parenthood—have changed, but many people get married and don't have children and others have children without getting married. Table 8 shows how the combination of these two statuses has changed over the past three generations among women and men ages 25 to 34, the prime family-building stage. The category "single with children" refers to women and men who are not married (never married, separated, divorced, or married spouse absent) and who are living with a biological, step, or adopted child under age 18. The category includes women and men who are cohabiting with an unmarried partner who may or may not be the child's parent.

Both women and men in Generation X are less likely to be married with children, more likely to be single with children, and more likely to be single without children when compared with previous generations. The greatest changes were in the declines in the proportions married with children: from 55 percent for women and 49 percent for men among the early baby-boom cohort to 43 percent for women and 34 percent for men among Generation X. The proportions who are single people without children also changed dramatically, increasing from 18 percent for women and 32 percent for men in the early baby boom to 26 percent for women and 42 percent for men in Generation X.

How do women and men compare in these family statuses, and are they becoming more or less similar? Figure 2 shows generational differences in the number of women for every 100 men in a given family status. The closer the bars are to 100, the more similar women and men are in their family statuses. Not unexpectedly, more women than men are in the family statuses with children (bars above 100) and more men than women are in the family statuses without children (bars below 100). The gap in the proportions of women and men who are married with children has grown consistently over the past three generations. In the early baby boom there were 112 married women with children for every 100 men. In the late baby boom this number increased to 121 and in Generation X the number was 126. Women and men are the most dissimilar, however, when it comes to single parenting. Differences are less substantial in later cohorts because there was a dramatic increase in the number of single fathers, although even among Generation X relatively few men are in this family status. Whereas there were 600 single mothers for every 100 single fathers in the early baby-boom cohort, the difference fell to 375 single mothers for every 100 single fathers in the late baby-boom generation and to 267 single mothers for every 100 single fathers in Generation X.

At each time point, men are more likely to be in the status with the fewest family responsibilities—single without children—than are women. In the early and late baby-boom cohorts, there were only 56 women for every 100 men in this category, compared with 62 women per 100 men in the Generation X cohort. Men are also more likely than women to be married with no children in each cohort. Thus, more young women than young men continue to occupy the most time-intensive family roles. While more Generation X than early baby-boom fathers are raising children in single-parent families, women are still more than 2.5 times more likely than men to be in the most time-poor family status.

When one considers all parenting combined—single and married—the gender *gap* in parenting responsibilities actually increased from the early baby-boom to the Generation X cohort. Women were about one-third more likely to be parents (married or single) than were men in the early baby-boom cohort, but this gap increased to 50 percent for the Generation X cohort.

*Table 9*

**PAID WORK FOR WOMEN AND MEN AGES 25–54 BY FAMILY STATUS, 2000**

| Paid work | Married with children* | Married without children | Single with children* | Single without children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Worked for pay (%)** | | | | |
| Women | 75 | 81 | 83 | 84 |
| Men | 95 | 90 | 89 | 84 |
| Ratio women/men (per 100) | 79 | 90 | 93 | 100 |
| **Worked full-time/year-round (%)** | | | | |
| Women | 38 | 51 | 49 | 55 |
| Men | 77 | 68 | 62 | 56 |
| Ratio women/men (per 100) | 49 | 75 | 79 | 98 |
| **Average annual hours of work** | | | | |
| Women | 1,233 | 1,514 | 1,473 | 1,600 |
| Men | 2,156 | 1,941 | 1,818 | 1,677 |
| Women's hours as % of men's hours | 57 | 78 | 81 | 95 |

* Living with at least one child under age 18.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

## Paid and Unpaid Work

How do gender differences in family statuses affect paid and unpaid work among the working-age population? In 2000, women's and men's paid work were the most similar when they were single with no children (see Table 9). Single women and men without children were equally as likely to be employed in the previous year (84 percent) and to be working full-time/year-round (about 55 percent). They also had similar average annual hours of work (about 1,600). The greatest discrepancy in paid work is found between women and men who are married with children: Seventy-five percent of married mothers were employed last year, compared with 95 percent of married fathers; 38 percent of married mothers worked full-time/year-round, compared with 77 percent of married fathers; and married mothers worked only 57 percent of the average annual hours of married fathers.

Women and men who are married with no children are more equal in terms of work than their married counterparts who have children. But even though they don't have children, these married women are still much less likely to work full-time/year-round and work many fewer hours than married childless men. These findings indicate that marriage and parenthood augment the gender gap in paid work. Economist Claudia Goldin's longitudinal analysis of cohorts of college graduates indicates that among women from the 1944-1957 birth cohort, fewer than one in five were able to combine full-time/year-round employment with marriage and motherhood continuously over their adult lives. About one-half of women with successful careers had forgone motherhood.[33] While our data are not longitudinal, they suggest that "having it all" continues to be an unattainable goal for many women. Balancing work and family often means making trade-offs such as withdrawing from paid work, shifting from full-time to part-time work, or scaling back career opportunities by switching to less-demanding jobs.[34]

Single mothers and single fathers are nearly as likely to have worked in the past year (83 percent for women and 89 percent for men). But only 79 single mothers for every 100 single fathers work full-time/year-round and they work about 20 percent fewer hours than single fathers. Some readers may be surprised that single fathers work so many more hours than single mothers, but about 62 percent of single fathers are cohabiting, living with their parents, or living with other adults, compared with just 46 percent of single mothers.[35] More single fathers than single mothers have household members who provide child care and help with housework.

Gender differences in the trade-offs between time for childrearing and time for paid employment are evident in the reasons adults give for nonemployment. Data from the 1996 Survey of Income and Program Participation show that among nonemployed women ages 25 to 44, taking care of children or adults was the main reason for not being employed. In contrast, men were more likely to cite long-term health problems and disability as reasons for not being employed. Only 2.6 per-

*Table 10*

### Average Weekly Hours of Unpaid Work for Women and Men Ages 25–54 by Family Status, 1999

| Unpaid work | Married with children | Single without children |
|---|---|---|
| **All housework** | | |
| Women | 20.0 | 11.4 |
| Men | 11.2 | 8.1 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 1.8 | 1.4 |
| **Core housework*** | | |
| Women | 17.0 | 6.5 |
| Men | 6.5 | 4.0 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 2.6 | 1.6 |
| **Other housework**** | | |
| Women | 2.9 | 4.9 |
| Men | 4.7 | 4.1 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 0.6 | 1.2 |

* Core housework includes cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry, and ironing.

** Other housework includes repairs, outdoor chores, gardening, animal care, and bill-paying.

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Study, 1999.

cent of men ages 25 to 64 gave taking care of children as the reason for nonemployment.[36]

Does family status also affect unpaid work? Data limitations preclude us from examining all the groups we were able to examine for variations in paid labor using the census data. However, we can look at differences for married women and men with children—the family status with the most gender inequality in paid labor—and for single women and men without children—the family status with the most gender equality in paid labor. Table 10 shows that in 1999 married women with children devoted nearly twice as many weekly hours to total housework as single women without children (20.0 hours versus 11.4 hours). The increased demand for household labor that accompanies marriage and motherhood is evident in differences among women in core household tasks: Married mothers spend nearly triple the time of single women without children cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry (17.0 hours versus 6.5 hours). However, husbands may relieve wives of some household chores, because single women without children spend more time on other household tasks than married women, including doing repairs, doing outdoor chores, gardening, taking care of pets, and paying the bills. Nonetheless, the time married fathers and single men without children devote to unpaid labor is much more similar than is the case for women. For example, married fathers spend 6.5 hours on core household tasks compared with 4.0 hours for single men without children.

*Table 11*

### Full-Time/Year-Round Paid Work for Women and Men Ages 25–34, by Family Status and Cohort

| Cohort | Married with children* | Married without children | Single with children* | Single without children |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Women (%)** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 33 | 56 | 44 | 55 |
| 1956-1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 30 | 59 | 36 | 57 |
| 1946-1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 20 | 51 | 36 | 53 |
| **Men (%)** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 75 | 64 | 59 | 57 |
| 1956-1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 75 | 69 | 53 | 54 |
| 1946-1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 74 | 68 | 52 | 52 |
| **Ratio women/men (per 100)** | | | | |
| 1966-1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 44 | 88 | 75 | 96 |
| 1956-1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 40 | 86 | 68 | 106 |
| 1946-1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 27 | 75 | 69 | 102 |

* Living with at least one child under age 18.

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

As was the case with paid work, single women and men without children are more similar in their unpaid work hours than married mothers and fathers. Married mothers devote almost three times more hours to core household tasks than married fathers. By contrast, single women without children spend only 60 percent more time on these tasks.

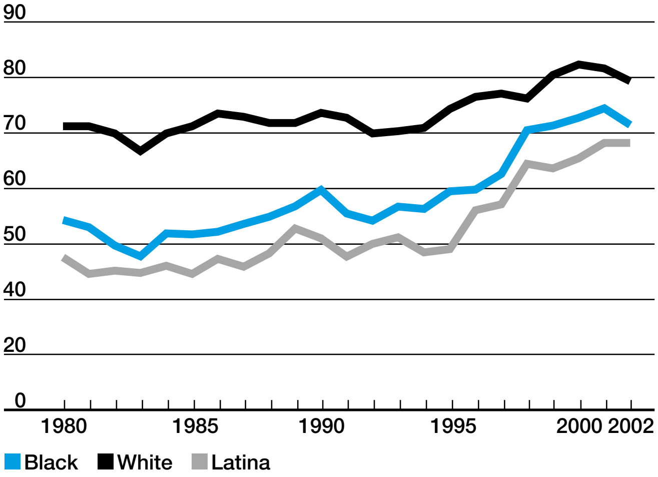
Table 11 shows generational changes in full-time/year-round employment for women and men ages 24 to 35, the ages at which most young adults are adopting family roles and establishing their careers. Full-time/year-round employment increased for married women with children in each successive generation, with the most dramatic increase occurring between the early and late baby boom. By contrast, married men with children did not make similar gains across generations. In fact, it is quite surprising that only 75 percent of men with wives and children work full-time/year-round. The gender gap in labor force attachment declined between married mothers and fathers across the generations because of the increase in married mothers' attachment to the labor force. The most progress in closing this gap was achieved between the early and late baby boom.

*Box 3*

## SINGLE MOTHERS, EMPLOYMENT, AND WELFARE REFORM

Historically, single mothers have been much more likely to be employed than married mothers. The gap between married and single mothers' employment rates narrowed during the 1980s, but in the 1990s single mothers increased their employment faster than did married mothers. All groups of single mothers saw steep increases in employment rates during the 1990s (see figure). Employment shot up especially quickly for black and Latina single mothers, substantially narrowing what had been a persistent racial/ethnic employment gap.

**Single Mothers' Employment Rate by Race/Ethnicity, 1980–2002**



Note: Black and white categories do not include Latinas.

Source: Authors' tabulations of the March Current Population Surveys (women ages 25–54).

There are two leading explanations for this. On the one hand, welfare policy could have successfully driven single mothers into the labor force. On the other hand, it's possible that the booming economy of the late 1990s increased employment opportunities among single mothers. Although it's not yet possible to resolve this debate, we can shed some light on it.

Federal and state programs to aid low-income families were transformed during the 1990s, culminating in the 1996 Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) at the federal level. This law replaced the Aid to Families with Dependent Children program, which had been a federal entitlement for poor families, with a program of block grants to the states called Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF). The biggest effect of the change—and its principal aim—was to force single mothers into the labor force. Additionally, the expansion of the Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) during the 1980s and 1990s also spurred poor women to enter paid employment. At the same time as welfare and tax policy was changing in the 1990s, the economy experienced a sustained recovery following the 1991 recession, with rapid job growth, falling unemployment rates, and job opportunities that reached uncommonly far down the socioeconomic ladder.

### Employment Among Single Mothers

Among those without college degrees, never-married mothers had steeper employment rate increases in the 1990s than married mothers: 15 percentage points (62 percent to 77 percent), compared with just a 1 percentage point increase for married mothers (72 percent to 73 percent). Employment also increased for single mothers who had finished college, but not nearly as steeply, and the difference in the increase between never-married mothers and married mothers was not as great. Thus, employment growth was the greatest among those who had been the least likely to be employed before: single mothers with less than a college degree.

The greater growth in employment among single mothers with less education could be evidence for either the welfare reform or the good economy explanation. But, if the good economy were helping poor mothers in general get jobs, it is likely that the increase would have been similar for married and never-married mothers.

Looking at 1990 versus 2000 is slightly limiting, however, if what we are interested in varied across the decade, as was the case with both economic growth and welfare policy. We use annual data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), a large, nationally representative employment survey, to get a better idea of the timing of the increase in employment for single mothers.

Major welfare reform was signed into law in 1996, and the time limits for welfare receipt that the new law imposed started to take effect in 1998. The figure above shows that the upward trend predates national welfare reform. In fact, the increase in single-mothers' employment began as soon as the 1990s recession ended, after 1992.

It is important to note, however, that welfare reform started at the state level, and a number of states were taking steps to move single mothers into the labor force even before the national program changed in 1996. So we cannot yet conclude welfare reform was not the driving force for single mothers' employment. We can learn a little more by looking at the effect of the 2001 recession. Both white and black single mothers saw decreases in employment again in 2002, for the first time since the end of the last recession. Clearly, economic conditions are an important factor in these trends.

Additionally, several analyses conducted by the Urban Institute, using their 1999 and 2002 National Survey of America's Families, have concluded that the economic recession hit single mothers hard, undermining the success of welfare reform in moving poor women into employment. The report shows that 50 percent of those leaving welfare from 1997 to 1999 reported working and not receiving TANF anymore in 1999. That number fell to 42 percent in the 2002 report, for those leaving welfare from 2000 to 2002. Hence, opportunity changes from the growth of the economy are probably more important than welfare policy in explaining these trends, although welfare reform and the expanded EITC undoubtedly contributed as well.

Single parents made little progress in improving their labor force attachment between the early and late baby-boom cohorts. Full-time/year-round work stayed steady across these generations at 36 percent for single mothers, while it increased slightly for single fathers, from 52 percent to 53 percent. The interesting story for single parents is the large increase in full-time/year-round work that occurred between the late baby boom and Generation X for both women and men. Full-time/year-round employment increased from 36 percent to 44 percent among single mothers and from 53 percent to 59 percent for single fathers. This finding is all the more striking when one considers that this is the first change we have seen that was greater between the late baby boom and Generation X than between the early and late baby booms. Substantial gains were also made by Generation X in the percent of single mothers in the labor force and the number of hours they worked (data not shown). Welfare reform and the strong economic recovery of the 1990s had a hand in these increases (see Box 3).

The gender gap in full-time/year-round work among single parents decreased substantially between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts. In the late baby-boom cohort, 68 single mothers for every 100 single fathers worked full-time/year-round, whereas in the Generation X cohort 75 single mothers for every 100 single fathers worked full-time/year-round.

In contrast to increases among women with children, full-time/year-round employment among women without children actually declined between late baby-boom and Generation X women. To our knowledge, this is the first evidence of a reversal in women's steady march toward increased full-time/year-round employment. However, more women in the Generation X cohort were enrolled in college compared with their counterparts in the late baby-boom cohort, and increasing enrollments could have depressed full-time/year-round employment, a topic we turn to in the next section.

Full-time/year-round employment also decreased substantially between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts for married men without children (from 69 percent to 64 percent) but not for single men without children. Greater decreases in full-time/year-round employment for men than for women who are married without children resulted in a slight narrowing of the gender gap in employment for this group. Single women without children were actually more likely than their male counterparts to work full-time/year-round in the late baby-boom cohort, but in Generation X this pattern reversed so that Generation X women were slightly less likely than men to be employed full-time/year-round. Nonetheless, the gender gap in full-time/year-round employment is still smaller among single women and men with no children than among women and men in other family statuses.

*Table 12*

## AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS OF CORE HOUSEWORK FOR WOMEN AND MEN AGES 25–54 BY FAMILY STATUS, 1975–1999

| Family status | 1975 | 1985 | 1999 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Married with children** | | | |
| Women | 23.6 | 19.0 | 17.0 |
| Men | 1.1 | 4.1 | 6.5 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 21.5 | 4.6 | 2.6 |
| **Single without children** | | | |
| Women | 10.7 | 9.8 | 6.5 |
| Men | 3.1 | 3.8 | 4.0 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 3.5 | 2.6 | 1.6 |

Note: Core housework includes cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry, and ironing.

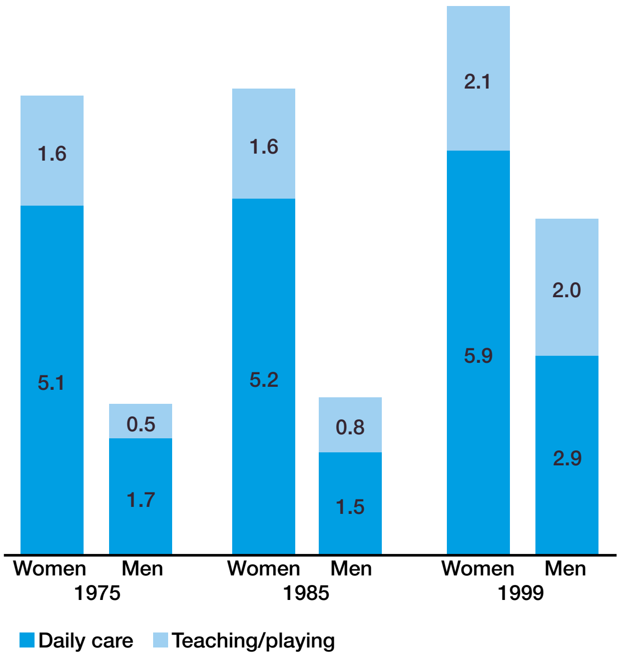
Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

In sum, with the exception of single women and men with no children, the gender gap in full-time/year-round employment continues to close, albeit at a much reduced pace. But what about unpaid labor? Have married women and men with children made progress in this domain as well? The relatively small sample size of the time diary data does not allow us to investigate change in unpaid labor by family status for those ages 25 to 34, but we are able to investigate these trends for all age groups (ages 25 to 54). The data in Table 12 show that the answer to this question is a resounding yes. Married women with children have decreased the time they devote to cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry, while married men with children have increased the time they spend in these tasks. Thus, whereas in 1975 married mothers were doing more than 21 times as much core housework as married fathers, by 1999 married mothers were doing only 2.6 times as much.

Married mothers continue to do more absolute child care compared with fathers, but gender differences have diminished here too, as shown in Figure 3 (page 20). Married mothers did three times more child care in 1975 compared with married fathers, but by 1999 they were doing only about 1.6 times as much. This is not because mothers decreased the amount of time they were spending in child care but rather because married fathers increased their time with children more than married mothers did. Married mothers' child-care time increased more than one hour between 1975 and 1999, whereas married fathers' child-care time increased almost three hours over the same period. Married dads are also spending more time in routine child-care activities, suggesting that fathers are getting more involved in their children's day-to-day care. Still, mothers continue to do more of the day-to-day care of children.

*Figure 3*

**CHANGES IN MARRIED MOTHERS' AND MARRIED FATHERS' WEEKLY HOURS OF CHILD CARE, 1975–1999**



Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

Gender differences in unpaid work have also diminished for single women and men without children (see Table 12, page 19). Single men have increased the time they spend cooking, cleaning, and doing laundry, and single women have decreased their time on these tasks. Most of the decline for single women without children occurred between 1985 and 1999; most of the increases made by men occurred between 1975 and 1985. The combination of these trends resulted in a steady reduction of the gender gap in housework among single women and men.

In sum, women and men's unpaid work is more similar across family statuses today than in the mid-1970s. Nevertheless, single women and men without children are more equal in terms of time in unpaid work than married women and men with children.

These results parallel those shown for paid work. Single women without children have been able to close the employment gap with men, but married women with children are still employed at lower rates and work fewer hours compared with married men with children. Women's greater responsibility for unpaid work likely underlies continuing gender differences in paid work. And women's and men's time in housework and child care remains far from equal.

## EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

Two of the theories introduced earlier to explain women's and men's allocation to paid and unpaid work emphasize differences in human capital. Human capital includes the set of skills and experiences employees bring to the job. One component of human capital is educational attainment. Women and men with diplomas and degrees are more attractive to employers, tend to get the best jobs when they leave school, and are better protected against unemployment during tough economic times than are their less-educated counterparts.

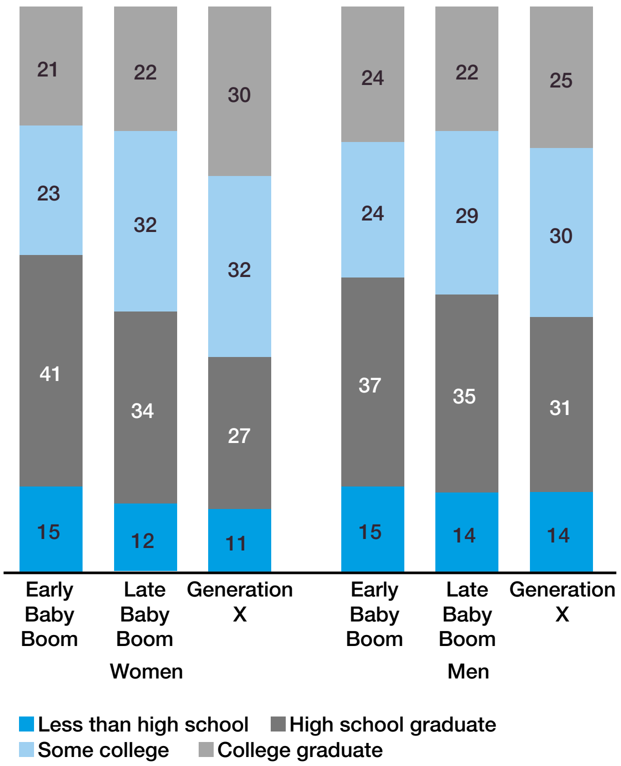
Like changes in the family, the institution of higher education was transformed by changes in society and the economy. Prior to the 1970s, opportunities to attend college were more common for men than for women. The gender gap in educational attainment reached its peak in the parents of the baby-boom generation, when many women married early and stayed home to raise their children while their husbands went to college under the G.I. Bill. Gender differences in educational attainment diminished with passage of Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, which opened the doors to institutions of higher learning for women by prohibiting sex discrimination in all public and private schools receiving federal funding. This legislation was passed at about the same time that reproductive rights were being bolstered by increased access to the birth control pill and the legalization of abortion. During this time, shifts in the economy translated into an increased demand for educated workers, and gave women an alternative to early marriage and motherhood: the pursuit of higher education and the attendant qualifications to land a good job.

Figure 4 shows that women have benefited from these societal changes, having improved their level of education in each successive cohort. Generation X women are much more likely to have college degrees and much less likely to have only a high school degree or less when compared with their counterparts in the early and late baby-boom cohorts. Late baby-boom women made some inroads into college compared with early baby-boom women, but they did not seem to be able to translate their increased college attendance into a degree. The change in the proportion of women who were college graduates did not actually occur until Generation X, when a record 30 percent were college graduates, compared with only 22 percent of late baby-boom women.

By contrast, men did not vastly improve their educational attainment from generation to generation. The most noteworthy change for men occurred with the increase in the proportion with some college. But most of this change occurred between the early and late baby-boom cohorts. The proportion of men who were college graduates increased slightly between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts, but because there was a

*Figure 4*

### Changes in Education Levels for Women and Men Ages 25–29, by Cohort



Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

*Table 13*

### Paid Work for Women and Men Ages 25–54 by Education Level, 2000

| Paid work | Less than high school | High school graduate | Some college | College graduate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Worked for pay (%)** | | | | |
| Women | 55 | 75 | 84 | 87 |
| Men | 77 | 88 | 93 | 96 |
| Ratio women/men (per 100) | 71 | 85 | 90 | 91 |
| **Worked full-time/year-round (%)** | | | | |
| Women | 24 | 43 | 51 | 50 |
| Men | 44 | 65 | 73 | 77 |
| Ratio women/men (per 100) | 55 | 66 | 70 | 65 |
| **Average annual hours of work** | | | | |
| Women | 852 | 1,294 | 1,490 | 1,607 |
| Men | 1,473 | 1,855 | 2,033 | 2,191 |
| Women's hours as % of men's hours | 58 | 70 | 73 | 73 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

decline in this proportion between the early and late baby-boom cohorts, the net improvement over three generations was only 1 percentage point. Improvements in the educational attainment of women and the relative stability in men's educational attainment across generations means that Generation X women have achieved something no other generation before them has: A greater proportion of women than men have college degrees (30 percent and 25 percent, respectively).

Even though women have made phenomenal progress with regard to education, men continue to have higher employment rates and spend more time working for pay than women, even within education levels (see Table 13). Women and men with at least some college tend to be more equal in terms of paid work than their less-educated counterparts. For example, in 2000 there were 91 female college graduates in the labor force for every 100 male college graduates, and these women worked 73 hours for every 100 hours worked by men. In stark contrast, among those with less than a high school education, 71 women worked per 100 men and these women worked only 58 hours for every 100 hours worked by men. In general, as educational attainment increases, paid work and the amount of time worked increases for both women and men. Why might women and men with more education spend more time in paid work compared with those with less education? More highly educated women and men may have more interesting or enjoyable careers than the often tedious work in jobs held by less-educated individuals. In addition, occupations requiring more education, such as scientist, professor, or physician, are more often full-time jobs compared with those requiring little education that are typically part-time, such as salesperson or fast-food cook. It is also possible that changes in the economic environment have intensified the time demands required in white-collar jobs. Downsizing of middle management along with shifts of some tasks formerly handled by administrative staff (such as professionals preparing their own documents on computers) has meant more work spread among fewer people.

Despite gains in higher education among women, men are still more likely to be engaged in paid work and tend to work more hours at all educational levels. Is the same true for unpaid labor? Do women spend more time in unpaid work than men regardless of education level, and are women and men more equal at higher levels of education? When one considers all housework, women do spend more hours engaged in this type of work than men in both education categories (see Table 14, page 22). But men and women with a high school degree or less appear to be more equal than their more highly educated counterparts. A closer examination of

*Table 14*

### Average Weekly Hours of Unpaid Work for Women and Men Ages 25–54 by Education, 1999

| Unpaid work | High school or less | More than high school |
|---|---|---|
| All housework | | |
| Women | 18.5 | 15.4 |
| Men | 13.7 | 9.4 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 1.4 | 1.6 |
| Core housework* | | |
| Women | 14.4 | 12.1 |
| Men | 6.1 | 5.5 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 2.4 | 2.2 |
| Other housework** | | |
| Women | 4.0 | 3.3 |
| Men | 7.6 | 3.9 |
| Ratio women's hours to men's hours | 0.5 | 0.8 |

* Core housework includes cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry, and ironing.

** Other housework includes repairs, outdoor chores, gardening, animal care, and bill-paying.

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Diary Study, 1999.

the data, however, indicates that most of this difference is because among those with a high school degree or less, men spend much more time than women doing other housework, while women and men with at least a high school degree spend more similar numbers of hours on these tasks. Women and men with a high school degree or less also spend more time on housework compared with women and men with more education. More highly educated people generally have higher incomes than those of more modest educational attainment and may purchase household services such as prepared food and lawn care. Less-educated women and men spend fewer hours in paid work compared with the more highly educated, so they may have more time to spend in unpaid work and less discretionary income to purchase outside help.

Recall that many social and economic changes over the past several decades altered the context in which women and men obtain their educations and enter the labor force. Many of these changes, such as the postponement of marriage and childbearing and the softening of norms against women in the labor force, have favored women's educational advancement. Changes in the economy have shifted jobs from manufacturing toward service, and these changes have favored women's employment. Table 15 shows that women's full-time/year-round employment increased for each successive cohort. Women without high school degrees did not increase their attachment to the labor force appreciably across the three generations. For men the story is quite different. The proportion of men with full-time/year-round employment remained relatively stable across cohorts for those with at least some college, whereas full-time/year-round employment actually decreased substantially for men with a high school degree or less, most likely due to the decline in manufacturing jobs.

*Table 15*

### Full-Time/Year-Round Work for Women and Men Ages 25–34 by Education and Cohort

| Cohort | Less than high school | High school graduate | Some college | College graduate |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Women (%) | | | | |
| 1966–1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 21 | 39 | 48 | 53 |
| 1956–1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 18 | 38 | 46 | 51 |
| 1946–1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 19 | 33 | 37 | 36 |
| Men (%) | | | | |
| 1966–1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 43 | 62 | 70 | 73 |
| 1956–1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 42 | 64 | 69 | 74 |
| 1946–1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 49 | 67 | 69 | 71 |
| Ratio women/men (per 100) | | | | |
| 1966–1975 | | | | |
| Generation X | 49 | 63 | 69 | 73 |
| 1956–1965 | | | | |
| Late Baby Boom | 43 | 59 | 67 | 69 |
| 1946–1955 | | | | |
| Early Baby Boom | 39 | 49 | 54 | 51 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

Due mainly to men's stagnating or worsening labor force attachment and to women's increasing labor force attachment for those with at least a high school degree, women closed the gap in full-time/year-round employment within each educational category. For example, among those with less than a high school education in the early baby-boom cohort, there were 39 women for every 100 men who worked full-time/year-round, but by Generation X this number increased to 49 women per 100 men. Among those with a college degree, there were 51 women for every 100 men working full-time/year-round in the early baby-boom generation, compared with 73 women per 100 men among Generation X. The most progress in closing the gender gap occurred between the early and late baby-boom cohorts.

*Table 16*

### AVERAGE WEEKLY HOURS OF CORE HOUSEWORK FOR WOMEN AND MEN AGES 25–54 BY EDUCATION, 1975–1999

| Education | 1975 | 1985 | 1999 |
|---|---|---|---|
| **High school or less** | | | |
| Women | 22.0 | 17.2 | 14.4 |
| Men | 2.1 | 3.4 | 6.1 |
| Ratio of women's hours to men's hour | 10.5 | 5.1 | 2.4 |
| **More than high school** | | | |
| Women | 17.7 | 13.9 | 12.1 |
| Men | 1.3 | 4.1 | 5.5 |
| Ratio of women's hours to men's hour | 13.6 | 3.4 | 2.2 |

Note: Core housework includes cooking, meal cleanup, housecleaning, laundry, and ironing.

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1975, 1985, and 1999.

Has progress been made in closing the gap in unpaid work as well among women and men with differing amounts of education? The answer seems to be yes. In 1975, among those with a high school education or less, women spent about 10 hours for every hour men spent cooking, doing dishes, cleaning house, and doing the laundry (see Table 16). By 1985 this differential was narrowed to five hours, and by 1999 women spent a little more than two hours doing these tasks for every hour men spent doing them. In 1975, for those with more than a high school degree, the gap in housework between women and men was greater than it was for less-educated women and men. Women with more than a high school education spent almost 14 hours on these tasks for every hour men spent on them. But by 1985 the difference in the time men and women spent in housework was smaller among those with more than a high school education than among those with a high school degree or less.

Educational attainment is tied to family status and norms about the appropriate roles for men and women. We now turn to examining whether compositional shifts or changes in behavior are accounting for changes in women's and men's work, and the slowing of this change in the most recent cohort.

## ACCOUNTING FOR TRENDS IN PAID AND UNPAID WORK

How women and men divide their time between paid and unpaid work changes over time both because the demographic characteristics of people change (compositional shifts) and because people modify their behavior. As we have described, women and men in more recent generations are better educated and are delaying entry into marriage and parenthood well into their 30s. Generation X women and men are both more likely to be single without children and single with children compared with earlier generations. But how do all these changes affect the paid and unpaid work of women and men?

In this section we first discuss how population changes in family status and education should affect paid and unpaid work. We then explore how shifting behaviors shape changes in paid and unpaid work. Finally, we examine the roles that changing behavior and changes in the composition of family status and education play in explaining shifts in paid and unpaid work.

Higher levels of educational attainment likely account for some of the increase in women's paid work hours as well as changes in time allocated to child care and housework. Shifts in the economy from manufacturing toward services translate into increased demand for workers with higher levels of education. More highly educated people are more likely to be employed and to work more hours than those with less education. Women's increasing education levels have no doubt played a role in boosting their employment and labor force attachment. Better-educated parents spend more time with children than less-educated parents spend. Thus, increases in women's education have helped them preserve time with children. Some research suggests that college-educated men do more housework compared with men without college degrees, whereas college-educated women do less housework compared with women with less education. Thus, women's gains in education have likely reduced the time women spend doing housework.

Also, college-educated women and men generally have more egalitarian attitudes about gender roles. For example, they believe that paid and unpaid work should be shared equally. The increase in women's education over time has likely augmented the number of women who favor more egalitarian gender roles and thus has acted to further spur the growth in women's employment. Because men's education has not changed appreciably since the early baby boom, it should not affect men's paid and unpaid work.

If education were all that mattered for explaining change in paid and unpaid work, women's continued improvement in education and men's lack of improvement should have substantially decreased the gender gap from the early baby boom through Generation X. But progress toward closing the gender gap in both paid and unpaid labor has slowed to a crawl since the late baby boom, and yet family status has changed over this period as well. Can changes in the composition of family status help explain this apparent anomaly?

For women, marriage and parenthood increase unpaid work and decrease paid work. More men and women are single without children and single with children than in the past. The increase in singles without children should boost employment and labor force attachment and dampen time spent in unpaid work for women and men because the people in this status do not have the family responsibilities that require more unpaid work. By contrast, the increase in single parents should dampen labor force attachment and unpaid work for both women and men because people in this family status have to do both types of work themselves. This should be truer for women than for men, who are more likely to have live-in help from a cohabiting partner or other relatives. Thus we have two trends in family status that have counterbalancing effects on paid and unpaid work. If one examines the statuses of marriage and parenthood, however, the gap between men and women has actually increased from the early baby boom to Generation X, so that over time women are increasing their family responsibilities vis-à-vis men. If family status were all that mattered, women should be losing ground to men in both work spheres.

Because young women and men are delaying parenting until older ages, family size has decreased and parents are older. Having fewer children in the home decreases housework and child-care time.[37] However, older parents are more likely to have chosen to become parents rather than to become a parent through an unintended pregnancy and might want to spend more time in child care and the household labor that goes along with children. Older parents will typically also have more competing demands on their time, especially from paid work. As a result, population changes in family size should act to decrease unpaid work and increase paid work among both women and men, whereas changes in the age of parents should work to increase both.

The increase in women's employment should also account for some of the change in housework and child care because the more hours women spend doing paid work, the fewer they have to devote to unpaid work in the home. In fact, studies show that employed women do less housework and child care compared with women who do not work for pay.[38] In contrast, men's employment has little or no association with time in housework and child care.

Changes in women's and men's allocation of time to paid and unpaid work also reflect behavioral shifts associated with the cultural and social transformations discussed in previous sections. For example, attitudes about women's involvement in paid work have become increasingly liberal, and norms about the appropriateness of women attending college have changed. Changes in the social acceptance of women working and going to college have allowed more women to change their behaviors, increasing employment and college attendance. Housekeeping standards are also more relaxed than in the past and convenience products such as take-out meals are more common. These changes have allowed women to decrease the amount of time they spend on housework. It has also become more socially acceptable for men to cook, clean, and take care of their children. By contrast, however, parenting practices have become more time-intensive as mothers and fathers are expected to devote most nonemployment hours to their children. Changes in parenting norms mean that parents have increased the time they spend with children.

Up until this point, we have addressed how women's and men's paid and unpaid work time have changed in relation to changes in a single demographic characteristic. Yet these characteristics tend to be grouped. For example, single mothers tend to be younger and have less education compared with married mothers. What our earlier discussion could not tell us is how changes in family status and human capital *combined* have affected changes in women's and men's paid and unpaid work, and to what extent these changes are due to the changing family status and human capital characteristics of the population versus shifts in men's and women's behaviors. For this information, we adjust paid and unpaid work hours to account for the combined effect of changes in women's and men's human capital characteristics (employment and education in particular), family status characteristics (marital and parental status), and alterations in their behavior. We then separate the change in these paid and unpaid work hours into the part due to shifts over time in the characteristics of people and the part due to changes over time in how people behave.[39]

Table 17 shows adjusted annual hours of paid work for women and men in 1980 and 2000, and the difference in adjusted annual hours between 1980 and 2000. We calculated the adjusted annual hours under the assumption that all women (men) have the family status and human capital characteristics of the average woman (man) in 1980 and in 2000. We can then partition the difference in the adjusted annual hours between 1980 and 2000 into two components: the portion that is the result of shifts in women's and men's characteristics and the portion due to shifts in behavior. This allows us to determine whether the inclination of women and men to spend time in paid work changed between 1980 and 2000 or whether the observed difference in annual hours of paid work reflects merely a change in the structure of the population, such as how many women and men are married, have children, and have a college education.

The results indicate that between 1980 and 2000, behavioral modifications and shifting demographic characteristics worked to increase women's annual employment hours. Nonetheless, the effect of behavior was a bit stronger. Changes in characteristics account for 47 percent (241 hours) and changes in behavior account for 53 percent (268 hours) of the 509-hour increase in annual paid work time. Women spent more time in paid work in 2000 than in 1980 because fewer of them are married, are parents, and have less than a col-

*Table 17*

## PORTION OF CHANGE IN ADJUSTED ANNUAL HOURS OF PAID WORK ATTRIBUTABLE TO BEHAVIORAL AND COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS, 1980 AND 2000

| Adjusted annual hours of paid work | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|
| 2000 | 1,282 | 1,959 |
| 1980 | 773 | 1,954 |
| Difference 2000-1980 adjusted annual hours | 509 | 5 |
| Change due to shifts in characteristics | 241 | 44 |
| Change due to shifts in behavior | 268 | -39 |

Source: Authors' tabulations using the Integrated Public Use Microdata Series (IPUMS), 2003.

lege education, and because they are more likely to want to spend time in paid work.

For men, changes in demographic characteristics and shifts in behavior contributed about equally to the small change in annual employment hours. However, changes in characteristics and behavior worked in opposite directions: If men in 2000 had similar levels of education, marriage, and parenthood as did men in 1980, annual employment would have increased by 44 hours. But shifts in men's behavior also occurred, pulling annual employment down by 39 hours and resulting in only a five-hour increase over the period. Hence, changes in women's behavior and characteristics both worked to increase their annual employment hours, whereas men's behavior has counteracted compositional shifts that alone would have increased paid work time. Overwhelming majorities of young men today state that they desire jobs that will allow them to spend time with their families. The results of the decomposition suggest that men have changed their behavior to ratchet down paid work time, possibly because they are spending more time in unpaid work and possibly because of the scarcity of good jobs. But do we find similar patterns for unpaid work time? Are changes in unpaid work due to shifts in the propensity of women and men to spend time in housework and child care, or are the observed changes merely the result of shifts in women's and men's characteristics?

Table 18 shows change in adjusted weekly hours of housework between 1975 and 1999 (Panel A) and child care between 1975 and 1999 (Panel B). The results in Panel A indicate that for men, almost all of the five-hour-per-week increase in housework time between 1975 and 1999 is related to behavioral change rather than changes in characteristics. Men's inclinations to cook, clean, and do laundry have increased since 1975. In contrast, if behavior had not changed, and men in 1999 were just like men in 1975, housework time would have declined by about 18 minutes.

*Table 18*

## PORTION OF CHANGE IN ADJUSTED WEEKLY HOURS OF HOUSEWORK AND CHILDCARE ATTRIBUTABLE TO BEHAVIORAL AND COMPOSITIONAL FACTORS, 1975 AND 1999

| Panel A:<br>Adjusted weekly hours of housework | Women | Men |
|---|---|---|
| 1999 | 21.2 | 17.0 |
| 1975 | 25.2 | 12.2 |
| Difference 1999-1975 adjusted weekly hours | -3.9 | 4.8 |
| Change due to shifts in characteristics | -1.9 | -0.3 |
| Change due to shifts in behavior | -2.0 | 5.1 |

| Panel B:<br>Adjusted weekly hours of child care | Mothers | Fathers |
|---|---|---|
| 1999 | 16.0 | 14.2 |
| 1975 | 11.7 | 7.8 |
| Difference 1999-1975 adjusted weekly hours | 4.4 | 6.4 |
| Change due to shifts in characteristics | -0.9 | 0.5 |
| Change due to shifts in behavior | 5.3 | 5.9 |

Source: Authors' tabulations of the U.S. Time Use Studies, 1975 and 1999.

For women, behavioral change and compositional shifts both contributed to the almost four-hour decline in housework between 1975 and 1999. About 49 percent of the decline is due to the larger proportion of women who are employed and college-educated and the smaller proportion who are married with children. For example, if women in 1999 were just like women in 1975—with the same lower rates of labor force participation and higher rates of marriage—the decline would have been 1.9 hours per week, not 3.9 hours. Because women's behavior also changed over the period, however, housework declined an additional two hours. Women have simply become less likely to want to spend time doing housework.

Some sociologists argue that women's housework can decline only to a certain point, because doing unpaid work is still part and parcel of being a good wife and mother.[40] Our results indicate that the activities in which women's housework have declined are the easiest to outsource entirely or piecemeal, suggesting that we may have reached the limits of behavioral change. For example, many services such as banking or ordering groceries can now be done online. Modern appliances, plus the inclination to "eat out," do appear to play a part in the reduction of women's housework time in the United States.[41] Consequently, women's housework time may have declined in some activities while their production of household goods has remained at "acceptable" levels.

It is also likely that what constitutes an "acceptable" level of housework has changed, as some research indicates that standards of housekeeping have fallen since the mid-1970s.[42] The use of cleaning products for more discretionary tasks such as cleaning the oven and shampooing carpets dropped sharply between 1986 and 1996.[43] Given the increased hours women spend working for pay, it is entirely possible that women are simply doing the bare minimum amount of housework. If this were the case, a further reduction in women's hours spent in housework would not be possible even with these technological advancements and the ability to purchase substitute goods and services.

What about mothers' and fathers' child-care time? Conventional wisdom has held that changes in the family have necessarily reduced parents' time with children. Results in Panel B of Table 18 indicate, however, that mothers and fathers have changed their behavior more than enough to make up for changes in the family that alone would have decreased time with children.

Between 1975 and 1999, predicted weekly hours of children care increased 4.4 hours for mothers and 6.4 hours for fathers. If mothers in 1999 had the same demographic characteristics as mothers in 1975, compositional differences alone would have *decreased* child-care time by almost one hour, with most of the decline due to increases in maternal employment (results not shown). However, negative compositional changes were more than outweighed by behavioral shifts that worked to increase mothers' time in child care by 5.3 hours per week. For fathers, compositional and behavioral shifts both contribute to the 6.4-hour increase in child-care time between 1975 and 1999, but the relative contribution of behavior is much greater. Increases in married fathers' propensity to spend time caring for children explain 92 percent (or 5.9 hours) of the change. In contrast, shifts in demographic characteristics account for only 8 percent of the increase in fathers' child-care time (or about 30 minutes per week), with most of this attributable to increased levels of paternal education (results not shown).

Behavioral changes among mothers and fathers likely stem from the increasingly voluntary nature of parenthood, burgeoning parental concern over the safety of children, and pervasive changes in the cultural context of parenthood.[44] The widespread availability of contraceptives and lessened normative pressure to become a parent suggest that women and men who decide to become parents may increasingly be selected from those who have greater motivation and desire to invest heavily in children. The erosion of community bonds within neighborhoods and heightened parental fears about children's safety appear to have increased the level of parental supervision of children's activities. Changes in the cultural context of parenting and childhood have also driven up the amount of parental time necessary to produce a "good" childhood.[45]

The results in Tables 17 and 18 suggest that although shifts in characteristics and behavior both play a part in explaining changes in paid and unpaid work, behavioral alterations account for a larger share of change. But what about change over the past decade? Results from the same type of analysis (not shown) indicate that behavioral change in the realms of paid work and housework has slowed to a crawl. Only about one-quarter of the change in women's paid work and housework hours over the 1990s is attributable to behavioral shifts. Additionally, the small uptick in men's housework over the past decade occurred because men's characteristics changed, not because of further behavioral modification. In contrast, though, behavioral shifts of mothers and fathers continued to drive child-care hours up in the 1990s, similar to the story of change in the 1980s. The declining importance of behavioral modifications in explaining change in paid work and housework hours suggests that women and men have reached a limit in the extent to which they can rearrange their lives to accommodate both paid and unpaid work.

## PROGRESS MADE, GAPS REMAIN

At the beginning of this report, we wondered whether the slowing pace of family change portended a plateau in the steady movement toward greater gender similarity in employment and household work that occurred between 1960 and 1990. Our findings suggest that sweeping changes in women's paid and unpaid work have slowed to a crawl. And while the transformation of men's household work was not as dramatic as women's paid work transformations, here too change has slowed.

We find that gender differences in all measures of paid work—employment in the previous year, full-time/year-round employment, and annual employment hours—narrowed more sharply in the 1980s than in the 1990s. Additionally, Generation X women do not appear to have increased their labor force attachment appreciably over that of late baby-boom women, in sharp contrast to the substantial increases evident between early baby-boom women and late baby-boom women.

The plateau in paid work appears to be interrelated with a slowdown in gender equality in unpaid work as well. The steady decline in housework has stalled among young women: Generation X women are doing about the same amount of housework as their late baby-boom counterparts. Among all women, declines in housework are smaller after 1975 than they were from 1965 to 1975. In each successive cohort, men are doing more housework, but the relative increase was less for the Generation X cohort compared with previous cohorts. Fathers increased child-care time substantially between 1985 and 1999; however, mothers also increased their child-care time, so a large gender gap in parental child-care time remains.

Although to a lesser degree than in 1970, marriage and parenthood continue to differentiate women's and men's paid and unpaid work time. Paid and unpaid work time allocations are most similar among single women and men without children and most dissimilar among married mothers and fathers. Among young adults, more women and men in Generation X are single with no children than in the early and late baby-boom cohorts. However, the gender gap in marriage and parenthood has increased over time, so that Generation X women have even more family responsibilities than their male counterparts when compared with baby-boom women and men.

Finally, education levels for women skyrocketed between the early baby-boom and Generation X cohorts. Women in Generation X did something no other cohort before them has: More women than men in this cohort have college degrees.

All of these population changes have affected the shifts we documented in women's and men's paid and unpaid work. But work and family change between the late baby-boom and Generation X cohorts was incremental, in sharp contrast to the more sweeping change that took place between the early baby-boom and late baby-boom cohorts. Women have altered their behavior so they spend more time in paid work and child care and less time in housework. Men have changed too, making behavioral modifications to decrease time in paid work and increase time in housework and child care. Nonetheless, our analysis indicates that, with the exception of child care, behavior appears to have changed little between 1990 and 2000—most change occurred between 1980 and 1990. In fact, the relatively small population shifts away from being married with children toward being single with no children and increased education explain the vast majority of the small gain in women's labor force attachment in the past decade. And increased labor force participation in conjunction with these trends explains about three-quarters of the small decline in housework for women over the same period. For men, shifts away from being married with children toward being single explain the vast majority of the small increase in their housework over the past decade.

The timing of change for men in the domestic sphere is more recent than for women. Change in men's involvement in the home may be slowing but does not show quite the "stall" that characterizes women's market work trends. The data presented in this report suggest that women changed first. They increased their paid work and decreased their housework as much as they could. But women may have reached a limit on the amount of domestic work that they can shed and still maintain a comfortable life at home. Similarly, mothers made adjustments to include more market work in their lives but also may have reached a limit on how much paid work they can add and still care for their children—unless they want to dramatically sacrifice time with children either by not having children in the first place or spending little time with them; or, for single mothers, granting physical custody to the nonresidential father. Hence, women's market participation has stalled far short of full market equality with men. Unless conditions change—such as less maternal value placed on time with children, fewer women having sole responsibility for raising children, more help from men, or policies that make it easier to combine both childrearing and market work—the trend toward greater gender similarity in market work may have reached a new "equilibrium" in the United States. There is considerably less gender specialization in the home and the market than there was in the 1950s, but mothers continue to concentrate more on family care whereas fathers continue to concentrate more on breadwinning. What implications does this have for reaching gender equality?

Two models of gender equality, or "nirvanas," have been proposed in the feminist economic literature.[46] The first model has three characteristics: men's and women's full-time labor force participation rates are equivalent; societal tax systems are not structured to encourage women to specialize in household labor; and housework and child care are performed efficiently through public-sector or private-sector provision. The second model has two characteristics: men increase their time in household labor and decrease their time in paid employment, and public policies encourage and reward shared paid and unpaid work between women and men.

Under both models, women's and men's time use will become more similar but for different reasons. In the first model, women reallocate their time away from unpaid work to paid work, and their time use becomes more like men's. In contrast, in the second model men reallocate their time away from paid work to unpaid work and their time use becomes more like women's.

Convergence due to men's time use becoming more similar to women's time use is more likely to result in gender equality. Women and men do not want to purchase all household goods and services from the market, because "family work" such as cooking meals, doing chores around the house, and caring for children help reinforce family relationships.[47] If men do not continue to increase their time in unpaid work, women will continue to do more than their fair share. And if women continue to be responsible for housework and child care, their paid work time will continue to be less than men's and they will continue to be at a financial disadvantage. Men will also continue to be emotionally deprived of the benefits women experience from their participation in caring for families, friends, and community.

But there are problems with this solution. First, husbands and fathers face long work weeks already. Certainly among married couples, fathers are not doing half of the work in the home but they work many hours in the market such that their total workloads look very similar to those of mothers.[48] Married fathers express even greater feelings of inadequate time with their children than mothers in the United States, largely because work hours are so long.[49] How much ability men have to curtail those long work hours is not clear, but one suspects this is unlikely to happen in an economy where job tenure is uncertain and interesting and well-remunerated work often comes with the price of long hours. Fathers still feel strong pressure to provide adequately for their families, and couples manage work and family demands with one partner, usually the mother, scaling back market work hours, thereby placing greater pressure on the other partner to work long hours. Married couples also generally need to have at least one spouse in a full-time/year-round job because these jobs have higher wages and usually offer health insurance. Because husbands continue to earn more than wives, most couples make the rational choice that husbands will work full time and wives part-time. In the absence of constraints, both spouses might choose to work fewer paid work hours. But this choice is not available for most people. Even Robert Reich and Penny Hughes, arguably valuable employees whom employers should have wanted to retain, were not able to change their paid work situation enough so that they could better balance work and family.

Second, as a nation we have fairly high expectations for consumption, and scaling back work hours has implications for our ability to realize those expectations. Owning a home is highly valued. Having many cars is common in families for the commute to work and other activities. As more adults work outside the home, more market substitutes for work in the home are needed, desired, and afforded. For parents, an important aspect of rising expectations is greater emphasis on the need for children to attend and complete postsecondary education and for parents to finance that education. Public education is universally provided in the United States through secondary school but not thereafter. Even a college education at a public institution in the United States is an expensive proposition, so parental investment in their children's education promotes market work. Men's and women's paid and unpaid work time has become more similar, but the social policies designed to facilitate and encourage a more equitable division of labor are lacking. The United States appears to have merged elements from both nirvanas, leaving American men and women and their families in a decidedly less-than-utopian state.

Government policies allowing for more successful integration of work and family lives are few and far between in this country, and the laws governing workplace schedules are woefully outdated and have not evolved with the changing workforce and economy. However, *Working Mothers* list of the "100 Best Companies for Working Mothers" has spotlighted some of the most innovative corporate practices and programs that improve their workers work and family lives. The list was introduced in 1986 and has spawned intense competition among CEOs to implement change in their workplaces so that they will make the list and become the employer of choice for working mothers. These companies have made many changes. For example, they have added child-care programs, child-care referral services, and reimbursements. But most of these companies are large and they employ only about 2 percent of all employees.

It is doubtful that more progress will be made to close the gender gap in paid and unpaid work unless more widespread work-family policies are adopted. However, Americans have been very resistant to the high taxes that fund generous family-friendly policies. For public or private provision of such support to be successfully implemented in the United States, a case must be made to a wider audience that the lack of work and family policy is costly to employers or to governments, either in terms of lack of adequate nurturance of children; lack of necessary investment in the productivity of future workers; increased absenteeism, lower worker productivity and higher turnover of employees; or increased health costs of current workers that result from work and family stress.[50]

Making the case for greater government and private-sector involvement in the work and family arena is in its infancy in the United States. The challenge is to implement policies that fit the needs of workers at all socioeconomic levels and all life stages—for all those who need child-care or elder-care services, adequate wages and more and better work hours, reduction in work hours, or greater flexibility in meeting family demands.[51] Policies must address an employer's need to remain competitive in an increasingly global marketplace, and must build upon rather than erode the progress made toward gender equality in paid and unpaid work.[52]

It is possible that the increased educational attainment of Generation X women may portend a surge in full-time/year-round employment. Yet our results suggest that women and men may have reached their limits in terms of individual change. Without some adjustments on the part of employers and the government, gender differences in paid and unpaid work are likely to continue.

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U.S. Census Bureau website on families
www.census.gov/population/www/socdemo/hh-fam.html

The Families and Work Institute
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The Institute for Women's Policy Research
www.iwpr.org

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