Being Together, Working Apart

Working mothers and fathers are now splitting three jobs between two people as they divide responsibilities for the family in addition to managing their own professional careers or jobs. Yet despite the fact that most parents are employed, how work affects the lives and well-being of parents and their children remains relatively unexplored. A recent study of 500 families, which focuses on middle-class dual-career families in eight communities across the US provides a holistic view of the complexities of work and family life experienced by parents and their children. This unique study has resulted in an unusually rich data set due to the variety of methods used. Drawing on the study, this book explores how dual-earner families cope with the stresses and demands of balancing work and family life, whether the time parents spend working is negatively affecting their children, how mothers feel managing both work and household responsibilities, and what role fathers are taking in family life. In answering these questions the authors argue for a new balance between work and family life. The book with its rich data, findings, and commentary from an interdisciplinary group of scholars provides a valuable resource for academics, policy makers, and working parents.

BARBARA SCHNEIDER is a Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago, Principal Investigator for the new Data Research and Development Center at NORC and the University of Chicago, and Co-Director of the Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work. She is also a Senior Social Scientist at NORC and the University of Chicago and a Research Associate at the Ogburn-Stouffer Center for the Study of Population and Social Organization.

LINDA J. WAITE is the Lucy Flower Professor of Sociology at the University of Chicago and Co-Director of the Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work. She is also a Senior Social Scientist at NORC and the University of Chicago.
Being Together, Working Apart

*Dual-Career Families and the Work-Life Balance*

*Edited by*

Barbara Schneider and Linda J. Waite
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Contributors

Authors

EMMA K. ADAM, Assistant Professor, Program on Human Development and Social Policy, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University

KATHLEEN E. CHRISTENSEN, Ph.D., Director, Program on Workplace, Workforce, and Working Families, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

NICHOLAS P. DEMPESEY, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

AMY F. FELDMAN, Ph.D., Research Associate, Public/Private Ventures

LISA HOOGSTRA, Ph.D., Director of Research Services, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

JAE-GEA JEONG, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

ARIEL KALIL, Assistant Professor, Harris School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago

CHI-YOUNG KOH, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

YUN-SUK LEE, Assistant Professor, Department of Urban Sociology, University of Seoul

JUDITH A. LEVINE, Assistant Professor, School of Social Service Administration, University of Chicago

KIMBERLY S. MAIER, Assistant Professor, Measurement and Quantitative Methods, College of Education, Michigan State University

ELAINE MARCHENA, Postdoctoral Fellow, Emory Center for Myth and Ritual in American Life, A. Sloan Center on Working Families
List of contributors

SYLVIA MARTINEZ, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

JENNIFER L. MATJASKO, Assistant Professor, Department of Human Ecology, Division of Human Development and Family Sciences, The University of Texas at Austin

CASEY B. MULLIGAN, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Chicago

THE REVEREND MARK R. NIELSEN, Ph.D., Research Affiliate, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

YONA RUBINSTEIN, Assistant Professor, The Eitan Berglas School of Economics, Tel Aviv University

JENNIFER A. SCHMIDT, Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology, Northern Illinois University

BARRABARA SCHNEIDER, Professor of Sociology and Human Development, Co-Director, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

HOLLY R. SEXTON, MA, Data Administrator/Research Analyst, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

CAROLYN P. STUENKEL, Ph.D, Research Affiliate, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

LINDA J. WAITE, Lucy Flower Professor of Sociology, Co-Director, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago

MATTHEW N. WEINSHENKER, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

KATHLEEN M. ZIOL-GUEST, Ph.D. candidate, Harris School of Public Policy Studies, University of Chicago

Commentators

SUZANNE M. BIANCHI, Professor of Sociology, University of Maryland

DON S. BROWNING, Alexander Campbell Professor of Religious Ethics and the Social Sciences, Emeritus, Divinity School, and Director of the Religion, Culture, and Family Project, University of Chicago
List of contributors

**Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi**, Director, Quality of Life Research Center, Drucker School of Management, Claremont Graduate University

**Mick Cunningham**, Assistant Professor of Sociology, Western Washington University

**William J. Doherty**, Professor and Director of the Marriage and Family Therapy Program, Department of Family Social Science, University of Minnesota

**Tom Fricke**, Professor of Anthropology, Director, Center for the Ethnography of Everyday Life, University of Michigan

**Nancy L. Galambos**, Professor of Psychology, University of Alberta

**Jennifer Glass**, Professor of Sociology, University of Iowa

**Norval D. Glenn**, Ashbel Smith Professor, Stiles Professor in American Studies, Department of Sociology, Population Research Center, University of Texas at Austin

**Ralph E. Gomory**, President, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

**Douglas A. Granger**, Associate Professor, Department of Biobehavioral Health, Pennsylvania State University

**Phillip L. Hammack**, Ph.D. candidate, Committee on Human Development, University of Chicago

**Jennifer Hanis-Martin**, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

**Joel M. Hektner**, Assistant Professor, Child Development and Family Science, North Dakota State University

**Jerry A. Jacobs**, Merriam Term Professor of Sociology, University of Pennsylvania

**Tali Klima**, MA, Department of Psychology, University of California, Los Angeles

**Tamar Kremer-Sadlik**, Ph.D., Director of Research, UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families, A. Sloan Center on Working Families

**Robert Kubey**, Director, Center for Media Studies, SCILS, Rutgers University

**Reed Larson**, Panpered Chef Endowed Chair in Family Resiliency, Department of Human and Community Development, University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign
List of contributors

LARS LEFGREN, Assistant Professor of Economics, Brigham Young University

ALISA C. LEWIN, Postdoctoral Fellow, Alfred P. Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, University of Chicago, Lecturer, University of Haifa

PHYLLIS MOEN, McKnight Presidential Chair, Sociology, University of Minnesota

JEYLAN T. MORTIMER, Professor of Sociology, University of Minnesota

SHIRA OFFER, Ph.D. candidate, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

PATRICIA M. RASKIN, Associate Professor, Program in Social-Organizational Psychology, Department of Education and Leadership, Teachers College, Columbia University

RENA L. REPETTI, Professor, UCLA Department of Psychology, Core Faculty Member, UCLA Center on Everyday Lives of Families, A. Sloan Center on Working Families

ELIZABETH A. SHIRTCLIFF, Ph.D. candidate, Biobehavioral Health, Pennsylvania State University

GLENNA SPITZ, Distinguished Service Professor, Department of Sociology, University at Albany, SUNY

SCOTT M. STANLEY, Ph.D., Co-Director, Center for Marital and Family Studies, University of Denver

ROSS M. STOLZENBERG, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

ELAINE WETHINGTON, Associate Professor and Co-Director, Cornell Institute for Translational Research on Aging, Department of Human Development and Department of Sociology, Cornell University

KAZUO YAMAGUCHI, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Chicago

JIRI ZUZANEK, Distinguished Professor Emeritus, Department of Recreation and Leisure Studies, University of Waterloo
Preface

Over the past thirty years, the life of the American family has experienced profound changes. Rather than the traditional arrangement of two adults with two jobs for them to do, one the breadwinner and one the homemaker, most families today have three jobs, two breadwinner jobs and one homemaker job, to distribute among its two adults. It is not surprising that in today’s world people often feel there is too much to do.

Recognizing that we are living through a historic change in middle-class family life, the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation established the Workforce, Workplace and Working Families Program in 1994. The goal of the program is to produce much-needed scholarship focused on working families; and to educate the next generation of scholars on issues of working families.

At the heart of the program have been our six Centers on Working Families. The Centers function as both regional and national laboratories for the rigorous examination of the issues faced by families in which both parents work. Housed within leading research universities across the country, the Centers focus on issues ranging from employment options for older workers and retirees, to the role of myth and ritual in family life, to the changing nature of the ordinary activities of everyday life.

The research efforts and policy recommendations of the Centers contribute to national discussion through conferences, publications, and media dialogue. The graduate and undergraduate students at the Centers receive important training that will help them to contribute to society’s ability to integrate work and family life.

Founded in 1997 at the University of Chicago, the Center on Parents, Children, and Work is headed by Barbara Schneider and Linda Waite. Under their direction, the Center undertook a major research effort: the 500 Family Study. Using innovative research methods and in-depth analyses they and the scholars who wrote the chapters in this book paint a rich and detailed picture of what life is like today for middle-class families in which both parents work. Through their research, they provide
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a compelling description both of the challenges that Americans face in trying to handle the dual demands of work and family, and of the ways in which work and family nurture them and engage them.

President, Alfred P. Sloan Foundation  RALPH E. GOMORY
Many individuals helped to make this book a reality. First and foremost are the 500 families who participated in our study. Despite their busy lives, they let us into the privacy of their homes, answered our many questions, and responded every day for a week to a watch that beeped at the most inopportune moments. We owe them our deepest thanks and appreciation. We are also indebted to the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, and particularly Kathleen Christensen, our Program Director, for their generous support in establishing the Sloan Center on Parents, Children, and Work, which made it possible for us to conduct the 500 Family Study. A decade ago, the Foundation, under the direction of Ralph Gomory, embarked on a bold initiative to create a vital research community throughout the US and abroad committed to the study of working families. Our work has greatly benefited from the Foundation’s efforts, which included networking and collaborating with other Sloan Center directors and researchers.

The interdisciplinary community at the University of Chicago facilitated our research. A special thanks to Craig Coelen, President of NORC, who generously housed and administratively supported our Center. Richard Saller, Provost, and Mark Hansen, Dean of the Social Sciences Division, provided us with support for graduate students, workshops, and conferences. We would especially like to thank Kathleen Parks, Director of the Academic Research Centers at NORC, who assisted in numerous ways with staffing, office space, and Institutional Review Board issues; Isabel Garcia, Grants and Contracts Administrator, who provided budget oversight and reimbursements; Brian Whiteley, who supplied editorial assistance; and Gail Spann and Adelle Hinojosa who made the little everyday problems disappear.

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Fielding the 500 Family Study involved the efforts of countless graduate and undergraduate assistants who helped with phone calls, scheduled interviews, visited families and conducted interviews at various sites across the country, and followed up and retrieved data from study participants. Space does not allow us to thank every person, but we have singled out a few who deserve special thanks for their hard work and dedication. We particularly thank Jennifer Schmidt, former Director of Research for the Center, who oversaw training, data collection, and coding for the 500 Family Study and without whose hard work, experience, and calm direction the study could not have been completed. Special thanks to Colleen Spence, Jennifer Hanis, Gloria Williams-McCown, Ali Swanson, and Christine Li for their coordination of fieldwork efforts. Thanks also to the graduate and undergraduate students who helped with various phases of data collection, transcription, coding, and data analysis, including Alisa Ainbinder, Nora Broege, Nicholas Dempsey, Allison Deschamps, Chi-Young Koh, Jennifer Kottler-Smith, Page Lessy, Laura Lewellyn, Elaine Marchena, Maureen Marshall, Sylvia Martinez, Mark Nielsen, Carolyn Stuenkel, Cheryl Sutherland, Matthew Weinschenker, Emily Bernstein, Sarah Crane, Sunny Chang, Joelle Gruber, Sara Ann Jachym, Lars Jarkko,
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