

Mothers at Work

Effects on Children's Well-being

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1 Introduction and Review of the Literature

Introduction

This book examines the effects of the mother's employment on family life and children's well-being. It starts with a review of the previous research and then reports the results of a study designed to answer the questions that emerge. The study focuses on 369 families with a child in the third or fourth grades of the public schools in an industrialized city in the Midwest. They represent a broad socioeconomic range and include both one-parent and two-parent families, African Americans and Whites. Extensive data have been obtained from mothers, fathers, children, teachers, classroom peers, and school records. The guiding hypothesis that emerges from the review of previous research is that maternal employment has few, if any, direct effects on the child; it operates mainly through the effect on the family. Three aspects of family life seem particularly important in mediating child effects: the role of the father, the mother's sense of well-being, and the parents' childrearing attitudes and behaviors. The data analyses reported here trace each of these links and reveal how the mother's employment affects family life and, by that route, affects child outcomes.

The book is divided into three parts. The first includes a review of the previous research and a description of the study. The second reports the results of the analyses that examine how the mother's employment status affects the father's role in the family, the mother's sense of well-being, and childrearing patterns. The third section deals with the effects on the child and how these are mediated or moderated by the effects on the three dimensions of family life. Throughout the book, attention is given to how socioeconomic conditions, the mother's marital status, ethnicity, and the child's gender affect these patterns. We start in this chapter with a review of the literature that served as background to our study.

Review of Previous Research

Any review of the research on the effects of maternal employment in the United States must first place the pattern in its social context. Currently, most mothers in the United States are employed. Not only is this true for mothers of school-aged children, as it has been for two decades, but it is also true for mothers of infants less than one year old (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1997). The pace with which maternal employment rates have increased to this point, however, is so rapid that many people fail to realize its prevalence. Furthermore, attempts to understand its effects often ignore the fact that this change is part of a whole complex of social changes. Both employed mothers and homemakers today live in a very different environment than their counterparts forty or even twenty years ago.

There are few social changes that are so easy to document as the increased employment of mothers in the United States. The steady rise in maternal employment rates over the years is clearly illustrated in Table 1.1. The pattern, rare in 1940, had become modal by 1977. By 1996, 70 percent of the mothers with children under eighteen were in the labor force.

Maternal employment rates still differ by age of the youngest child, but this difference has diminished as the greatest recent increases have occurred among married mothers of infants and preschoolers. The rate of employment for married mothers of infants one or under almost doubled between 1975 and 1995, from 30.8 percent to 59 percent (Table 1.2). As Table 1.3 shows, in 1960 18.6 percent of all married mothers of preschoolers were employed, but by 1996, that rate had jumped to 62.7 percent.

Table 1.3 also indicates another change over the years. Whereas in 1960, employed mothers were more likely to be from single-parent families, this

Table 1.1. *Labor Force Participation Rates of Mothers with Children under 18, 1940 and 1946–1996*

Year	Percent in Labor Force
1940	8.6%
1946	18.2%
1956	27.5%
1966	35.8%
1976	48.8%
1986	62.5%
1996	70.0%

Table 1.2. *Labor Force Participation Rates for Wives, Husband Present, by Age of Youngest Child, 1975–1995 (in percent)*

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

difference has now vanished. For single mothers who have been married, the current employment rates are just slightly higher than those of married mothers, while both groups show higher rates than never-married mothers. The statistics in these three tables document a major social change in the United States.

It is reasonable to assume that a mother's employment status affects the child's development – that the accommodation to the dual demands of employment and parenting influences the family structure, functioning, interaction patterns, and childrearing orientations, which, in turn, have significance for child outcomes. Yet, in fact, we know amazingly little about what the differences are between these families and how such differences affect children.

Table 1.3. *Labor Force Participation Rates for Mothers by Marital Status and Age of Youngest Child, 1960–1996 (in percent)*

Year	Married		Widowed, Divorced, Separated		Never Married	
	6 to 17 years	Under 6 years	6 to 17 years	Under 6 years	6 to 17 years	Under 6 years
1960	39.0	18.6	65.9	40.5	NA	NA
1970	49.2	30.3	66.9	52.2	NA	NA
1980	61.7	45.1	74.6	60.3	67.6	44.1
1990	73.6	58.9	79.7	63.6	69.7	48.7
1996	76.7	62.7	80.6	69.2	71.8	55.1

NA, not available.

There are two major reasons for this lack of knowledge. First, much of the research in this area fails to take account of the social changes that have occurred. Maternal employment research is often built on data collected in the 1950s, as though family life had remained unchanged. However, as maternal employment patterns have changed over the years, so, too, have other aspects of society and particularly the family. Family size in America has decreased, the management of a household has become more efficient, marital stability has declined, notions of what a person should expect from life have changed, women's roles have been reconceptualized, childrearing orientations are different, and the adult roles for which children are being socialized are not the same as they once were. The selective factors that determine which women will seek employment and which will not have been altered; what was once the deviant choice is now the modal choice. It is not only the employed mother today who must justify her role and cope with possible guilt and anxiety about how this affects her children, but also the full-time homemaker who feels a need to explain her decision and to defend her failure to contribute economically to the family and to conform to the new image of women (Hoffman, 1984b, 1989).

Second, in all of the research during the last forty years, it has been clear that the mother's employment status is not so robust a variable that the simple comparison of the children of employed and nonemployed mothers will reveal consistent differences (Hoffman, 1961, 1974, 1979, 1989). For one thing, relationships had to be examined with attention to other variables that moderated effects; particularly important were social class, the mother's marital status, whether the employment was full- or part-time, the parents' attitudes, and the child's gender. In addition, the research needed to examine the relationships between the mother's employment status and the more proximal variables that mediated the effects on the child. It needed to consider, for example, how maternal employment affected the child's experience in the family and how these experiences, in turn, influenced child outcomes. Unfortunately, few studies have sought indirect effects through linkages, and fewer still have adopted a mediation model in studying the effects of employment on children.

This review begins with a summary of the research that has examined the direct relationship between the mother's employment status and child outcomes and then concentrates on the three variables that have emerged as most likely to be mediators of child outcomes: the father's role, the mother's state of well being, and parent-child interaction patterns. A final section describes the efforts to examine socioeconomic, marital status, and ethnic differences in maternal employment effects. Studies of the effects of

day care, other forms of nonmaternal care, and after-school care will be reviewed in Chapter 11.

Differences Between Children of Employed and Nonemployed Mothers

Most of the studies that have compared the children of employed and nonemployed mothers on child outcome measures (e.g., indices of cognitive and socioemotional development) have failed to find significant differences (Heynes, 1982; Zaslow, 1987). The research that has shown reasonably consistent differences has examined the relationships within subgroups based on social class and gender. Patterns that have been revealed over the years include the following:

1. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to have higher academic achievement, greater career success, more nontraditional career choices, and greater occupational commitment (Alessandri, 1992; Eccles & Hoffman, 1984; Hoffman, 1979, 1980).
2. Studies of children in poverty, in both two-parent and single-mother families, found higher cognitive scores and higher scores on socioemotional indices for children with employed mothers (Cherry & Eaton, 1977; Heynes, 1978; Kreisberg, 1970; Vandell & Ramanan, 1992).
3. A few studies have found that sons of employed mothers in the middle class showed lower school performance and lower IQ scores during the grade school years. Although two recent studies did not replicate this finding (Gottfried, Gottfried & Bathurst, 1988; Stevenson, 1982), a third did (Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1989).
4. Some nonacademic differences between characteristics of children with employed and nonemployed mothers have also been found, but with less consistency. Daughters of employed mothers have been found to be more independent, particularly in interaction with their peers in a school setting (Hoffman, 1974, 1979; Schachter, 1981; Siegel, Stolz, Hitchcock, & Adamson, 1963), and to score higher on socioemotional adjustment measures (Alessandri, 1992; Gold & Andres, 1978a). Results for sons have been quite mixed and vary with social class, preschool experience, and age at testing (Zaslow, 1987).
5. Sons and daughters of employed mothers have less traditional sex-role ideologies (Hoffman, 1979, 1989).

The Father's Role

In addition, several studies have found relationships between the mother's employment status and family patterns that, in turn, have been related to children's sex-role attitudes, academic performance, and social competence. Of particular note is the father's participation in household tasks and child care. Fathers play a more active role when the mother is employed (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Gottfried, Bathurst, & Gottfried, 1994; Hoffman, 1983, 1986; Pleck, 1983). Three possible consequences of this increased participation of fathers have been suggested:

1. It mitigates the mother's potential overload from the dual role.
2. A less traditional model of adult roles is presented.
3. It enhances the child's cognitive development.

Relief for the Mother. There is some support for the first suggested consequence: In a national sample study, Kessler and McRae (1982) found that among currently married mothers, the higher morale of employed mothers commonly reported in the research holds only when their husbands help with child care.

Less Gender Role Traditionalism. There is also evidence for the second possible consequence. The increased participation of fathers associated with the mother's employment has been found to extend across the traditional division of labor. For example, Baruch and Barnett (1987) found that in single-wage families, more active fathers participate by spending more time with their children, but are not as likely to take part in child care and household tasks. In dual-wage families, on the other hand, a merging of roles is more common. Research has shown that fathers in dual-wage families participate more in family tasks traditionally carried out by mothers (Hoffman, 1983, 1986; Pleck, 1983). This effect is more pronounced when the mother is employed full-time, when there is more than one child, and when there are no older children in the family, particularly no older daughters. Furthermore, some studies indicate that the effect is more pronounced when the mother's income approaches the father's (Model, 1981; Scanzoni, 1978). The fact that the husbands of employed mothers are more active in household tasks and child care also appears to be a causal relationship, and not merely a selective factor, because the relationship holds even when sex-role ideology is controlled (Crouter & Huston, 1985; Hoffman, 1986), and it is frequently reported by parents as an effect of employment (Gottfried,

Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Hoffman, 1983). Because father involvement has increased generally in recent years (Bond, Galinsky, & Swansberg, 1998; Hill & Stafford, 1980; Pleck, 1983), it has been suggested that there also has been an increased responsiveness by fathers to their wives' employment (Lamb, 1981).

The effects of maternal employment on the traditional division of labor in the family are important in several respects. In particular, it is likely that this is one of the routes by which maternal employment operates to diminish sex-role traditionalism. The employment of a mother calls for some accommodation by the father. Although the response has been modest, there has been some, and this, in turn, diminishes traditionalistic attitudes in families (Baruch & Barnett, 1986b). Data have shown that the relationship between the father's participation and children's diminished sex-role traditionalism is significantly stronger in the employed-mother families than in the families with nonemployed mothers (Baruch & Barnett, 1986b). This difference may reflect the nature of the father's participation: in the employed-mother family there is more of a merging of roles between the parents, while in the nonemployed-mother family, the involved father spends more time with the children but the traditional sex-based division of labor is maintained (Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987). The repeated finding that the children of employed mothers hold less stereotyped attitudes about sex roles than do the children of nonemployed mothers may be at least partly explained by the intermediating effect on the parental division of labor. The children's nonstereotyped attitudes might be because of the parents' attitudes but also because they observe their parents' less traditional roles.

Cognitive Enhancement. The third hypothesis is that fathers' involvement with children *enhances* the child's cognitive abilities and that by this route employed mothers' children are more advantaged than the children of full-time homemakers (Hoffman, 1980; Gold & Andres, 1978a; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988). There are two forms of this idea.

One of these is specific for daughters: that is, father participation may decrease gender-role stereotyping, and this may have positive effects on daughters' achievement motivation and behavior. Since daughters of employed mothers are often found to have higher cognitive scores as children and to show higher achievement patterns as adults, this is a viable hypothesis, but the actual chain of connection – from maternal employment, to father participation, to decreased traditionalism, to daughters' higher achievement – has not previously been empirically examined.

The other hypothesis is that father–child interaction is particularly cognitively stimulating, especially with respect to competence in math. This hypothesis derives from earlier research that compared achievement test scores of children in single-mother families and two-parent families and found such advantages for the latter group. This body of work has been criticized and the suggestion has been made that it is not the presence of the father but the financial advantage of a father that accounts for the difference (Barber & Eccles, 1992; Herzog & Sudia, 1973). Nevertheless, Gottfried, Gottfried, and Bathurst (1988) found that higher involvement of fathers was associated with children's higher cognitive scores within a primarily two-parent sample with social class controlled.

Such results, however, do not mean that father involvement per se has a special advantage. They might mean that the benefits for children stem from having an additional adult of either gender involved – that it is augmented parenting that is advantageous. This possibility receives some support from the research of Dornbusch and his colleagues (1985), which indicated that some of the problems associated with single-mother status are mitigated by the presence of an additional adult of either gender. It is possible that father involvement in employed-mother families compensates for lesser interaction with employed mothers, but does not provide an overall enhancement of the child's environment. As yet, no study has actually demonstrated special benefits of fathers' involvement with children. Neither are there any data showing that the father's involvement mediates cognitive or achievement outcomes in employed-mother families – either compensation or enhancement (Gold & Andres, 1978a; Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988).

In summary, then, the data show that the father's role in the family is affected by the mother's employment status. They also show that his role has significance for child outcomes. More attention needs to be given, however, to how different aspects of the father's participation in household tasks and child care affect children. Such research should separately examine families with employed mothers and those with full-time housewives. The separate examination is particularly important because data suggest that the nature and effects of father participation are different in the employed-mother family than in the nonemployed-mother family (Barnett & Baruch, 1987; Crouter & Crowley, 1990; Crouter, Perry-Jenkins, Huston, & McHale, 1987). For example, Crouter and her colleagues (1987) found that the increased involvement of fathers associated with mothers' employment includes functional rather than fun activities. A fuller understanding of these issues could shed light on the higher achievement patterns so often

found for daughters of employed mothers: the diminished sex-role traditionalism in dual-wage families could be the important link. Further, either the greater interaction between fathers and children or specific patterns of interaction could be involved in the link between the mother's employment status and children's cognitive abilities.

The Marital Relationship. A research issue that has been considered is whether the mother's employment status affects the marital relationship. Further, the possibility has been raised that the father's participation in household tasks and child care may moderate such effects (Hoffman, 1989).

Most studies investigating the effects of maternal employment on marital satisfaction find no difference (Smith, 1985; Warr & Perry, 1982). When differences are found, a negative correlation between maternal employment and marital satisfaction occurs more often when there is sex-role traditionalism, resentment of the employment by either parent, a lower-class sample, or the father is the reporter. A positive relationship is more likely to be found when the sample is educated or middle class, the mother wants to work, the work is part-time, or the mother is the reporter (Hoffman, 1986). In several studies of highly educated *dual-career* couples, both parents report that the mother's career has enhanced their marriage, despite the inconveniences it has caused (Emmons et al., 1987; Gilbert, 1985). It is interesting also to note that for employed women, the impact of marital stress seems to be less pervasive (Weinraub, Jaeger, & Hoffman, 1988), and work provides a buffer against debilitating anxiety (Cleary & Mechanic, 1983; Hetherington, 1979; Stewart & Malley, 1987; Stewart & Salt, 1981).

Consistent with the idea that the nature and significance of the father's participation in child care may be different in single-wage and dual-wage families, however, high father participation has been found to be related to fathers' marital dissatisfaction in dual-wage families and not in single-wage (Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Crouter et al., 1987). The reason for the different relationships to marital satisfaction is not clear, but there are at least two possible explanations. One is that because the father's participation in child care in the dual-wage family may not be intrinsically motivated, he may resent it. There is evidence that fathers in dual-wage families often complain about their wives' availability for child care and indicate concern that their own careers may be suffering because of the family demands on their time (Baruch & Barnett, 1986a, 1987; Emmons et al., 1987; Gilbert, 1985). Another possible explanation has to do with the nature of the father's involvement. As already noted, in single-wage families, the active fathers participate by spending time with their children, but not by carrying

out the child care and household tasks, as active fathers do in dual-wage families. This pattern of participation may not only be more pleasurable, but it may also avoid the conflicts that can emerge when both parents are involved in the same activities (Hoffman, 1983). Little attention has been paid to the role of marital satisfaction as a possible link between a mother's employment status and child outcomes, but it may be an important one, both in terms of the direct effect of the marriage relationship on children and through its effects on the mother's morale.

The Mother's Sense of Well-being

Another aspect of family life that is often seen as linking the mother's employment status to effects on the child is the mother's sense of well-being, and numerous studies have compared employed mothers to full-time homemakers on various indices of mental health and life satisfaction. Most of this research has found a higher level of satisfaction among the employed. These results have been found for professional women (Birnbaum, 1975) and for blue-collar workers (Ferree, 1976), in national samples (Kessler & McRae, 1982; Veroff, Douvan, & Kukla, 1981) and in more homogeneous ones (Gold & Andres, 1978a, 1978b). In addition, employed mothers have been found to score lower on psychosomatic symptoms, measures of depression, and various stress indicators (Burke & Weir, 1976; Kessler & McRae, 1982; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994). Furthermore, employment has been shown to be a source of psychological support in times of family difficulties (Cleary & Mechanic, 1983; Hetherington, 1979; Stewart & Malley, 1987; Stewart & Salt, 1981). Nevertheless, these relationships can be affected by the mother's attitude toward the job (Gove & Zeiss, 1987; Baruch & Barnett, 1987; Staines, Pleck, Shepard, & O'Conner, 1978), by the stability of child-care arrangements (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1988), and, as already noted, by the father's participation in child care (Kessler & McRae, 1982).

Although the bulk of the research on employment status and mothers' mental health has found higher morale among employed mothers, some investigators found no significant differences (Baruch & Barnett, 1986c; Radloff, 1980; Repetti & Crosby, 1984; Ross, Mirowsky, & Huber, 1983). However, despite an extensive search, we found no study that showed the mental health of full-time homemakers to be higher than that of employed women, and this same conclusion is reported in other reviews (Repetti, Mathews, & Waldron, 1989; Warr & Parry, 1982b). Because most of this research has been conducted with middle-class samples, it has sometimes

been suggested that the absence of negative mental health effects of employment is a result peculiar to the middle class. In fact, however, the mental health advantage of employment is more consistently found in working class or poverty samples (Ferree, 1976; Warr & Parry, 1982a; McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, & Borquez, 1994), an observation also made by Warr and Parry (1982b).

This social-class difference may seem surprising since the jobs available to middle-class women are generally considered more attractive (Menaghan & Parcel, 1990). Furthermore, recent research has shown positive effects on mothers and children associated with the job characteristics of complexity, autonomy, and challenge (Greenberger, O'Neil, & Nagel, 1994; Menaghan & Parcel, 1995), and middle-class jobs are more likely to offer these qualities than are working-class jobs. It may be, however, that for working-class women, the satisfactions from employment are not from the job per se but from the increased social support and stimulation provided by co-workers, the marked advantages that their wages bring to their families, and the greater sense of control they feel over their lives. This hypothesis is supported by several studies of working-class mothers (Ferree, 1976; Rosen, 1987).

It is also possible that the alternative role of full-time homemaker is a less attractive one in the lower class than in the middle class, so the advantage of employment for working-class mothers comes primarily from higher levels of depression among the working-class homemakers. In other words, the morale advantage of employment in the lower class may be relative to the particularly unhappy state of the homemakers in that class. In addition, as noted above, several studies have shown that employment can serve as a buffer against stress and depression both of which are more prevalent in lower socioeconomic circumstances. This social class difference is important because previous research has also shown more consistent advantages of maternal employment for children in the working class than in the middle class (Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1988; Gold & Andres, 1978b, 1978c; Hoffman, 1979; Zaslow, 1987). It is possible that the greater advantage of maternal employment for working-class children is mediated by its more positive effect on the mother's sense of well-being.

A large body of research demonstrates a positive relationship between maternal mental health and both more effective parenting and children's cognitive and emotional adjustment (Yarrow, 1979; Downey & Coyne, 1990; Rutter, 1990; Lyons-Ruth, 1995). However, although previous research has demonstrated a relationship between the mother's employment status and

her mental health, and other research has demonstrated a relationship between maternal mental health and both parenting and child outcomes, no previous study has examined the possibility that the mother's mental health or well-being mediates the relationship between employment status and either parenting styles or child outcomes. In one recent investigation, all three levels were examined: employment status, maternal depressed mood, and parenting styles. McLoyd, Jayaratne, Ceballo, and Borquez (1994), in a study of lower-class, single, African-American mothers of adolescents, found that full-time homemakers were more depressed than employed mothers, and also that depression was significantly related to both a negative perception of the maternal role and to the use of power-assertive discipline. However, no test was made to see if depression carried the relationship between the mother's employment status and her parenting style.

There is another body of research that is related to the issue of the mother's morale as the link between employment status and child outcomes. This focuses on the mother's satisfaction with her employment status. Several investigators have found that the mother's satisfaction with her role as a full-time homemaker or as an employed mother, a pattern called *congruence*, is associated with low scores on measures of depression (Hock & DeMeis, 1990; Ross, Mirowsky, & Huber, 1983), the quality of the mother-child relationship (Hock, 1980; Schubert, Bradley-Johnson, & Nuttal, 1980; Stuckey et al., 1982), and children's higher scores on cognitive and mental health indices (Farel, 1980; Guidubaldi & Nastasi, 1987). However, this research is confounded by the fact that the mother's role satisfaction can be a function, or expression, of her happier state, her attitude toward her child, or the child's level of functioning. The predictor and the outcome may not be independent. Furthermore, in several of these studies, closer examination of the data indicates that the relationship is carried by the dissatisfied homemakers (Dienstag, 1986; Farel, 1980; Hock & DeMeis, 1990; Ross, Mirowsky, & Huber, 1983). It might be that the mother who is home full-time with her children and indicates a preference for employment is expressing dissatisfaction with her mother role, while the employed mother's dissatisfaction may indicate a preference for more time with her children. The consequences for mother-child interaction might then be different in each case.

Thus, although the empirical work to date suggests that a mother's employment status may affect family life and child outcomes through its effect on the mother's well-being, this has not been directly examined. Further, there is a need to more thoroughly assay the mother's sense of well-being and role satisfaction by tying it to other aspects of the family

environment in order to disentangle the cause-and-effect aspect of the relationships. There is also a need to identify what conditions influence when employment has a positive effect on the mother's mental health, why such effects occur, and when such effects carry over to the child's well-being. Finally, the existing research, particularly the findings on maternal employment effects on mothers' morale, reveals a need to understand more fully how social context variables such as social class, ethnicity, and marital status affect these patterns.

Childrearing Patterns

Although several hypotheses in the literature suggest that a mother's employment status affects her children through its effects on childrearing practices, few studies have attempted to trace this linkage. Sometimes the researcher only examines the relationship between employment status and parenting attitudes or behavior. More often, however, the relationship between employment and child outcomes is examined and the childrearing orientation is simply inferred. But even in studies that have looked at both parenting and child outcomes, tests were not conducted to see if the outcomes were carried by the parenting effects. This research will be reviewed here, organized under three headings. The first examines mother-child interaction and concentrates on studies of infants and toddlers. The second concerns the dimensions of autonomy-granting, monitoring, encouragement of independence, and stress on achievement goals. The third describes research investigating how the gender of the child moderates the relationship between the mother's employment status and parent-child interaction.

Mother-Infant Interaction. Whereas most of the research discussed thus far has been conducted with school-aged children, the research that has looked directly at parent-child interaction has been conducted primarily with infants and preschoolers. For infants and young children, valid outcome measures are difficult to obtain and so parent-child interaction is studied instead (Hoffman, 1984a; 1989). These studies have looked at the quantity and quality of the mother-child interaction, the home environment as measured by the HOME (Caldwell & Bradley, 1987) or the Family Environment Scale (Moos & Moos, 1981), and the parent-child attachment relationship. In general, findings indicate that full-time employed mothers spend less time with their infants and preschoolers than do part-time and nonemployed mothers, but this effect diminishes with maternal education. Differences also diminish with the age of the child (Duckett & Richards,

1989; Hill & Stafford, 1980). In addition, the effect is also less when the nature of the interaction is considered. Data indicate that employed mothers tend to compensate for their absence in the proportion of direct interaction and in the amount of time with the child during nonwork hours and on weekends (Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1985; Hoffman, 1984a). Several studies that used behavioral observations of mother–infant interaction showed that employed mothers were more highly interactive with their infants, particularly with respect to verbal stimulation (Hoffman, 1984a; Pedersen, Cain, Zaslow, & Anderson, 1982; Schubert, Bradley-Johnson, & Nuttal, 1980); one study, however, found the opposite – the full-time homemakers were the more interactive (Zaslow, Pederson, Suwalsky, Cain, & Fivel, 1985). In a study of toddlers, no difference was found in the mother's behavioral sensitivity in a problem-solving situation (Goldberg & Easterbrooks, 1988).

Three studies that compared the quality of the home environment using the HOME index (Caldwell & Bradley, 1987), a measure that includes ratings of mother–child interaction, found no differences between the families with employed and nonemployed mothers (Gottfried, Gottfried, & Bathurst, 1988; Mackinnon, Brody, & Stoneman, 1982; Owen & Cox, 1988). The study by Gottfried, Gottfried, and Bathurst (1988), a longitudinal investigation that examined the home environment from infancy through age 7, and in a later publication through age 12 (Gottfried, Bathurst, & Gottfried, 1994), also found no differences on the Family Environment Scale.

A particularly active area of maternal employment research since 1980 has involved the comparison of dual-wage and single-wage families with respect to mother–infant attachment.¹ In most of these studies, no significant differences were found (Chase-Lansdale & Owen, 1987; Easterbrooks & Goldberg, 1988; Hock, 1980; Owen & Cox, 1988; Schwartz, 1983; Vaughn, Gove, & Egelund, 1980). However, in the research of Barglow, Vaughn, and Molitor (1987) and Belsky & Rovine (1988), the number of insecure attachments was statistically higher, although the majority of mother–infant attachments in the full-time employed-mother group was secure. Furthermore, in reviews that have combined subjects across studies (Belsky, 1988; Clarke-Stewart, 1989), full-time employed mothers were more likely than part-time employed and nonemployed mothers to have insecurely attached infants.

The results showing an association between early maternal employment and mother–infant attachment have received a great deal of attention in the media. However, the measure of attachment used in that research is the Strange Situation measure (Ainsworth, Blehar, Waters, & Wall, 1978). This

measure has proven useful over the years in predicting subsequent childhood behavior, but its validity had not been established for employed-mother families (Clarke-Stewart, 1989; Hoffman, 1989). In fact, in a follow-up of an earlier study, Vaughn, Deane, and Waters (1985) found that the measure did not predict later socioemotional competence for the early-employment group, even though it predicted well for the full-time home-maker group.

The measure is a laboratory measure and it assumes that the situation of entering an unfamiliar room, meeting a new adult, and experiencing two brief separations from the mother produces anxiety and activates attachment behavior. However, if such experiences are familiar to the child, as they are likely to be if the mother is employed, the child might not be anxious, and thus the behavior might not be a basis on which to judge the attachment relationship. In the studies that found more insecure attachment for the children with full-time employed mothers, the type of insecure attachment found was the *avoidant* pattern. The avoidant infant is one who seems to be independent, which might be a defense against anxiety, as it has been shown to be in earlier research (Sroufe & Waters, 1977). On the other hand, independence might be an appropriate behavior if the child is not anxious in the situation. Thus, distinguishing between avoidant insecurity and lack of anxiety can be difficult.

The most recent and most extensive investigation of these issues is an ongoing study of the effects of nonmaternal care in early childhood conducted by the National Institute of Child Health and Development. This is a collaborative effort involving multiple sites and a large team of prominent researchers. Data have been presented supporting the validity of the Strange Situation *as used in this study*. In this study, the amount of the non-maternal care (whether the infant received more than thirty hours a week or less than ten) was not related to the security of the attachment, nor was the child's age at onset of the mother's employment (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 1997b). The high quality of this investigation, and the fact that the consortium of investigators included researchers from both sides of this highly politicized issue, may have led to more precise coding operations, which eliminated the uncertainties sometimes involved in differentiating independence from insecure-avoidant attachment.

It should be added that a few studies have looked at maternal employment during the early years in relation to child outcome measures obtained later. These investigations have been conducted with large longitudinal data sets that require complex analyses differentiating early from concurrent employment and exercising multiple controls (McCartney & Rosenthal,

1991; Heynes and Catsambis, 1986; Vandell & Ramanan, 1991). Because of these complications, the results of these efforts have been disappointing and, in several cases, different research teams have reported contradictory results with the same data set. For example, Belsky and Eggebeen (1991) and McCartney and Rosenthal (1991) analyzed the same data with different results; as did Milne, Myers, Rosenthal, and Ginsberg (1986) and Heynes and Catsambis (1986); and also Desai, Chase-Lansdale, and Michael (1989) and Baydar and Brooks-Gunn (1991). The difficulties of identifying long-term effects of early maternal employment are discussed more fully in previous reviews (e.g., Hoffman, 1984a).

Independence, Autonomy-Granting, and Achievement. A number of researchers have suggested, in post hoc discussions or theoretical papers, that the childrearing dimension that includes encouragement of independence, maturity demands, and autonomy-granting is the link between the mother's employment status and observed child outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982; Hoffman, 1979; Moore, 1975). This dimension can encompass the extremes of overprotection, on the one hand, and neglect, on the other. It is believed that employed mothers encourage independence in their children more than nonemployed. The encouragement of independence is consistent with the situational demands of the dual role, because it enables the family to function more effectively in the mother's absence (Hoffman, 1961, 1974, 1979, 1989). It has also been hypothesized that the child's growing independence may be threatening to the full-time homemaker who feels a need to justify her role choice by demonstrating the importance of her full-time presence in the home (Birnbaum, 1975; Hoffman, 1979).

This difference in childrearing orientations has been invoked as the explanation for the observation that daughters of employed mothers show more independence and higher professional achievements than daughters of nonemployed mothers. The latter, it is suggested, often receive too little encouragement of independence, a pattern noted to characterize traditional childrearing and one that is seen as detrimental to top academic and professional achievement in females (Hoffman, 1972, 1977).

This same dimension has also been invoked to explain the pattern of lower school grades and I.Q. scores that has sometimes been found for middle-class sons of employed mothers during the elementary school years and younger. Alternative hypotheses have been proposed to explain this pattern: (1) these results might reflect too much encouragement of dependency by full-time homemakers, which results in overconformity and better perfor-

mance in grade school, where conformity is an academic asset for boys; or (2) employed mothers might grant sons too much autonomy, resulting in underconformity or too much peer influence. That is, because sons traditionally are granted more autonomy than daughters, an increment might be excessive. Furthermore, the impact of greater peer influence for boys is seen as more likely to be counter to adult standards (Bronfenbrenner & Crouter, 1982; Hoffman, 1979, 1980; Moore, 1975).

These hypotheses are predicated on the belief that employed mothers emphasize independence training and grant their children more autonomy than do nonemployed mothers. The data behind this assumed difference in childrearing, however, are far from solid. Most of the evidence comes from early research conducted in the 1950s and 1960s. Thus, Yarrow and her colleagues (1962) found, in a comparison of employed and nonemployed mothers of elementary-school children, that employed mothers who had not attended college were more likely to stress independence training and to assign their children more household responsibilities than their nonemployed counterparts, but they did not find differences among the college-educated mothers. Burchinal (1963) also found a greater stress on independence on the part of employed mothers across a sample of high-school aged children. McCord, McCord, and Thurber (1963) reported less overprotection by employed mothers and more encouragement of independence in a study of lower-income boys, but only for families identified as stable. Birnbaum's (1975) study of professionally employed mothers also suggests that they placed a higher value on independence for their children than did the comparison group of educated mothers who were full-time homemakers.

Only a few of the more recent studies have examined differences in parental attitudes toward independence or relevant childrearing patterns. Goldberg and Easterbrooks (1988) contrasted employed and nonemployed mothers of toddlers with respect to attitudes toward their child's independence and found no differences, while Gold and Andres (1978c) found that full-time employed mothers of preschool boys reported less overprotection, but there was no difference for mothers of daughters. New support for the idea that employed mothers encourage independence in their daughters, however, is provided in a recent study conducted with a sample of low-income, single-mother families with a child between ten and twelve years old (Alessandri, 1992). In this study, daughters of full-time employed mothers reported a greater emphasis on independence and achievement in their families, indicated higher scholastic competence, and showed higher academic performance in schools.

The greater emphasis on achievement by employed mothers was also found in the longitudinal research of Gottfried, Gottfried, and Bathurst (1988). This study was based on a middle-class sample of two-parent families. For both boys and girls, at ages five and seven, both contemporaneous and earlier maternal employment predicted to higher educational aspirations for children, more out-of-school lessons, and less TV-viewing by both mothers and children. Employed mothers were also more involved in discussing school activities with their children. Although these parental behaviors themselves predicted to a variety of measures of the children's academic competence, there was no direct relationship between the mother's employment status and the indices of child competence.

Recent studies (Bartko & McHale, 1991; Medrich, Roizen, Rubin & Buckley, 1982) have reconfirmed the greater participation of school-age children in household tasks and self-care (e.g., cleaning their own room) when mothers are employed, a finding that has remained fairly solid over the years. This pattern has been seen as promoting responsibility and maturity in children (Bartko & McHale, 1991; Elder, 1974).

On the other hand, the widely believed idea that employed mothers' children are less well monitored has received little support, either in the past (Hoffman, 1974) or in recent research. Crouter, MacDermid, McHale, and Perry-Jenkins (1990), in a study of nine- to twelve-year-old children from small towns and rural areas, found no effects of the mother's employment status or child gender on parental monitoring. They did find, however, that unmonitored boys, but not girls, had lower school grades and felt less competent academically. In addition, they found more conduct problems among less well-monitored boys in the dual-wage families than for such boys in single-wage families or for girls, suggesting that the consequences of inadequate supervision might be more serious for sons of employed mothers even though the degree of supervision was not less. The results suggesting more negative consequences of insufficient monitoring of boys than girls are consistent with hypotheses proposed by Bronfenbrenner and Crouter (1982) and Hoffman (1979) discussed earlier.

Thus, a limited body of data has documented differences between employed-mother families and nonemployed-mother families in their behavior and expectations regarding their children's independence and achievement, and there is some evidence that these childrearing patterns are related to child outcomes, or that employment status itself is related to relevant child outcomes. However, as yet there are no studies that have tapped all three levels and shown that these childrearing patterns actually mediate a relationship between employment and child outcomes.

Behavior and Attitudes of Parents and Gender of Child. The hypotheses about how child autonomy and independence training might mediate a relationship between mothers' employment and child outcomes were geared toward explaining previous research results that suggested positive outcomes of maternal employment for girls but sometimes negative outcomes for boys. Other hypotheses have also been proposed to explain this pattern. One, discussed earlier, is that traditional gender-role attitudes are dysfunctional to girls' independence, achievement, and self-esteem, and if mothers' employment operates to diminish these attitudes, their daughters will benefit. Another is a modeling hypothesis: the employed mother is more of a model of independence and achievement than the full-time homemaker; and there is evidence that daughters of employed mothers, from preschool through adulthood, are more likely to hold a concept of the female role that includes less restrictions and more independence, to incorporate these aspects of the female role into their self-concept, and to name their mother as the person they most admire (Hoffman, 1974; Miller, 1975).

Still another hypothesis has emerged from the research. Recent research with younger children has revealed additional advantages for daughters in the employed-mother family. In two studies, parents were found to engage in more positive interactions with daughters when the mother was employed, and in more positive interactions with sons when the mothers were not employed (Stuckey, McGhee, & Bell, 1982; Zaslow, Pederson, Suwalsky, & Rabinovich, 1983). Furthermore, in an interview study with mothers of three-year-olds, full-time employed mothers who had more than a high school education described their daughters but not their sons in the most positive terms; the opposite pattern was found for the nonemployed mothers (Bronfenbrenner, Alvarez, & Henderson, 1984). Two later studies failed to replicate this pattern (Greenberger & O'Neil, 1992; Zaslow et al., 1985.) However, in a study of school-aged children, Crouter and Crowley (1990) found that fathers in dual-wage families spent about the same amount of time in dyadic interactions with sons and daughters (about one hour per week), but fathers in single-wage families spent more time with sons (ninety minutes per week compared with thirty for daughters).

Several post hoc explanations have been offered to explain these differences in effects of maternal employment status on parents' attitudes and behavior toward daughters and sons. First, the traditional pattern is for parents to favor boys and to interact more with sons than with daughters (Block, 1983). Thus, the findings for families with nonemployed mothers are simply replications of previous results from studies where the mother's employment status was not considered. Because families with employed

mothers are less likely to hold traditional sex-role attitudes, the prevalent son preference might be diminished. It is also possible that when mothers are employed, the traditional pattern of higher father-son interaction is preempted by the need for supplementary child care created by the mother's job demands. An additional explanation has to do with possible differences in stimulus qualities of male and female children. Data on sex differences suggest that boys are more active and less compliant than girls (Block, 1983). In the employed mother home, this may provide an inconvenience because of the potential stress of the dual roles, making sons more of a strain than daughters. Furthermore, since day-care experience is more common for employed-mother's children and has been noted to increase the activity level and noncompliance of children (Clarke-Stewart, 1989), this effect might be exacerbated (Hoffman, 1989).

Although these differences in parent-child interaction and parental attitudes toward sons and daughters are not firmly established, they do suggest another route by which the mother's employment status could affect gender differences in child outcomes.

The Social Context

An issue that has not been adequately addressed in the research on maternal employment is: To what extent are the effects of the mother's employment status affected by the larger social context? Is the impact of a mother's employment status different in different socioeconomic settings? Are the effects different in one-parent than in two-parent families? Does ethnicity moderate the effects?

Social Class. We have already indicated that some effects are more solidly established for one social class than another. For example, the positive effects of employment on the mother's sense of well-being have been found more consistently in the lower- than in the middle-class. In addition, the finding that the children of employed mothers show cognitive and mental health advantages is a more reliable one in poverty samples. However, while social-class differences in effects have been given more attention than the other social-context variables, drawing firm conclusions about the moderating influence of social class is limited because these results are primarily generalizations across different studies. With a few exceptions (e.g., Desai, Chase-Lansdale, & Michael, 1989; Gold & Andres, 1978b), most of the research in this field has been conducted with samples that are homogeneous with respect to socioeconomic status, and class contrasts are based