

— Chapter 1 —

Introduction: The Conflicts Between Earning and Caring

IMAGINE A WORLD in which mothers could take a few months away from their jobs following the birth or adoption of a child, without sacrificing either job security or their paychecks. Imagine a world in which both mothers and fathers could spend substantial time at home during their child's first year, while receiving nearly all of their wages. Imagine a world in which mothers and fathers could choose to work part-time until their children are in primary school without changing employers or losing their health benefits. Imagine a world in which the normal workweek was thirty-seven or even thirty-five hours, and parents had the right to take occasional days off, with pay, to attend to unexpected family needs. Imagine a world in which all parents had the right to place their children in high-quality child care provided by well-educated professionals. Imagine a world in which this child care was provided at no cost or very low cost to parents.

A world such as this, indeed, can only be imagined by American parents. It is a reality, however, for parents in several countries in Europe. Parents throughout the United States and Europe share the common challenge of balancing responsibilities on the job and at home; mothers and fathers everywhere struggle with establishing divisions of labor at home that are fair and economically viable. Many parents in Europe benefit from public policies that distribute the costs of caring for children across society and require employers to accommodate parents' caregiving responsibilities. American parents are grappling with these challenges in

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a world that is much less supportive. For the most part, they are left to craft their own solutions.

We have spent the past several years studying what parents need to balance paid work with caregiving and analyzing social and labor market policies in other countries that are relatively similar to the United States. In this book we describe what we have learned and draw policy lessons that are meaningful in the American context.

During the writing of this book, we have become keenly aware of several overlapping but surprisingly distinct conversations about work and family life in the United States. These parallel but nonintersecting conversations converge in recognizing that there is a problem. They diverge substantially, however, in their definition of the problem and their proposed solutions.

One conversation has evolved out of growing concerns for the well-being of children. Researchers in public health and education tell us that American children are doing poorly on a number of dimensions, from early school readiness to later school achievement and adolescent childbearing. Research on child development, including important new findings about early brain development, has focused much of this discussion on the role of the family in determining child outcomes. Although the causes of these problems are multiple, many observers point to the absence or diminished attention of parents—who are more deeply engaged than ever in responsibilities outside the home—as an important contributing factor.

A second conversation has been animated by rapid changes in women's engagement in the labor market. Following the sharp rise in the employment of women with children during the 1960s and 1970s, a somewhat different group of social scientists, policy analysts, and advocates began a conversation about the conflict between work and family. This conversation has focused on the problems of working parents, whose competing responsibilities leave them penalized in the workplace and overburdened and exhausted at home. Although the research is not exclusively focused on the problems of women—men too complain about a lack of time with their families—it is mothers who are viewed as most burdened and conflicted by multiple roles.

A third conversation has grown out of the second wave of the

women's movement. Since the 1960s, when activists began to argue that "the personal is the political," many feminists have taken a hard look at the role of the nuclear family in the subjugation of women. Feminists concerned with the family have concluded that persistent gender inequality in the labor market is both cause and consequence of women's disproportionate assumption of unpaid work in the home. This conversation revolves around the ways in which men's stronger ties to the labor market carry social, political, and economic advantages that are denied to many women, especially those who spend substantial amounts of time caring for children.

There has been surprisingly little meeting of the minds among participants in these separate but related conversations. Their conversations seem most at odds in the solutions they propose to the problem. Research on child well-being stresses the importance of parents' availability, and many interpret this research to suggest the need for policies—such as child tax credits and maternity leaves—that would allow mothers of young children to opt out of the labor market.¹ Much of the literature on work-family conflict also stresses women's connection to children and locates the conflict in women's lives; solutions focus on policies that allow women both to work for pay and to spend time at home caring for their children—such as part-time work, job sharing, telecommuting, and flextime. In contrast, feminists have typically identified the problem as women's intermittent connection to employment and men's lagging contributions at home. Feminists argue that women will not and cannot achieve parity with men as long as they shoulder unequal responsibilities for unpaid care work. Along with policies that reduce employment barriers and discrimination, feminists typically advocate for alternatives to maternal child care—such as more and higher-quality out-of-home child care and an expansion of options for paternity leave.

We came to this collaboration as interdisciplinary social scientists with a shared interest in social welfare policy. Our backgrounds also differ in ways that mirror these larger divides: one of us was steeped in feminism, the other had a long-standing concern with the care and well-being of children. Not surprisingly, we clashed over several issues, especially those related to maternal employment when children are very young. One of us worried

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about symmetry between women's and men's engagement in the world outside the home, arguing that women's emancipation depends on their reaching parity with men in the public spheres of employment and politics. The other worried about poor-quality care for children, pointing out that children need their parents' time and that, in many families, that need might be incompatible with full-time maternal employment when children are young.

The challenge of reconciling these apparent tradeoffs is at the heart of this book. For the most part, we now write from a shared perspective. This perspective has been profoundly influenced by lessons we have learned from other countries. Those lessons have come partly from feminist theorizing about societal outcomes that reconcile earning, caring, and gender inequality and partly from comparative social policy studies. The more we looked abroad, the more convinced we became that our disagreements reflected false dichotomies that are socially constructed by existing family, labor market, and social policy arrangements. Our comparative research has convinced us that other countries have developed policies that help reconcile what we in the United States too often understand to be irreconcilable. Our goal in this book is to relate the lessons we have learned on our own intellectual journey.

One of the most important steps in this journey was the articulation of an end vision that honors the importance of both earning and caring, both child well-being and gender equality. The most pressing conflicts of interest arise not between men and women, nor between parents and children, but between the needs of contemporary families and current divisions of labor, workplace practices, and social policies. To resolve these conflicts in the United States, we do not need to choose sides; rather, we need to focus our attention on an end vision of what an earning, caring, egalitarian society that promotes the well-being of children might look like.

This end vision is reflected in the title of chapter 4 in this volume: the dual-earner–dual-carer society. It is a vision of a fully gender-egalitarian, economically secure, caring society. We do not suggest that this end vision is a prediction for the near future. We recognize that it embodies a long-term, perhaps even impossible, social transformation. We are convinced, however, that articulating an end vision is critical not only for resolving arcane academic

debates but, more important, for establishing the principles against which we evaluate new social and labor market policies. American parents need and want more support from government. If we respond to these needs as if they embody fundamentally irreconcilable demands, we will create policies that perpetuate tradeoffs between the interests of mothers, fathers, children, and employers. If we reject the assumption that these conflicts are irreconcilable, we can hope to develop policies that advance the interests of each.

Recent decades have seen a profound transformation in the organization of employment and caregiving arrangements in the American family. The “traditional” model of a male breadwinner and female homemaker has been replaced by a model of highly gendered partial specialization in which men invest their time primarily in the workplace and women combine employment with unpaid work in the home. In the United States, in particular, government plays a minimal role in supporting parents’ dual responsibilities in the home and workplace. This model assumes, and perpetuates, a long-standing belief that caregiving is a private, and largely female, concern.

This resolution of employment and caregiving demands is failing American parents and their children. Many of the problems besetting American families are less acute in other industrialized countries that have more extensive public policies that help families manage competing demands from the home and the workplace without sacrificing gender equality. Although none of the countries we have studied can be characterized as having achieved a fully egalitarian, dual-earner–dual-carer society, some provide useful examples of the ways in which government can support families in their efforts to share earning and caring work.

Our goal in this comparative exercise is to move current policy debates in the United States beyond fragmented conversations that treat child well-being, the conflict between work and family life, and gender equality as separate issues and beyond the belief that caregiving is a wholly private concern. Cross-national comparisons can help move the debate by suggesting new conceptual and practical models for policy design. They can expand our options by demonstrating that policies that appear politically or economically infeasible in the context of the United States are in fact

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well established and successful elsewhere. Cross-national comparisons can also provide specific lessons about policy design. Because the difference between policy success and failure often turns on details—including rules about coverage, eligibility, benefit levels, duration, and financing—the experience abroad offers valuable lessons about the nuts and bolts of policy design. In the remainder of this chapter, we preview our analytical framework and our key findings.

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

In chapter 2, we argue that American parents are navigating uncertain new terrain, caught between traditional conceptions of caregiving and new demographic, economic, and social realities. In the wake of rapid changes in family composition and women's employment, parents are struggling to organize their working lives and their partnerships in new ways. They are doing so, however, in a society in which many members reap the benefits of family caregiving while doing little to share the burden. The gender revolution remains unfinished, leaving women with a disproportionate share of paid and unpaid care work. Out-of-date workplace practices constrain parents' ability to devote time to the care of their children. Government provides only the most meager assistance and targets much of that assistance on those at the margins of self-sufficiency. The resulting mismatch between parents' needs and society's response strains family life, disadvantages mothers, and leaves many children with inadequate care.

Contemporary problems facing parents, especially mothers, are rooted in long-standing gendered divisions of labor. In the late nineteenth century, industrialization and the rise of waged labor sparked a massive economic and social reorganization. As most men—but few women—moved their labor from the agricultural to the industrial and commercial sectors, a family that included a male breadwinner and a female homemaker came to be defined as the ideal. Men and women assumed increasingly separate roles, with men engaging in paid work and women taking responsibility for unpaid work—most especially, the work of caring for children. This arrangement remained fairly stable through the first half

of the twentieth century but began to unravel later in the century with the sharp increase in women's labor force participation and the growth of single-parent families.

The waning of the breadwinner-homemaker family increased women's opportunities. New arrangements for work and family, however, including the dominant contemporary model of partial specialization between mothers and fathers, have created new tensions for many families. One tension arises because the large increase in maternal employment, and more modest increases in working hours, leave many families squeezed for time. With the majority of both fathers and mothers in the labor force, many families simply lack sufficient hours in the day to care for their children. A second tension arises from the fact that, even with high and rising employment rates, women remain the primary caregivers for children. Women have increased their ties to the labor market, but men's contributions to work in the home have not increased at a corresponding rate. Women, far more than men, now juggle dual responsibilities in the home and the workplace.

Although these tensions are not unique to the United States, they create more acute dilemmas here because we have done comparatively little to distribute the costs of caregiving throughout society. Industrialized countries have traditionally characterized childbearing and child rearing as private concerns. In reality, caregiving work—performed overwhelmingly by women—creates broadly shared benefits. As Nancy Folbre and Paula England have argued, women's caring labor creates what economists call "public goods" in the form of children who are well nurtured (Folbre 1994; England and Folbre 1999b). Children's capabilities, which result in large measure from sustained caring and nurturing, provide public benefits (what economists term "positive externalities") by enriching today's society and providing economic benefits for the next generation. Women who provide care in the home pay the costs of that work, in the form of time, energy, and forgone market wages. Others in society reap the benefits—in the form of children who are prepared to learn in school, adults who are prepared to engage in productive employment, and neighbors who are prepared to create civil society—but they do not necessarily share the costs. In other words, others in society free ride on women's care work.

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Ours is not the only society that free rides on the unpaid work of families, and of women in particular. The United States is exceptional, however, in the extent to which it has failed to develop welfare state structures that distribute these costs more broadly. The American welfare state is often characterized as a laggard in cross-national terms. The United States does far less than many similarly rich countries to redistribute and equalize income or to actively manage labor markets. We also do much less to socialize the costs of caregiving—through government policies that redistribute income to families with children, public services that reduce employment penalties associated with devoting time to caregiving, or labor market regulations that protect parents' time with children. We benefit as much as any society from families' and women's caregiving work, but we do much less to spread the costs.

This exceptionally private conception of family life leaves American families to craft individual solutions to what is essentially a social dilemma: If everyone is at the workplace, who will care for the children?

Families are inventing a variety of creative arrangements to reconcile high rates of parental employment with their children's need for care. Many families reduce the labor market attachment of one parent—usually the mother. Many mothers engage in various forms of underemployment, opting for jobs that demand less of them than their skills would otherwise warrant or working part-time or intermittently (or both). Some families arrange to work opposite hours: one parent leaves for the workplace as the other returns home. Others make extensive use of nonparental care, placing children in substitute care starting in early infancy.

Although these private solutions are often adaptive for individual families, they also exacerbate long-standing problems of gender inequality at home and in the labor market. Because of their caregiving commitments, women with children earn far less, as a group, than their male counterparts, rendering them economically dependent, lacking in bargaining power at home, and at risk in the event of family dissolution. Comparatively weak labor market ties have also left women vastly underrepresented in positions of commercial and political leadership. Private solutions are also cre-

ating new social problems. For some families, nonstandard employment schedules disrupt home life, increase the risk of marital dissolution, and compromise children's well-being. For others, child care costs strain financial resources. The search for inexpensive child care solutions both reduces the quality of children's care and impoverishes child care providers. For a disturbingly large number of families, the combination of partial labor market attachment and limited government assistance leads to economic insecurity. In the end, these "private" problems create social costs, as economic insecurity, inadequate caregiving time, and poor-quality child care combine to jeopardize the well-being of many children.

ARE PARENTS AND CHILDREN DOING BETTER ELSEWHERE?

It is clear that American parents are struggling. What is less clear is the extent to which the problems they confront are inevitable. The collision between new realities and traditional conceptions of family life are evident in all industrial and postindustrial societies. Families in other countries are also struggling to balance the demands of paid work with the needs of their children and to reconcile the interests of women with those of men. In many relatively similar countries, however, the resulting problems are less acute.

In chapter 3 we compare the United States with other countries on a number of well-being indicators. In several other industrialized countries—including those with male and female employment rates that are higher than those of the United States—employed parents spend less time in paid work and incur less-costly penalties for part-time work. In some other countries, gender inequality in the labor market is less pronounced, and men do a larger share of nonmarket work. In all of our eleven comparison countries, fewer parents work nonstandard hours, and families headed by employed parents are less likely to be poor. Children in many of these countries are also doing better on dimensions ranging from infant birth weight to adolescent childbearing. This suggests that while the challenges of reconciling the demands of

the home and employment are common across similar countries, the extent to which they exacerbate gender inequality, work-family conflict, and compromises to child well-being is not inevitable.

ENVISIONING A NEW SOLUTION

A comparison of the United States with other industrialized countries suggests that families' private solutions to the competing demands of the workplace and the home are exacting a particularly heavy toll from American families. As we describe in chapter 4, the discourse about these problems has also been narrower and more fragmented in the United States than in many countries in which families face similar dilemmas. Public debates about the problems of child well-being, work-family conflict, and gender equality in the United States characteristically focus on the family itself as the source of the problem. These debates fail to recognize the common origin of many of the dilemmas facing contemporary families in our willingness as a society to share the benefits of women's unpaid caregiving work without distributing the costs. These debates suggest various responses for meeting the needs of children, mothers, and families. In the absence of a new conceptualization of the collective dimensions of family caregiving, however, most solutions fail to resolve tradeoffs between earning and caring or between child well-being and gender equality.

Many observers in the United States suggest that we should shore up the male-breadwinner–female-homemaker model by increasing supports for women in their caregiving roles. With sufficient financial remuneration and social approbation, it is argued, women may be persuaded to forgo employment opportunities that are equal to men's and to retain the primary responsibility for the care and nurturing of children. This is the solution favored by many social conservatives who advocate the implementation of unrestricted child tax credits and other forms of support for the "traditional" family. It is an approach that has also been favored by some feminists, who propose rewarding women in their caregiving roles by adopting generous paid family leaves, public payments for the care of dependents ("wages for caring"), and the extension of social insurance credits to full-time caregivers.

This approach would free women to devote themselves to the

care and rearing of children. It may have much to recommend it from the perspective of children, who would be guaranteed more time with their mothers. From the perspective of gender equality, however, this approach is deeply flawed. However well compensated, the relegation of women to unpaid care work can only reinforce gendered divisions of labor and the low value placed on caring work. Women would continue to incur the economic, social, and civic penalties associated with their withdrawal from the labor market. Men would continue to miss out on caregiving opportunities. Children would continue to miss the active presence of their fathers.

An alternative possibility would be to move more caregiving work out of the home. In a universal-breadwinner society, all parents would be in the workforce full-time, and children would be cared for largely by other adults, paid for by the family or the government. This is the solution advocated by many liberal feminists, who argue that women will not obtain social and economic parity with men until they achieve equality in the labor market. It is also the solution suggested by some conservative social reformers, who place a premium on engaging low-income parents in the labor market.

This approach could go a long way toward achieving gender equality in employment, but it, too, is fundamentally flawed. It would limit mothers' and fathers' opportunities to be fully present during the critical early years of their children's lives, and it would deprive children of sustained contact with their parents throughout their lives. It would continue to devalue caring work by valuing market work above unpaid care work. Moreover, to the extent that child care remains market based, this approach would perpetuate the social and economic disadvantages of having a heavily feminized and poorly paid caregiving workforce.

Debates in the United States have vacillated for many years between these two alternatives. In the one, we are asked to sacrifice gender equality in the name of children's well-being; in the other, to sacrifice the interests of children for the sake of gender equality. What is constant is that many individuals and families are asked to sacrifice their interests to perpetuate a system in which the care of children is overwhelmingly defined as a private, and largely female, responsibility.

In chapter 4 of this book, we draw on comparative social wel-

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fare and feminist scholarship to suggest an alternative end vision. The work of several European writers has convinced us that the interests of men, women, and children cannot be reconciled by asking families to make more accommodations to the tensions inherent in the gendered model of partial specialization between fathers and mothers. These tensions cannot be resolved without fundamental transformations in divisions of labor, workplace arrangements, and the role of government. If Americans hope to create a society that values both paid work and unpaid caregiving, we will need to transform gender relations so that women and men face symmetrical opportunities and responsibilities for employment and caregiving. If we want men and women to have the opportunity to engage in caregiving work without undue economic and career sacrifice, we will need new employment arrangements that allow time for caregiving. If we hope to enhance the well-being of children and to promote gender equality, we will need to distribute the cost of caregiving more equally within society and to call on government to help make this a reality.

One version of such a transformed society has been labeled a “dual-earner–dual-carer” society by the British sociologist Rosemary Crompton (1999). This is a society that recognizes the rights and obligations of women and men to engage in both market and care work and one that values children’s need for intensive care and nurturance during their earliest years. In a dual-earner–dual-carer society, parents would spend substantial amounts of time at home when their children are infants, relying more heavily on substitute care as their children grow. Parenting would be degendered; fathers and mothers would share responsibility for earning and caregiving symmetrically, with support from both employers and society more broadly.

What would it take to realize a dual-earner–dual-carer society? It would require three transformations that would reduce our historic free riding on women’s unpaid labor and increase our collective support for caregiving work. First, and most fundamental, its realization rests on the dissolution of today’s gendered divisions of labor. For mothers and fathers to share the caring, men (on average) would need to shift an appreciable number of hours from the labor market to the home when their children are young. For men and women to share the earning, women (on average) would

need to shift a more modest number of hours from the home to the market. Mothers and fathers would essentially meet in the middle.

Second, it would require the creation of a more family-friendly labor market. Both women and men would need employment that allows them to take temporary breaks, especially when their children are young. Both women and men would need access to new employment arrangements that allow them to carry out parenting responsibilities without excessive penalties in wages, benefits, and job advancement—including high-quality, reduced-hour jobs.

Third, it would depend on the expansion of government policies that support caregiving work and socialize the costs of rearing children. Families and employers alone cannot bring about these transformations in the home and workplace. For a dual-earner–dual-carer society to become a reality, government will have to take a more active role in helping both women and men to blend employment with caregiving by providing benefits such as paid family leave and child care. Policies are also needed that secure workplace changes through labor market regulations—for example, legislation that reduces standard working hours and grants workers the right to temporary periods of leave.

AN EXPANDED ROLE FOR GOVERNMENT

The development of a caring, gender-egalitarian society rests on three related changes: the dissolution of gendered divisions of labor, the emergence of new workplace practices, and the redistribution of the costs of caregiving through government policies. The subject of this book is the third of these three: the development of a new and expanded role for government. We lay out the contours of an “earner-carer” policy package that would both support families today and facilitate the development of a dual-earner–dual-carer society in the future. This package has three elements: publicly regulated and financed paid family leave, regulation of working time, and public early childhood education and care programs.

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Before turning to the details of these policies (in chapters 5 through 7) or the evidence of their effectiveness (chapter 8), we consider two challenging questions. The first is whether American men and women want to share caregiving work more equally. Academics have advanced at least two theoretical rationales for gendered specialization. Essentialist arguments suggest that women's disproportionate commitments to caregiving reflect the higher value that they place on this work; neoclassical economic arguments assert that men and women elect to specialize because it is efficient and raises total family utility. These arguments are difficult to counter precisely because of the absence of a counterfactual: Women's and men's choices can be observed only in the context of contemporary views about appropriate gender roles and the limited institutional support available for caregivers. It is impossible to know what American women would prefer, or how American families would behave, in a society that valued both earning and caregiving and that allowed both women and men to blend labor market attachment and caregiving without costly penalties.

The second challenging question, particularly for Americans, is whether government *should* assume a more prominent role in supporting families. The policy package described in this volume includes family leave and child care programs that involve several forms of redistribution—from nonparents to parents, from smaller to larger families, and from well-off to less affluent households, to name a few. The package also includes labor market regulations that could be seen as restrictive to employers—for example, requiring them to shorten their standard work hours or to pay part-time and full-time workers the same hourly wage. This raises important normative questions about whether it is legitimate and appropriate to use the power of government to redistribute the costs of caring for children.

We argue that government has a central responsibility in this area because, as England and Folbre (1999b) argue, many individuals and institutions enjoy the fruits of parental caregiving without contributing to the costs. Society, through government, has at least two reasons for sharing the costs of caregiving. The first is related to efficiency. Because children's capabilities generate positive ex-

ternalities, private investments in children will fall below levels needed to produce economically and socially optimal outcomes. Public programs that help to defray the costs of child rearing, such as paid family leave and high-quality substitute care, constitute important investments in today's children and in the next generation of adults.

The second reason concerns equity. To the extent that all members of society reap the benefits of child rearing, all members of society—not just mothers—should share the costs (England and Folbre 1999b; Budig and England 2001). Labor and consumer markets cannot bring about this sharing of costs; for this, we must rely on the redistributive and regulatory power of government. The failure to share caregiving costs has still other implications for equity among children. To the extent that we rely on parents' private resources, children in poor families receive far less than their more affluent counterparts; government supports could help equalize children's opportunities.

POLICY MODELS FROM OTHER COUNTRIES

We do not have to begin from scratch in the design of a policy package that would support families and facilitate the development of a dual-earner–dual-carer society. Family policies in several European countries, especially the Nordic countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden as well as France and Belgium—and even in neighboring Canada—provide models of what government can do to help families resolve the tensions between workplace and caring responsibilities while promoting greater gender equality. Although none of these countries has made the transition to a fully egalitarian dual-earner–dual-carer society, several have taken important steps in this direction, and their policy designs suggest useful lessons for the United States.

Chapter 5 describes family leave policies that grant employed parents time for caregiving, with compensation, especially during their children's first three years. Policies in countries that do the most to support a dual-earner–dual-carer society grant nearly all

employed mothers job security and wage replacement around the time of childbirth. Following maternity leaves, parental leave rights and benefits provide both parents periods of paid leave during their children's preschool years. Gender disparities in the take-up of these policies remains problematic, however, leading some countries to strengthen incentives for fathers to make use of leaves. Mothers and fathers also have the right to some time off, with pay, to attend to short-term and unpredictable needs that arise throughout their children's lives. The financing of these leaves distributes the costs across society and minimizes the burden for individual employers.

Chapter 6 provides examples of labor market policies that protect parents' time for caregiving. In the countries that do the most to support families in their earning and caring roles, public measures limit weekly employment hours, often setting the standard full-time workweek at thirty-five to thirty-nine hours, below the American forty-hour standard. Labor market measures are in place to improve both the availability and quality of part-time work and to limit parents' employment during nonstandard hours or to compensate workers who work those schedules (or both). Public vacation policies ensure parents four to five weeks' time with their families each year—twice the amount of time available to most American workers.

In chapter 7, we describe public policies that provide alternatives for the care of children while their parents are at the workplace, through public early childhood education and care (ECEC) programs and school scheduling that is compatible with parents' employment schedules. The most supportive countries provide or finance inclusive ECEC services for a large share of one- and two-year-olds and nearly all older preschool children. The costs of these services are shared between government and families, with government assuming most of the cost and scaling parental fees to family income. Quality is ensured through public-sector staffing and regulations that require high levels of preparation—with appropriate compensation—for private and public child care workers. For older children, school scheduling policies in the most supportive countries ensure that children's school schedules are well matched to parents' hours of employment.

DOES POLICY MATTER? LINKING POLICIES TO OUTCOMES

We have argued that an expanded role for the U.S. government can be justified both as an investment in the healthy development of children and as a means for more equitable sharing of the costs of caregiving. This assumes that these policies are effective in achieving these outcomes. In chapter 8 we review in some detail what is already known and what remains to be learned about the extent to which these policies promote gender equality and enhance child and family well-being.

The employment effects of family leave policy have received substantial research attention. The empirical evidence suggests that access to leave has the potential to reduce labor market inequalities between men and women by facilitating continuous employment and reducing wage penalties associated with motherhood. Other research suggests that access to family leave may have health benefits for children as well, especially in the form of reduced infant mortality. Evidence is less consistent as to how children benefit on other dimensions from the presence of a parent at home, although the most recent research suggests that high levels of maternal employment during the first year of life are associated with worse outcomes for at least some groups of children and that these effects persist well into grade school.

Many researchers have examined the effects of early childhood education and care on women's employment and on children's well-being. This research has produced substantial evidence that high child care costs depress mothers' employment; policies that reduce these costs have been shown to increase maternal employment, potentially closing employment and wage gaps between mothers and fathers with young children. A substantial empirical literature has also established the contribution of child care quality to children's health, cognitive, and socioemotional outcomes. The most disadvantaged children appear to benefit the most from high-quality care and to suffer the most from poor-quality care.

A small body of research has also assessed the effects of multi-

program policy packages such as we describe. These studies provide encouraging evidence that public policies aimed at either increasing gender equality or easing work-family tensions can increase women's employment rates, reduce employment discontinuity in connection with child caregiving, and lessen the extent to which employment interruptions for caregiving penalize mothers' wages later in life.

CAN FAMILY POLICY MODELS FROM ABROAD WORK IN THE UNITED STATES?

We close, in chapter 9, by addressing several common objections to the adoption of "European-style" policies in the United States. Those who are skeptical of drawing lessons from abroad often point to the extreme diversity within the American population and to particular social and economic challenges, such as the prevalence of both single parents and low-wage workers. Others are concerned that these programs are actually harmful. In particular, some fear that generous social programs may have problematic consequences for family formation; others warn that public provisions have undermined the European economies and that they would do the same in the United States. Still others argue that Americans' preferences are fundamentally incompatible with public, especially national, social programs. Other skeptics raise concerns that are not about differences between the United States and other countries. They argue that many men simply do not want to become committed caregivers, employers are likely to resist or undermine public policies that require them to accommodate parents' needs for caregiving time, or that comprehensive work-family policies would simply be too expensive.

In our concluding chapter, we address each of these concerns. We argue that these concerns do not have to constitute insurmountable barriers to providing more public supports for American families. The reality is that many of the European countries with high levels of social provision are also quite diverse, some with immigration rates as high as or higher than the U.S. rate. In fact, part of the rationale for generous social policies in some of the high-providing countries is to contribute to the integration of

diverse populations into a united citizenry. Moreover, though high rates of single parenthood and low-wage employment are indeed vexing problems in the United States, they are not unique to this country. The policies described here play a crucial role in supporting families in other countries, and they operate outside the realm of traditional “welfare” programs, which have received the most sustained criticism in the United States.

Frequently voiced concerns about the unintended consequences of work-family policies are often exaggerated. Although recent fertility declines in Europe are troublesome, there is no evidence to suggest that the programs described here have contributed to this decline by encouraging women to choose employment over childbearing. In fact, the countries with the highest fertility rates are among those with the most generous work-family reconciliation policies that allow parents to combine parenting with employment. Nor is there reason to worry, as many Americans do, that these programs would increase childbearing among single women without labor force ties. The incentives created by work-family policies are in precisely those directions most widely supported by Americans: employment, parental caregiving, and paternal involvement.

Other Americans argue that generous social programs have damaged the European economies; their contribution to high unemployment rates has been widely reported in the American media. More-scholarly assessments conclude that there is little evidence for such a causal link. More important, nearly all of the European economies rebounded during the 1990s, and these recoveries unfolded as governments across Europe expanded public family leave and child care provisions and passed new laws aimed at reducing working time and increasing protections for part-time workers.

We would also argue that social policy analysts and advocates have been too quick to conclude that public work-family programs will not play in the political heartland of the United States, or are too costly, thereby reinforcing the inevitability of their defeat. In fact, public-opinion research suggests that a large share of Americans support paid parental leave, regulations aimed at shortening the workweek, public investments in child care, and longer school hours. There is no question that these benefits would be

costly. A comparative analysis suggests, however, that comprehensive leave and child care benefits would cost only about half of what the United States now spends on primary and secondary education.

Finally, broadening the end vision of family policy to include support for a gender-egalitarian society has the potential to close political cleavages that have hampered the adoption of family policies in the past. Formulating leave, child care, and labor market policies to explicitly include fathers as well as mothers has the potential to engage men's support. Designing these policies to support both employment and caring, shared equally by women and men, holds promise for closing the schism between feminists oriented to reducing gender differentials, especially in the labor market, and those focused on rewarding caregiving in the home. A policy package that enables parents to care for young children at home also holds promise for bridging the gap that often separates feminists working toward gender equality from advocates concerned with children's well-being. Embracing the vision of the earner-carer society may help to mobilize widespread support for family policy expansion in the United States.

ABOUT THE SELECTION OF FAMILIES

We focus in this book on the problems of reconciling employment with the care of children. We choose to focus on families with children because the problems they face are so pressing and the consequences of failure are so great. Many of the problems we consider, however, and some of the solutions we describe are equally relevant to other caregiving demands and other family forms. The care of elderly parents, for example, creates many similar dilemmas, and a growing number of families are finding themselves "sandwiched" by the need to care for both young children and elderly parents. Although we do not address these additional caregiving challenges, many of our policy lessons are equally relevant to them.

We also focus our discussion and examples primarily on two-parent families, implying married or cohabiting heterosexual adults who are jointly caring for children. We focus on heterosexual couples

because one of our key concerns is the gendered division of labor within contemporary families, but nearly all of the policies that we identify would bring nearly the same advantages for same-sex couples. In fact, same-sex couples raising children are, in some sense, the model dual-earner–dual-carer families insofar as paid and unpaid work hours are not allocated by gender. The policies that we describe as supporting dual-earner–dual-carer families are also relevant for single-parent families, who are likely to have even greater needs for caregiving and income support.

ABOUT THE SELECTION AND COMPARISON OF COUNTRIES

Most of the empirical analyses and policy discussions in this book are explicitly cross-national and comparative. Cross-national comparisons help to challenge the belief that the family-level outcomes and policy designs observed in the United States are the only ones possible, and they provide models for alternative policy designs. By linking policy designs to outcomes, we are also able to benefit from a “natural experiment” that sheds light on the consequences of policy for the outcomes that most concern us.

When selecting countries for cross-national studies, comparativists face two fundamental decisions: how many countries to study and their degree of homogeneity. A smaller number of countries allows more intimate knowledge of each case, whereas a larger number of countries ensures more variation—a factor that is crucial for any research that aims to tease out policy impacts. Selecting more similar countries (say, the United States and Canada) allows comparativists to assume some degree of similarity between them that controls for omitted variables, such as political culture. In contrast, choosing countries that are more different (say, the United States and France) provides more variation but also exacerbates the problem of dealing with multiple differences that co-vary. Choosing countries that are extremely different (say, the United States and China) pushes the limits of comparative-policy research, as overarching contextual factors are so different that policy translation becomes nearly impossible.

We have chosen a compromise strategy. Our group of coun-

tries comprises twelve relatively similar countries: the United States, Canada, and ten European countries. Twelve countries is few enough to allow us to learn about them in a reasonable amount of detail and just enough to enable us to draw some inferences about policy effects. The European countries—especially the Nordic countries—give us a window on generous, egalitarian social welfare policies that exist only in these countries, whereas Canada and even the United Kingdom allow a comparison of the United States with its most similar counterparts. Taken together, these countries offer a range of comparators, from our nearest neighbor, Canada, to countries considerably more remote.

We have excluded many countries in which families are grappling with the same concerns. The most noteworthy exclusion is that of industrialized countries in two rapidly changing regions: the former Eastern Europe and the Pacific Rim. Our omission of these countries is explained partly by severe data limitations and partly by their very differences in the area of family policy. State supports for families in the Eastern European countries, once common, have been wholly or partially dismantled following economic liberalization; similar supports are exceedingly limited, or radically different in structure, in the Pacific Rim. Policy developments in these countries are worthy of study but are largely outside the scope of our comparative framework.

We organize our presentation of these comparisons by grouping our eleven comparison countries into three fairly homogeneous groups. These groups include the four Nordic European countries of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden; the five Continental European countries of Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands; and two English-speaking countries, the United Kingdom and Canada.²

This grouping reflects the theoretical and empirical work of the Danish sociologist Gosta Esping-Andersen, as presented in his book, *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* (Esping-Andersen 1990). Esping-Andersen classifies the major welfare states of the industrialized West into three clusters, each characterized by shared principles of social welfare entitlement and relatively homogeneous outcomes. He and subsequent authors using this framework characterize social policy in the Nordic countries as generally organized along social democratic lines, with entitlements

linked to social rights. Social policy in the Continental countries is typically tied to earnings and occupation, and public provisions tend to replicate market-generated distributional outcomes. In the Continental countries, social policy is also shaped by the principle of “subsidiarity,” which stresses the primacy of the family and community for providing dependent care and other social supports. Social benefits in the English-speaking countries are usually organized to reflect and preserve consumer and employer markets, and most entitlements derive from need, based on limited resources.

In the 1990s, many critics (including us) charged Esping-Andersen with ignoring gender issues, such as variation in the provision of family leave and child care, and the roles of paid and unpaid work in establishing welfare-state entitlements. Yet subsequent empirical efforts to establish welfare-state typologies that incorporate gender have largely confirmed Esping-Andersen’s classification. That suggests that the welfare-state principles underlying these clusters are highly correlated with those that shape family policy. In the Nordic countries, the social-democratic principles that guide policy design are generally paired with a commitment to gender equality; the market-replicating principles in the Continental countries are often embedded in socially conservative ideas about family and gender roles; in the English-speaking countries the principles of the market nearly always take precedence.

The Esping-Andersen regime types provide a useful and robust organizing framework. We make use of them in this volume because they push us to think theoretically about social policy and help us to identify empirical patterns across our comparison countries. Working with these well-known groupings will also allow comparativists to situate our findings within the larger welfare-state literature.

