

The Logics of Work, Care, and Gender Change in the New Economy:
A View from the U.S.

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for

Work-Family Dynamics: Competing Logics of Regulation, Economy, and Morals,

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Abstract:

The “new economy” is reshaping the logics of gender, work, and care worldwide, but the U.S. lacks state and market supports to ease this transition. Interviews with a cross-section of Americans provide an overview of the strategies emerging to cope with this new reality. These include neo-traditional arrangements, with women responsible for caregiving even when both partners work; remaining single, with individuals living without support from or obligations to a partner; gender-reversed arrangements, with women performing breadwinning and men becoming caretakers; and egalitarian efforts, with couples striving to share work and care. All these strategies entail difficulties that highlight the need to restructure market and state institutions to foster flexible, integrated reconciliations for everyone.

Caring for others – financially, physically, and emotionally – is a universal human task that is inextricably linked to the organization of gender. In modern societies, this task is organized by the institutions of the family, the workplace, and the welfare state. Yet the ways these three institutions interact to organize work and care is not uniform. They operate according to different logics that often exist in conflict with one another, and the connections among them take different forms in different national contexts. Nations vary in the way they distribute responsibility for paid work and unpaid caregiving, and these differences both reflect and influence the diverse forms of gender and class inequality across national settings.

The United States provides an especially telling example of the complicated dynamic between universal needs and local constraints. The U.S. resides at the center of transnational economic and demographic shifts that are transforming the institutions of work and care worldwide, yet it lags behind other post-industrial nations in creating new institutional logics that can adequately address the new breadwinning and caregiving needs these shifts have created. Widespread changes in Americans' lives – such as the erosion of stable jobs and the decline of two-parent, male-breadwinner households – are thus unfolding amid a national policy vacuum.

The lack of institutional realignments to meet new family needs is well known, but the consequences remain obscure. How do American workers and their families cope with the dislocations caused when market and government structures fail to provide workable options for reconciling paid work with unpaid caregiving? What strategies are people forging in an institutional context that defines work-care conflicts as personal challenges rather than social

responsibilities? What are the implications for the future of work, care, and gender equality? And, finally, how can we restructure the organizational logics of the American welfare state to effectively address this growing conflict between Americans' desire for work-care integration and the marketplace's resistance to providing flexible, egalitarian options?

The Changing Logics of Work and Care: New Uncertainties in Work and Family Life

Just as the industrial revolution transformed the gender order by separating the public and private spheres, a “new economy” is reshaping the organization of gender, work, and caregiving in the 21st century. The roots of this transformation can be found in several distinct, but intertwined social revolutions that, taken together, are changing the logics of work and care and creating new uncertainties in both institutional spheres.

In the world of paid employment, unpredictable work paths are replacing stable jobs and 40 hour workweeks. The decline of manufacturing jobs and strong unions has eroded the wages and job security that broad swaths of white working-class American men once counted on to support their families (Rosenfeld, 2014). For white collar workers, the decline of employer loyalty has had a similarly corrosive effect on middle-class career paths (Hacker, 2008; Kalleberg, 2011). The rise of digital technologies, moreover, has blurred the spatial and temporal boundaries between the home and the workplace for everyone. All of these changes have converged to create new uncertainties in the daily rhythm of paid work and the long-run employment trajectories of workers.

A parallel revolution has taken place in the personal realm, where optional commitments have replaced compulsory ones (Coontz, 2005). Marriage remains a popular ideal, which most Americans hope to achieve, but it is no longer a requirement for attaining adulthood or parenthood (Furstenberg et al., 2004; Cherlin, 2009). Nor is marriage defined by a gender-divided, heterosexual partnership. Options such as divorce, cohabitation, same-sex partnerships, delayed marriage, and permanent singlehood are all increasingly acceptable and appealing options. The expanded choice to form diverse relationships, to change partners throughout adulthood, and to eschew intimate commitment altogether has eroded security and predictability in people's private lives just as the decline of stable work and career ladders has eroded predictability in people's work lives.

The gender revolution is both a cause and a consequence of massive shifts in the logics of both the market and the family. Women's strengthened ties to the paid labor force are a global trend. In the United States, women now constitute close to half of the labor force, and they are outpacing men in educational attainment and college attendance (DiPrete and Buchmann, 2013). American women still lag behind men in earnings and continue to face daunting barriers to workplace advancement, but they nevertheless serve as the main breadwinner for 40 percent of the U.S. households with children under the age of eighteen (Wang, Parker, and Taylor, 2013).⁴

These intertwined economic, family, and gender revolutions have irrevocably shattered the once-dominant "gender bargain" between breadwinning husbands and caregiving wives. That bargain rested on two premises – that marriages would be permanent and that husbands could earn

enough throughout their working lives to support wives and children. Now that fewer than 15 percent of U.S. households consist of a (heterosexual) married couple with a single (male) earner, these premises no longer obtain. The generations coming of age today face uncertain job prospects and unpredictable family paths that require new strategies for navigating their work and personal lives.

Outdated Institutional Logics and the Intensification of Work-Care Conflicts

Economic and personal uncertainties have undermined a gender system based on assigning responsibility for market work to men and responsibility for carework to women, but a more viable framework has not emerged to take its place. Paradoxically, as the need to integrate work and care has increased, pressures to devote more time to both paid work and caregiving have also escalated.

At the workplace, Americans face mounting pressure to put in more time. Although firms and workers throughout the world compete in a global economy, studies show that Americans workers tend to put in longer hours today than they did in the past or than their contemporary peers in other post-industrial societies (Gornick and Myers, 2004; Jacobs and Gerson, 2004). The norm of the “ideal worker,” who places his or her job before all other pursuits, has intensified and expanded (Williams, 2000; Moen and Roehling, 2004).

On the home front, American parents confront similar pressures. Despite the growing numbers of dual-earning couples and single parent households (overwhelmingly headed by women), parents

are spending more time with their children than they did when stay-at-home mothers were the norm (Bianchi, Robinson, and Milkie, 2007). While there is some debate about whether the norm of “intensive parenting” is concentrated among middle-class parents or weighs heavily on parents, and especially mothers, of all classes, there is no doubt that American parenting remains a highly privatized, time-intensive responsibility (Hays, 1996; Lareau, 2011).

The values of hard work and parental responsibility are integral to the American cultural tradition. Yet longstanding cultural values cannot explain why work and parenting pressures have intensified in the current period. Nor can values alone explain why the new insecurities spawned global economic changes take an especially acute form in the United States. Instead, the intensification of work-care conflicts in the U.S. ultimately stems from a reluctance to restructure the institutions of work and care – which were largely built in the middle decades of the 20th century when breadwinner-homemaker households were the norm – in light of new economic and caregiving needs.

Competing Views of Gender Change

The demographic and economic forces reshaping American work and family life have generated a divisive debate about the meaning of the gender revolution. On one side are those who argue that these shifts are irreversible and thus require the restructuring of work and care; on the other are those who counter that these shifts are symptoms of a worrisome moral decline that needs to be reversed. This debate has generated conflicting views about the future trajectory of change and the steps that should be taken in response.

Two scenarios, positing quite different outcomes, have framed the public discussion. One scenario depicts an end to the gender revolution. This view points to evidence showing a stall in women's labor force participation, the persistence of a glass ceiling at the workplace, and continuing gender gaps in women's earnings and men's participation in domestic work. Surveys that document a continuing ambivalence about the employment of mothers with young children – along with anecdotal stories about professional women who opt out of careers to rear children – add to the popular view that the movement toward gender equality has stalled and even reversed (England, 2010; Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman, 2011).⁵

In contrast, a second scenario posits a different future. Rather than returning to mid-20th century gender patterns, this view focuses on signs of women's growing independence and men's declining power and privilege. Younger generations of women are outpacing men in college attendance, educational attainment, personal earnings, and career aspirations, men's labor force participation is declining (Patten and Parker, 2007).⁶ Pointing to the confusion and sense of threat that a loss of status evokes in some men, one pundit has even dubbed this trend “the end of men” (Rosin, 2012). Whether the focus is on women's gains or men's purported losses, this scenario depicts a future populated by single adults who build their life paths on their own rather than in concert with a lifelong partner (Klinenberg, 2012). The most alarmist vision of this future sees unmoored individualism replacing lasting commitments to marriage, family, and community (Wilcox, 2010).

Despite the starkly different pictures these two scenarios present, they share a concentration on one aspect of change. Each implicitly projects a linear trajectory going forward. Like blind men touching different parts of an elephant, each isolates one element of a diverse set of trends, taking it to represent the whole. Neither is wrong, but both are incomplete. A fuller picture reveals a more complex landscape, in which change is contradictory and the future is not predetermined.

Beyond making linear projections based on discrete trends, it helps to place these apparently contradictory developments in a larger context. Uneven change has created structural and cultural cross-pressures that require new integrations of work and care without offering the necessary social supports to do so. These cross-pressures undermine earlier practices, but they do not provide new institutionalized pathways. Instead, they pose dilemmas that require innovative responses, but still lack clear, viable, and socially accepted resolutions. In this climate, American women and men have been left to devise their own strategies to reconcile the conflicting pressures to be *both* a committed worker and a devoted caretaker. How are they navigating work-care conflicts, what range of strategies are they crafting, and what explains the varied shapes these strategies are taking? These questions make it possible to chart the multiple directions of change while also helping to illumine the obstacles that prevent American workers and parents from achieving a more equal, integrated, and secure blending of work and care.

The Contending Options: Neo-traditionalism, Self-Reliance, or Equality?

While the future is not a preordained extension of current trends, neither individuals nor societies can construct their futures in a social-historical vacuum. As Marx's famous dictum declares,

people make history under conditions not of their own choosing. Historical conditions constrain the range of options available to social actors, but they do not determine which of these options people will select. That depends on how historical actors envision the possibilities and choose among them.

What options do Americans consider as they endeavor to build their work and family lives? My interviews with young adults (between ages 18 and 32) who grew up during rapid changes of the last several decades revealed three possible types, which I term “neo-traditional,” “self-reliant,” and “egalitarian” (Gerson, 2011). The neo-traditional option represents an updated version of the oft-labeled “traditional” pattern that predominated in the mid-20th century. Like that paradigm, neo-traditionalism stresses permanent marital commitment, but also includes the possibility that both partners hold paid jobs. It presumes, however, that one partner will specialize in breadwinning and the other in caregiving, thus maintaining a gender division of responsibilities even when the household contains two earners (Hochschild and Machung, 1989).

At the other end of the spectrum, another option stresses individual “self-reliance.” In this prototype, marital commitment remains a possibility, but does not provide a framework for apportioning responsibilities or achieving financial security. Individuals retain a sense that, whether single or married, they need to be able to survive on their own without relying on a partner for economic support.

These contrasting models echo the scenarios posited by analysts and pundits. Neo-traditionalism

thus depicts one consequence of a stall in the move toward gender equality, while self-reliance depicts an understandable reaction to the rising fragility of marriage and the growth of single adulthood. There is, however, another alternative that contains elements found in each of these scenarios, but diverges from both in critical ways. This third vision upholds the ideal of enduring commitment to an intimate partner, but also stresses the value of personal autonomy. To reconcile these potentially incompatible goals, an egalitarian ideal emphasizes fairness, equity, and flexibility in apportioning responsibility for work and care. In this vision, intimate partners seek to share earning and caregiving and to blend these pursuits in their own lives.

How, then, do young Americans perceive these options? The overwhelming majority of the young adults I interviewed expressed a desire to establish an egalitarian balance of work and care.

Indeed, four-fifths of women and two-thirds of the men hoped to create an egalitarian relationship where both paid work and family caretaking are shared. Yet most of these young adults also concluded that they have little choice but to prepare for options that are likely to fall substantially short of their ideals. In the face of these barriers, they formulated fallback strategies. Yet unlike their ideals, the fallback positions of women and men are quite different.

Most young women – regardless of class, race, or ethnic background – expressed reluctance to surrender autonomy in a traditional marriage and instead remained determined to seek financial and emotional self-reliance. Hoping to avoid being trapped in an unhappy marriage or abandoned by an unreliable partner, almost three-fourths of the women said they plan to build a non-negotiable base and an independent identity in the world of paid work. When the bonds of

marriage appear fragile, self-reliance appears more appealing and sensible than relying on a husband for economic security.

Young men, in contrast, were more inclined to fall back on neo-traditionalism. Torn between their recognition of women's right to work and their own need to succeed – or at least survive – in the marketplace, they supported women's employment but still felt the need to be the primary breadwinner. If and when the demands of work collide with the needs of children, they expected their partner to take the lead for caregiving. In the context of a heterosexual relationship, this modified form of a separate-spheres arrangement offers women the “choice” to work (as long as they combine this with caregiving) and makes room for two earners as a buffer against the uncertainties of living on one income, but it does not impose the costs of equal parenting on men.

These findings reveal two emerging divides in American life. Most attention continues to focus on the gender divide between men, who perceive need to put paid work first, and women, whose desire for equality and financial independence is growing. As significant, however, is the rising conflict between ideals and perceived options among younger generations regardless of gender identity or sexual orientation. Women and men are converging in their aspirations, but face daunting obstacles to achieving them. Viewed from this perspective, institutional arrangements rather than individual values hold the key to enabling a more egalitarian balance between work and care.

Emerging Responses to Work-Care Conflicts

How is the conflict between egalitarian ideals and constricted options shaping people's strategies?

To find out, I have interviewed women and men in their prime career and family building years (between ages 34 and 46) about their commitments to work and care. To see how new economic and interpersonal uncertainties are shaping their strategies, I focused on areas in the heart of the new economy, including communities in and around Silicon Valley and in the New York metropolitan area where new types of jobs are on the rise. Residents in these areas live in a climate where the growth of the technology and service sectors has, to use a term favored by the high tech world, disrupted the structure of traditional jobs and blurred the boundaries between home and work. The sample consists of 120 respondents, equally divided between women (including one transgender respondent) and men. These respondents were randomly selected from voter registration lists in selected areas, chosen to exclude the wealthy neighborhoods of the "one percent" but to include areas with middle-class, working-class, and poor residents. The sample contains respondents from diverse ethnic, racial, and class backgrounds who work in a variety of occupations and live in diverse household types.

This research has revealed a complex patchwork of work-care strategies. Amid this diversity, four general patterns emerge. The patterns most evident are "neo-traditionalists" and "committed singles." The first conforms to the image of a stalled revolution in which the arrival of children prompts parents to divide paid work and caretaking in gender-specific ways, even when the original hope had been to avoid such an outcome. The second, which embodies the concerns of those who see a trend away from marital commitment, encompasses a variety of situations, from those who are single parents (almost always mothers) rearing a child without a partner to those

who are single, childless adults living on their own. These two patterns are well represented, with slightly more than a third living on their own or as a single parent and another third in a relationship with a traditional gender division in earning and caretaking.

These patterns exemplify the dual, if divergent, concerns of those who argue that the gender revolution has come to an end and those who see the triumph of uncommitted individualism. Yet they do not tell the whole story, since another third of my sample are developing quite different strategies. About 15 percent are “reversers,” who are in relationships that divide primary responsibility for earning and caretaking, but not in a way that conforms to traditional gender assignments. The final 15 percent are “egalitarians,” who find they must take extraordinary steps to resist gender divisions and share the work of earning and caretaking. Taken together, these two emerging strategies represent the rise of new patterns that transgress historic gender divisions either by reversing work and care domains or taking conscious steps to share them as equally as possible. They may be less plentiful than the dominant strategies, but they are on the rise. Among American households with children younger than 18, the share consisting of married mothers who out-earn their husbands has risen from 4 percent in 1960 to 15 percent in 2012 (Wang, Parker, and Taylor, 2013).¹⁴

The Dominant Strategies: Neo-Traditionalism and Staying Single

The dominant patterns among my interviewees show how the current logics of both the market and the state lead even those who prefer egalitarian and balanced work-care integrations to develop less desired arrangements. First, let’s consider how and why some women and men

settled for a neo-traditional partnership that they had once hoped to avoid. Most neo-traditional originally aspired to far more equal and flexible relationships, but circumstances converged to knock them off that path. Demanding jobs left fathers with little time for other pursuits, leaving mothers to become the default family caregiver when children arrived. Yet people took a variety of paths to this outcome, as the stories of Kyra and Tim illustrate:

Kyra, for example, left a successful career to move with her husband, who found his “dream job” in another city. Soon after their arrival, however, she became pregnant with a second child and received a chilly reception from potential employers who feared she would not be a committed work despite her past record of accomplishment. Kyra faced this maternal discrimination just as her husband’s new employer placed added pressure on him to work around the clock.¹⁵ Now at home with the children while her husband puts in long days at his company’s startup, she feels mounting frustration and anger.

Tim’s situation provides a mirror image to Kyra’s. As a technology expert, he had married a physician with whom he shared breadwinning and domestic work during the early years of their marriage. Hoping to continue to share equally when their first child arrived, his wife arranged to cut back her medical practice to work four days a week. When Tom asked for a similar arrangement, however, his boss not only refused but also hinted that his job would be in jeopardy if he continued to ask for time off. “I can find someone else who will be happy to take this job if you don’t want it,” Tim recalled his boss declaring. Unable to be with his young son in the ways he hoped, Tim is caught between fears of losing his job

and worries about the growing difficulties in his marriage.

In contrast to Kyra and Tim, another group found themselves on their own rather than in a committed relationship. Like their neo-traditional counterparts, these single women and men also hoped for an egalitarian partnership. In these cases, however, setbacks in relationships – and especially for the men, in job prospects as well – led toward singlehood. Michelle and Jason exemplify this path:

After years of seeking some stability in her work and family commitments, Michelle seemed to achieve both as she reached her mid-thirties. At work, she had ascended to become the director of a nonprofit agency that raised money from private foundations to help the poor. In her private life, she was happy in a two-year relationship that she hoped would lead to marriage. Then the unexpected happened in the form of an unplanned pregnancy. She greeted the surprising news with the hope that it would mark the beginning of starting a family, but soon discovered that her partner did not share this hope. Instead, Michelle decided to bear and rear their child without his participation or financial help. Today, Michelle is a single mother, who is devoted to her young daughter. She relies on the help of good friends and paid caretakers, but she has also relinquished up her directorship for a less exciting, but more financially secure job in middle management.

Jason represents the other side of the single divide. Though he hopes to succeed as an entrepreneur, his twenties and thirties brought a series of jobs in retail or at the lower

rungs of an organization's ladder that never provided stability, a comfortable income, or future prospects. His history of intimate relationships has followed a similar path, with live-in girlfriends who soon moved out, often because his precarious finances left him unable and unwilling to take on the responsibilities of a long-term commitment. Today, Jason does not hold a paid job and does not feel "entitled" to have a family. Instead, he spends his days in front of his laptop at a local coffee house, trying to develop an app that he hopes will lead to a "real" job and a more promising future.

On the surface, Michele's and Jason's lives could hardly appear more different. As Michelle rushes from home to work and back again, shouldering responsibility for breadwinning and caregiving largely on her own, Jason has no such responsibilities and faces a surfeit of "free" time. Yet they share the challenges that come with singlehood – how to manage their time, find a network of social and emotional support, and create a sense of belonging that does not depend on having an intimate, reliable partner. Yet even though these patterns account for the majority of my interviewees, a substantial minority developed different patterns that consisted of more transgressive gender arrangements.

The Emerging Strategies: Gender Reversals and Egalitarian Partnerships

Neo-traditionalism and extended singlehood may be the most prevalent patterns among my interviewees, but two additional patterns – "gender reversal" and "egalitarian" – point to the emergence of new possibilities for organizing gender, work, and caregiving. Yet a lack of institutionalized support for these patterns leaves their adherents facing a different set of

drawbacks and difficulties.

The women and men who created a gender reversed pattern were especially likely to have wanted for an egalitarian partnership. As the years passed, however, their efforts at equal sharing stalled. While the men hit roadblocks at work, the women were able to find stable – if not always fulfilling – jobs and careers. What began as a shared agreement to support a woman’s ties to paid work and a man’s desire to follow a riskier work path crystallized into an increasingly uneven division of work and care as children arrived. Women who were able to bring in a steady, if not abundant income became the main breadwinners, leaving men to take on a greater share of caretaking, as the paths of Dolores and Adam demonstrate:

Dolores met and married her husband when they were both students working to pay their way through college. After college graduation, he encouraged her to accept a generous fellowship and continue her studies in biology, gladly following her to a new city. They also decided to start a family, and the first of their three children soon arrived. This pattern continued for a decade, as Dolores found a series of better jobs in new places. Not surprisingly, the frequent moves took a considerable toll on her husband’s ability to find a good job or build a resume. As Dolores thrived in her career, her husband faced diminishing work prospects. Along the way, two more children arrived, and her husband took increasing responsibility for caregiving as Dolores’ work responsibilities grew. By the time she arrived at her current job, her husband had become the full-time caretaker for their toddler. Today, she worries that her income cannot sustain the family and, worse, that

their marriage cannot survive the weight of her husband's resentment.

While Dolores has unwittingly become the family breadwinner, Adam has become his young son's primary caretaker. For almost a decade, Adam has been in and out of the labor force, primarily by choice. Even though he lacks a college degree, he is a self-taught computer coder who with skills many companies value. Yet he harbors no desire take a low rung job working long hours doing what he considers boring work. Instead, he hopes to create his own start-up. His wife, in contrast, works full-time as an office manager, a job she has held for many years and represents the kind of paid work he wants to avoid. Adam, in contrast, spends his days working on ideas at hangout where techies gather and where he brings his young son. He is forgoing a paycheck to pursue a dream he may or may not achieve, while his wife provides the family income. In the short run, their arrangement is working, although it less clear how long they can sustain it. He must endure the questioning of neighbors and friends who think he should be earning a steady income, and she would prefer more satisfying work with better pay and fewer time demands.

These reversed arrangements represent practical adjustments to the changing mix of work and care options offered by the service and hi tech economy. They also embody one possibility for enacting new, less rigidly determined gender patterns. Yet given a social context that continues to expect "marriageable" men to be good providers and employed women to endure lower pay and fewer opportunities, gender reversed strategies pose considerable perils as well (Wilson, 1987). In too many instances, they leave women facing financial responsibilities their jobs cannot provide

and men facing social opprobrium for caring for their families.

A fourth pattern among my interviewees comes closest to the ideal of egalitarian commitment, although the strategies people developed to enact this ideal make it clear that “doing it all” does not mean “having it all.” Those who forged relationships built on the principle of equal sharing found that sustaining this arrangement entailed an array of sacrifices. Take the cases of Carmen and Danny:

After graduating from high school, Carmen joined the military, where she spent her twenties as a clerical worker. After a decade, she longed to put down roots somewhere, and left military service to take a job as an administrator at a small company. She also met her husband, a construction worker, and they settled down. As the years passed, Carmen's skills as a manager led to successive promotions, while her husband built a small contracting business. They both succeeded beyond their modest expectations, but the demands of their work left little time for anything else. As they moved through their thirties, they reluctantly decided to forego having children of their own. Now in her early forties, Carmen occasionally feels confident about the decision to remain childless, although also wistful about the children she did not have. Instead, she and her husband have taken several nieces and nephews into their home when crises arose in her extended family.

Danny, like Carmen, has created an egalitarian marriage. He and wife are both highly

committed to their jobs – he as a financial advisor and she as a real estate broker. Unlike Carmen, however, Danny and his wife were unwilling to forgo parenthood and recently had a son. Determined to share equally in his care, they both received permission to work at home half-time. This arrangement has made it possible for both of them to spend ample time with their son, but it has also left them feeling constantly exhausted. Unable to find affordable childcare and facing pressure to spend more time at the office, Danny is concerned that they will not be able to sustain their current arrangement or consider having another child.

In both of these cases, a commitment to equality could not provide a solution to the competing demands of work and care. Lacking flexible career options and high quality childcare, both faced a fateful tradeoff between childlessness and exhaustion. They made different choices, but each entailed difficulties and sacrifices. Egalitarian strategies offer an alternative to neo-traditional, self-reliant, and gender reversed models, but the ideal remains vague and difficult to attain in lieu of clear institutionalized supports and pathways. It is not surprising that the small group (about 20 percent of the “egalitarians”) who were able to share work & care without undue sacrifice to themselves or their relationships enjoyed job security, flexible work schedules, and access to a network of caretakers they trusted.

Different Strategies, but Shared Conflicts

All the patterns among my interviewees contain diversity, and the distinctions among them can blur as people move from one category to another as changes occur in their economic and

interpersonal fortunes. These four patterns nevertheless provide a roadmap for charting the options people face and the paths they are blazing as they attempt to resolve the conflicts between work and care in today's uncertain economic and interpersonal landscape.

It would be inaccurate, however, to presume that any of these strategies are straightforward or easy. To the contrary, each contains drawbacks that leave most feeling vaguely dissatisfied and some feeling intensely conflicted. The variety of patterns is itself an indication that a lack of institutional supports makes all pathways insecure and difficult. Considering the full array of strategies, it is important to see their commonalities as well as their differences. Each strategy represents a different compromise to a set of shared dilemmas. Yet neither gender identity nor personal preferences can explain why people developed such different strategies. Indeed, women and men from all social backgrounds articulated aspirations to integrate and share work and care in a flexible way with a life partner.

If personal values and preferences cannot explain the divergent pathways people traveled, what does? Surveying the whole landscape reveals the importance of social context. Differences in exposure to the uncertainties and insecurities wrought by the new economy propelled individuals in different directions. Only a small minority some were able to find a secure, flexible job and to build a relationship with a partner who enjoyed similar advantages. Most faced less ideal conditions, including a lack of secure, flexible work and a lasting relationship with a partner who had secure, flexible work. All these factors combined in different ways to produce divergent responses to the rising insecurities and conflicts between work and care. Yet none of these

responses provided a satisfactory option for achieving economic security or integrating work and care in the long run.

Despite the differences, none of the strategies were able to provide satisfying avenues for most to reconcile work and care. Even those who pursued an egalitarian approach struggled against the odds and remained doubtful their efforts could be sustained going forward. Amid an increasingly insecure, competitive, and individualized economy, this finding may not be surprising but it is cause for concern. It highlights the inadequacy of an institutional regime that emphasizes the priority of the market and sees families as responsible for “taking care of themselves.” This institutional logic pits work, career, and financial survival against the caregiving needs of families. Equally concerning, even though American families face new financial insecurities and increasingly depend on the earnings of women, my respondents held little hope that either the government or employers would provide the support they needed. Instead, like most Americans, most took it for granted that they alone are responsible for their own fate.

The Future of Work and Care in the U.S. Context: Are Equality and Reconciliation Possible?

The irreversible erosion of job and marital security has undermined the bedrock that once sustained a gender bargain between breadwinners and caregivers. Indeed, the rise of same-sex couples, along with the increasingly fluid nature of gender identities, shatters the presumption of binary gender categories altogether. In the American context, however, more flexible ways of apportioning and integrating work and care continue to lack institutional support. My interviews

show that even though gender can no longer provide the sole or primary organizing principle for allocating work and care, outdated institutional logics prevent the emergence of more egalitarian and integrated resolutions. They show that in the context of the new economy, the next stage in the U.S. gender revolution must focus on restructuring the institutions of work and caretaking to support the needs and aspirations of 21st century workers and parents, regardless of their gender identity. What, in practical terms, does this mean?

Inevitable Change, Uncertain Directions

The first requirement for developing any roadmap for the future is to distinguish between changes that are inevitable and social arrangements that can be shaped by collective choices. The economic and demographic forces fueling financial and marital uncertainty in the U.S. are not likely to reverse. They will shape the future, even if some pockets of American society wish to deny their inevitability. In fact, the number who reject gender and family change is shrinking as more Americans, especially among younger generations, endorse same-sex marriage and mothers' employment (Padulla and Thebaud, 2015; Jacobs and Gerson, 2016).

The decline of secure jobs for men and secure marriages for women does not, however, guarantee that a more egalitarian gender system will take its place. Past arrangements may no longer work for most, but the shape of new practices remains unsettled. It depends on how – and if – political actors develop institutional policies that address the new tensions between work and care and create new logics that support flexible, egalitarian work-family integrations.

Looking cross-nationally, three options can be found for organizing work-family institutional regimes, which I term “familistic,” “individualistic,” and “egalitarian.” Each represents a different approach to structuring the links among gender, the workplace, and family life. What, then, do my findings imply for the larger challenge of creating a policy regime that recognizes the challenges posed by the new economy and offers workable resolutions to the conflicting logics of work and care at play in the U.S. today?

The Limits of Familism and Individualism

In the U.S., the earliest policy regime was based on the principle of “familism” (or what Orloff, 2011, calls “maternalism”). This paradigm stresses the family cohesion over gender equality, and it builds social policy around the primacy of the married, heterosexual couple. Social rights are allocated to households anchored by a breadwinning husband and father, and social programs are aimed at those – such as single mothers and unemployed men – who cannot adhere to this paradigm. This “familistic” approach informed much of American social welfare policy throughout the middle decades of the 20th century, but it began to fray as women joined the labor force and family structures diversified.

Amid the closing decades of the 20th century, an “individualistic” social policy regime began to supplant the earlier principle of supporting single mothers and their children. This approach stresses equal opportunities (not outcomes) for individuals rather than social rights for households. Drawing on the American tradition of individualism, an individualistic policy logic focuses on the rights of all citizens, regardless of gender, race, class background, or sexual

orientation, to compete on an equal basis for social resources such as jobs, education, and housing. Since the emphasis is on opportunities rather than outcomes, anti-discrimination policies that aim to affirm equal rights at the workplace take center stage, while policies providing a financial safety net as well as support for unpaid caregiving are downplayed, leaving care as a largely private responsibility.

Yet the American tradition of individualism and family self-sufficiency is inadequate to address the challenges of the new economy. Neither a familistic nor an individualistic approach can address the revolutionary shifts that have upended the gender system. By depending on women as unpaid caretakers, a familistic policy regime swims against the tide of history. Rather than persuading women to relinquish economic autonomy in favor of motherhood, it is more likely to create a birth dearth as women avoid marriage and childbearing in favor of paid work. An individualistic policy regime, in contrast, may protect individual rights in the marketplace but it ignores the rights of those who give and receive care in the private sphere. Each of these institutional logics presumes the market takes precedence over nonmarket activities and the state is not responsible for protecting or supporting families.

Both thus both fall far short of a workable and humane framework that provides *both* equal rights and caregiving support.

The Case for Egalitarianism

An egalitarian policy regime stressing equality *and* care offers the most effective and just response to the work-care conflicts wrought by the new economy. This paradigm includes three principles:

gender equality in work and caregiving; integration between the public sphere of the market and the private sphere of family life; and support for all workers to integrate earning an income with caring for others. Achieving these goals requires policies that make it possible for women to attain equality at work, for men to become equal partners at home, and for families to weather unpredictable changes in their economic fortunes and household composition. Such policies would seek to combine economic security with gender equality by constraining inequality within and between families and granting social rights to all citizens, regardless of the composition of their households or the changes they undergo in their job and family circumstances.

The possibilities for creating an egalitarian policy regime – and the steps needed to achieve it – depend on the constraints and opportunities offered by diverse political contexts. The American context poses especially daunting obstacles. Americans possess a well-known skepticism toward strong state-based policies, which many see as “government intervention” in the private realm. The rise of family diversity has also created a deeply polarized political stalemate, often called a “culture war,” between those who wish to restore an earlier gender and family order and those who favor a more egalitarian one. Finally, the rise of work-care conflicts leaves ordinary citizens facing severe time crunches that leave little time for political activism in favor of new policy initiatives (Putnam, 2000).

Despite these roadblocks, there are ample instances when Americans have come together to transform policies at critical historical moments. The Great Depression in the early part of the 20th century, for example, paved the way for the adoption of social insurance and protective labor legislation that dampened economic inequality and protected the needy, the dependent, and the

wage worker. Today's growing support for paid family leave, nationally subsidized health insurance, and a higher minimum wage suggest that the moment may have arrived again to overcome political stalemate and remake the American social contract.

As the new economy continues to transform the lives of successive generations, the conflicts between work and care will only become more apparent. Change is inescapable, and going back is not an option. Going forward, the choice is between new forms of inequality and insecurity or the creation of new supports for equalizing and integrating responsibility for work and care. The good news is that the revolutionary shifts taking place in work and family life have created an unprecedented opportunity to achieve greater gender and family equality and to create a new social contract for this new era. In a society as diverse as the United States, the political challenge is to find common ground for realigning state and market institutions to address the needs of America's 21st century families, whatever form they may take.

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Endnotes

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4. Wang (2014) reports that in 2012, 27 percent of newlywed women married a spouse with less education, while 15 percent of newlywed men did the same. Among adults in their twenties and early thirties, the gender pay gap is smaller than in other cohorts, but this gap increases as workers age.
5. Lang and Risman (2010) argue that the “gender stall” represents a pause rather than an end to the gender revolution, and recent data show a rebound in women’s labor force participation (Cotter, Hermsen, and Vanneman, 2014).
6. Patten and Parker (2012) report that, on average, the career aspirations of young women are out-stripping those of young men.
14. Wang, Parker, and Taylor (2013) report that 40 percent of households with children under 18 depend on mothers as the sole or primary source of their family’s income, compared to 11 percent in 1960. Among this group, 37 percent are married mothers, and 63 percent are single mothers.

15. Budig and England (2001) and Correll, Benard, and Paik (2007) refer to a “motherhood penalty.”