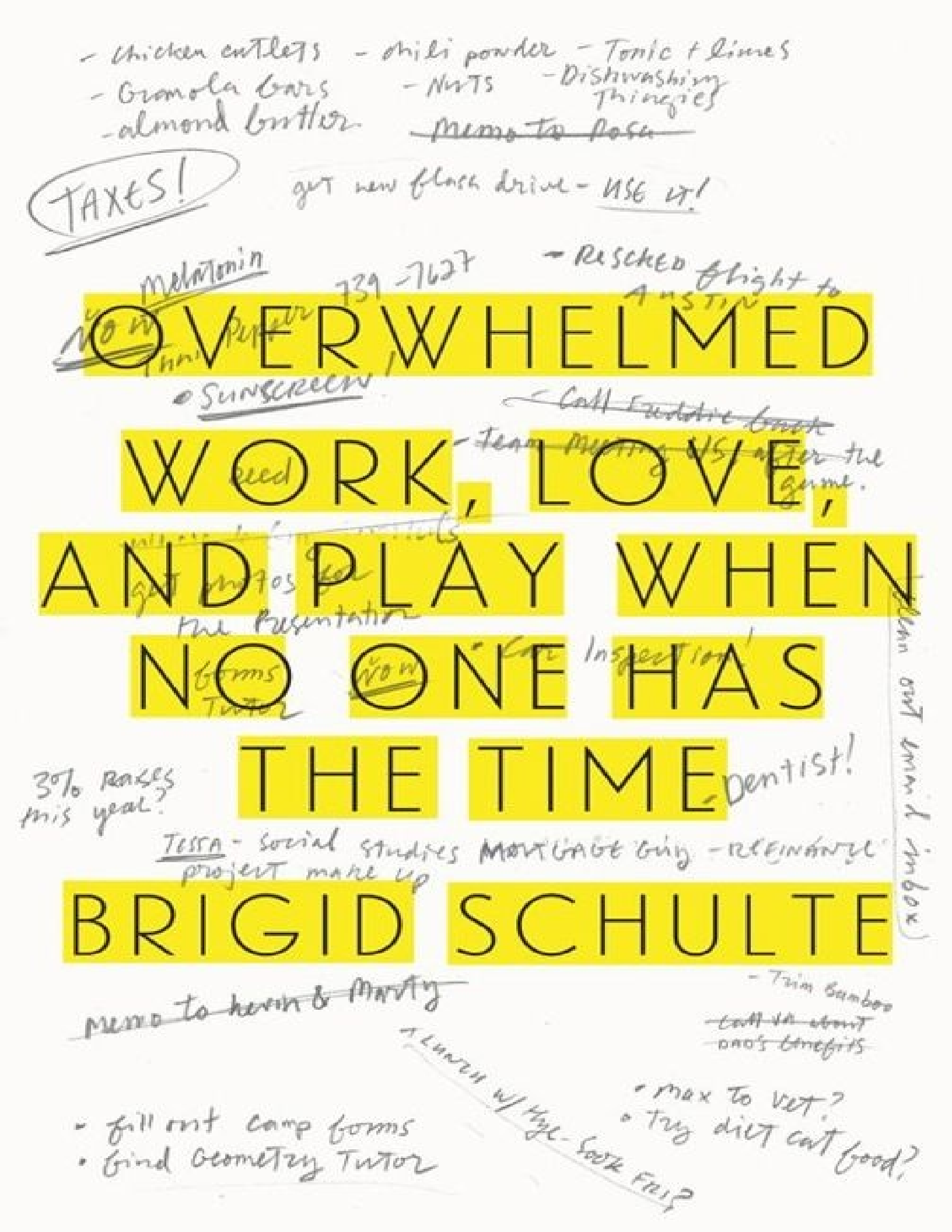
OVERWHELMED
WORK, LOVE, AND PLAY WHEN NO ONE HAS THE TIME
BRIGID SCHULTE

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BRIGID SCHULTE

SARAH CRICHTON BOOKS FARRAR, STRAUS AND GIROUX NEW YORK

To Liam and Tessa, that your horizons may be clear and wide, and to Tom, always

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THE IDEAL WORKER IS NOT YOUR MOTHER

We work to have leisure, on which happiness depends.
—Aristotle

Renate Rivelli loved her job. The thirty-nine-year-old single mother of two loved her job in the Human Resources Department of the elegant four-star Brown Palace Hotel in Denver so much that she never minded working the occasional crazy hours, sometimes braving snow and ice and closed streets to come back after she'd tucked her kids into bed for the night to help get payroll out or, when the housekeeping staff couldn't make it, to snap on plastic gloves and clean rooms herself.

She loved walking through the kitchens because the smells reminded her of her Austrian grandmother's cooking. She found meaning and purpose in her work as the benefits manager. So many of the hotel's cooks and maids had such struggles. Some had lost a husband or children in a faraway genocide or war. Some labored mightily to make ends meet. It humbled her, as stretched as she herself sometimes felt, to be able to help someone on the verge of breakdown switch money from a retirement account for the future to pay for the heat he or she needed now. The staff, she said, was like one big family. And for seven years, the Brown Palace, simply, was home.

At the hotel, there was no such thing as flextime or telework, no family-friendly policies to help employees manage work and life demands. When her kids got sick, she said, the hotel didn't allow her to take sick days to care for them. Because she lived with her mother, a surgical technician who worked long

hours herself, Rivelli was able to call on her for help. But a few times when her kids were older, her mother wasn't available, and Rivelli couldn't afford to take a day off—three sick days in a six-month period put one's job in jeopardy—she had no other option than to throw some movies in the DVD player, promise to call, and, seized with guilt, kiss her children goodbye and rush out the door.

Once, she herself was so sick she wound up in the emergency room. Doctors were pumping her with antibiotics at 3 a.m. But she was back at the office by 7 a.m. to run an employee orientation because no one else could do it. She stayed until midnight repeatedly for several months, doing the work of two people after a coworker left. It was that kind of total devotion to work that won her consistently high performance reviews and recognition in 2005 as Manager of the Year. "I always gave 150 percent," she says matter-of-factly over a cup of coffee in Denver, pushing her short dark brown hair out of her eyes and straightening her crisp gray wool business pantsuit.

So it came as a shock when hotel managers called her into their office in November 2008 and announced out of the blue that they'd created a new position in her department and she had a new boss—her younger, less experienced coworker. Rivelli had been on the job for seven years at that point. Her coworker, a young woman fresh out of college with no children, two.

Stunned, Rivelli protested they hadn't given her a chance to apply for it.

The new position, they said, would require fifty to sixty hours of work each week, lots of travel, and possibly relocation to another city. That, they told her, was "simply not possible" for her because she already "had a full-time job at home with her children."[1] She was a *mother*.

"I felt like I'd been kicked in the face. They obviously didn't realize I worked those kinds of hours anyway," Rivelli says. "I wasn't even given an opportunity to say, 'No, it sounds like too much work' or 'Let me talk to my family.' They decided *for* me, based on their assumptions about my life as a mother."

To soothe her, the managers said they'd give Rivelli a $38 a week raise to her $42,000 annual salary—30 percent of which typically went to cover the cost of child care. Instead, Rivelli called a lawyer and lodged a complaint with the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission.[2]

Rivelli would ultimately win a $105,000 settlement and a promise from the Brown Palace Hotel to refrain from gender discrimination. I had come to Denver to talk to Rivelli because, far from being another run-of-the-mill employment dispute, her case set a groundbreaking legal precedent. Hers became one of the EEOC's first test cases in a brand-new kind of law called family responsibilities

discrimination. As I struggled to understand how work fueled role overload and overwhelm, this new type of law, I came to see, strikes right at the source.

In recent years, lawyers across the country have begun filing thousands of family responsibilities law actions in every state, in every industry, and at every level in organizations. They include cases of mothers, like Rivelli, who have been held back or demoted, had pay docked, or have been fired because of their perceived lack of commitment to the workplace. But as fathers who are more fully involved in family life find themselves passed over for promotion or stigmatized at work, and as both men and women begin caring more for aging relatives—which nearly half of all American workers expect to do in the coming years[3]—family responsibilities discrimination lawsuits climbed, mushrooming 400 percent from 2000 to 2010.[4]

The premise is simple. Today's workplace thinks and operates much as it did in the 1950s, when people expected the world to be neatly divided into two separate and unequal worlds: the man in the gray flannel suit who could devote himself entirely to work in one, and, in the other, his homemaker wife, taking care of everything and everyone else. But the worlds of work and caregiving have collided. The lawsuits show the workplace is harshest on those who try to live in both worlds at the same time. "Look, if you design work around someone who starts to work in early adulthood and works full force for forty years straight, who have you just described? Men," Joan Williams, the legal scholar who helped shape the new theory, told me. "We have organized the workplace around men's bodies and men's traditional life pattern. That's sex discrimination."

Williams runs a hotline for caregiver discrimination cases at the WorkLife Law Center at the University of California Hastings College of the Law. In testimony before the EEOC, she rattled off a list of the kinds of calls they routinely get:

- A woman at a law firm was given less client contact and work when she became a mother. When she announced her second pregnancy, she was fired, which, Williams said, is a "common pattern."
- An aircraft mechanic was disciplined and ultimately fired for "lack of dependability" after using some of the twelve weeks of unpaid leave guaranteed under the Family and Medical Leave Act[5] to care for his pregnant wife, who had gestational diabetes.
- A carpenter on FMLA leave to care for his father, who'd had a heart attack,

was told that “no one wanted to work with him” and was terminated.[6]

- An employee who worked at Wendy’s for four years notified her employer that she was pregnant with her second child and was told, according to court filings, that if she wanted to keep her job, she had to have an abortion, something “sadly common” for low-wage workers, said Cynthia Calvert, an attorney who works with Williams.[7]

Though Congress passed the Pregnancy Discrimination Act in 1978, EEOC records show pregnancy discrimination claims are actually on the rise.[8]

I spoke with a twenty-three-year-old mother named Laura from Napa, California, who works two jobs and earns about $1,000 a month, most of which goes to rent. When she was pregnant and began to have back problems, her doctor sent a note to her employer asking that Laura not be required to lift more than twenty pounds or bend over. Her supervisor, who had shifted duties for other employees with back problems and other ailments, refused to do the same for her. Instead, the supervisor forced Laura to take her twelve weeks of unpaid FMLA leave early, or face being fired. If Laura hadn’t gotten help from her local Legal Aid attorney, who threatened to file a family responsibilities discrimination lawsuit, Laura’s maternity leave would have been used up before her baby was even born.

EEOC general counsel P. David Lopez said stories like Laura’s are run-of-the-mill. “It’s overt discrimination,” he told me, shaking his head. Employers don’t think twice about punishing pregnant workers or making offensive remarks. Sometimes, Lopez said, neither do judges. “On one case, a judge referred to the plaintiff as, ‘Oh, isn’t that the woman who should be at home with her kids?’”[9]

After the win with Rivelli’s case, another EEOC foray into family responsibilities discrimination litigation was not as successful. The EEOC sued Bloomberg LP, the global financial services and media company owned by the former New York mayor Michael Bloomberg, on behalf of seventy-eight women, some of them highly placed in the organization, charging that the top-heavy male company had a pattern and practice of discriminating against employees with family responsibilities. The women asserted in court filings that once they announced their pregnancies or returned from maternity leaves, they were demoted, their pay reduced, their responsibilities taken away, or they were marginalized—a step many feared would lead to their termination. Bloomberg denied the charges.

The EEOC alleged that bias against caregivers started at the very top, with the executives who set the tone for the rest of the company. Court documents allege that Lex Fenwick, who took over as CEO after Bloomberg left the company, once said, “I’m not having any pregnant bitches working for me.” The head of news, court filings allege, derided women who take maternity leave, saying, “Half these fuckin’ people take the [maternity] leave and they don’t even come back. It’s like stealing money from Mike Bloomberg’s wallet. It’s theft. They should be arrested.”[10] U.S. District Court Judge Loretta A. Preska sided with Bloomberg and ruled against the EEOC, arguing that, while each woman may have valid individual claims, the EEOC had not proved that the company systematically discriminated against pregnant women and mothers. “In a company like Bloomberg, which explicitly makes all-out dedication its expectation, making a decision that preferences family over work comes with consequences,” Preska wrote. “To be sure, women need to take leave to bear a child. And, perhaps unfortunately, women tend to choose to attend to family obligations over work obligations thereafter more often than men in our society. Work-related consequences follow.”[11]

The EEOC appealed the judge’s ruling.

I couldn’t get Preska’s comments out of my head. There is no doubt that women, even when they are employed, are still expected to be the primary caregiving parent. And there are consequences: fewer women leaders in virtually every field, harried mothers, those sidelined on the “mommy track,” those who opt out when it becomes too much, breadwinning fathers pressured to work long hours to hold on to jobs that provide for families they rarely see. But with such rigid and work-devoted cultures, how much of a “choice” does any worker who wants a full life or a family really have? If we have designed workplaces around an expectation of work without end, if those workplaces expect all-out dedication of body, mind, and soul, then *no one*, male or female, has much of a choice. There is only one way to work to succeed or to survive: all the time.

As I sought to get to the root of how work contributes to the overwhelm, it became clear complicated factors are at play: extreme work hours,[12] rapidly evolving technology, information overload, globalization, changing demographics, shifting gender roles, the high status of busyness, economic anxiety, and cutbacks that “offload” more work onto the fewer remaining employees, not to mention the increased cost of living, stagnant wages, growing household debt, and the steep cost of child care followed by eye-popping college tuition bills—increasing 893 percent since 1980—that perpetuate the work-and-

spend spin cycle.[13]

But as I read case after case of workers, both men and women, claiming they'd been discriminated against because of caregiving responsibilities, as I read studies on human performance and motivation that show our work culture is completely at odds with how we produce our best work, I came to understand that something deeper, and more insidious, drives us.

I was about to meet the Ideal Worker.

*

The ideal worker doesn't take parental leave when a child is born. He doesn't need a place or time to pump breast milk. He has no need of family-friendly policies like flexible scheduling, part-time work, or telecommuting. The ideal worker doesn't have to find babysitters, deal with school closures on snow days, or otherwise worry about child-care responsibilities. The ideal worker doesn't mop up after the child who barfs up her breakfast Cheerios or the green Saint Patrick's Day cookie of the night before. He wrinkles his nose, says, "Good luck with that," and waltzes out the door. The ideal worker doesn't get interrupted by repeated calls from the school because a child is acting out, like Rivelli's, or daily 3 p.m. calls from kids begging for playdates instead of the scheduled after-school program, like mine. The ideal worker never has to think about researching good assisted care facilities for Mom or Dad as they get older, whether they're getting the best treatment in ICU, or how to get his sister to her next chemotherapy appointment. It's simply not his job.

Instead, the ideal worker, freed from all home duties, devotes himself completely to the workplace. He is a face-time warrior, the first one in in the morning and the last to leave at night. He is rarely sick. Never takes vacation, or brings work along if he does. The ideal worker can jump on a plane whenever the boss asks because someone else is responsible for getting the kids off to school or attending the preschool play. In the professional world, he is the one who answers e-mails at 3 a.m., willingly relocates whenever and wherever the company directs, and pulls all-nighters on last-minute projects at a moment's notice. In the blue-collar workplace, he is always ready to work overtime or a second shift.

So tied to his job is the ideal worker that he works endless hours, even if it costs him his health and his family.

Obviously I'm exaggerating. This is a stereotype. But stereotypes reflect deeply held beliefs—accurate or not—and this notion of the ideal worker wields

immense power in the American workplace. We are programmed to emulate him at all costs, or at least feel the sting of not measuring up.

Rivelli and I walk across the street to the company where she now works. In the two years that her case against the Brown Palace Hotel dragged on, Rivelli went back to school at night to earn the college degree she'd put off when she had her children. She began walking to deal with the stress. Sometimes, when things got really bad, she'd escape to housekeeping to help fold towels. As part of the settlement agreement, the hotel asked her to leave.

At her new job, Rivelli smiles and hugs coworkers as they pass. Most everyone has families. Telecommuting and working flexible hours is the norm here. Rivelli has more time with her children and her mother. In addition to her college classes, she's found time for true leisure—to garden, to cook, and to start writing, a lifelong dream. Still, she says, she misses the Brown Palace and the thrill of striving against all odds to be the ideal worker.

"Would you go back?" I ask her.

"In a heartbeat."

*

I have to admit, I was skeptical that the ideal worker still holds sway in the twenty-first century. I mean, come on, women and mothers have worked throughout history as domestics, teachers, nannies, nurses, and secretaries, in family shops and businesses, on family farms and ranches. Women have been working in fields traditionally dominated by men since the early 1970s, graduating from college and many graduate programs in greater numbers than men since 1985, and they now make up about half the workforce. In a majority of married American families, both mothers and fathers are employed.[14] About three-fourths of all mothers with school-age children work outside the home.[15]

Plus, the ideal worker is so *old*. He first surfaced at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution when work became something you left home to do, somewhere you *went.* And over time it became something that *men* did. Men had public lives; women, private. Men's labor was paid. Women's was not. Men's work was visible and valued as contributing to the work of society, the market, or the life of the mind. Women's labor was invisible, noticed only if it was done badly or not at all.

This "separate spheres" theory of specialized work in an ideal family was first described as an economic theory in 1981 by Nobel Prize–winning economist Gary Becker in his landmark book *A Treatise on the Family*. He

called it the most “efficient” kind of family unit. But real life is so much messier than tidy stereotypes. From 1952 to 1966, the TV show *The Adventures of Ozzie and Harriet* burned the notion of separate spheres as best into the American psyche. At the same time, the percentage of American families living that breadwinner-homemaker ideal dropped dramatically. The number of mothers of young children going to work about doubled, from 20 to nearly 40 percent. By the time the iconic black-and-white sitcom was in reruns in the mid-1990s, the number of mothers working for pay had nearly doubled again.[16] A majority of African American mothers have always worked. Blue-collar families were able to afford the single-earner lifestyle only in the two decades of economic boom following the Second World War.[17]

Still, the notion stuck that separate spheres, with an ideal worker father and an ideal mother at home, was “best.”

In a survey of more than two thousand supervisors, managers, and executives around the globe, WFD Consulting, a company that researches work and life conflicts, uncovered deep-seated “caregiver bias.” More than three-fourths of these bosses thought the best and most productive workers “are those without a lot of personal commitments.” Half thought that “men who are highly committed to their personal/family lives cannot be highly committed to their work.” Even more thought the same of women.[18]

Research has found that mothers are seen as less committed to work than nonmothers.[19] Pregnant women are perceived as less authoritative and more irrational, regardless of their actual performance.[20] One family responsibilities discrimination case quoted an employer calling employed mothers “incompetent and lazy.”[21]

To gauge how notions of the ideal worker and caregiver bias influence hiring, promotions, and pay, Shelley J. Correll, Stephen Benard, and In Paik, then all at Cornell University, wrote a fictitious résumé for a person applying for a marketing job.

They put male names on half the résumés and female names on half. They signaled parenthood on half the résumés by listing work in a parent-teacher association in the activities section. The other half listed work for a charitable organization instead. Other than that, the résumés were virtually identical.

The researchers gave the résumés to nearly two hundred students and asked them to judge which one, the mother, the father, the childless woman, or the childless man, was the best worker.

Fathers were considered equally competent as men without children but

significantly more committed to work. Fathers were held to a lenient standard of punctuality. They were considered more hirable and promotable, and were recommended for management training more than men without children.

Mothers ranked at the very bottom. They were rated as significantly less competent, less intelligent, and less committed than women without children. Mothers were held to harsher performance and punctuality standards and had to score significantly higher on a management exam than nonmothers to be considered for the position. The recommended starting salary for mothers was $11,000 less than for nonmothers and far less than what students recommended fathers receive. The students also rated mothers as less promotable. In the end, they recommended that only 47 percent of the mothers be hired, compared to 84 percent of the nonmothers.

To test what the researchers came to call this "motherhood penalty" and "fatherhood bonus" in the real world—the first such study of its kind—they perused the newspaper help-wanted ads in a large northeastern city and sent out 1,276 résumés to 638 employers advertising entry-and midlevel marketing and business positions. Just as in the lab experiment, the researchers sent each company a pair of nearly identical résumés, save for one detail: One was a parent and one was not. Consistent with their lab findings, fathers were called back at a slightly higher rate than nonfathers. But mothers received only *half* the offers of nonmothers.[22]

Working mothers are judged unfairly not only as workers but also as mothers. Studies have found that employed mothers are seen as more selfish and less dedicated to their children than at-home moms, especially if they are thought to be working because they want to, rather than being forced to in order to make ends meet.[23]

No wonder just walking out the door in the morning as a working mother can be so fraught. Already, you're judged as guilty at best, a jerk, or worse. As Joan Williams told me, "You just walk around feeling polluted."

*

The ideal worker norm, Williams argues, is behind the all-too-familiar statistics of the dearth of women in upper management and political leadership: 4.2 percent of *Fortune* 500 CEO positions and 18.3 percent of the 535 seats in Congress.[24] It is also the unspoken specter behind the wage gap. Although there has been a rise in female earning power and economic independence, the Bureau of Labor Statistics consistently finds that men still outearn women at every age.[25]

But what those statistics mask, Williams said, is that the wage gap is not so much between men and women, but between *mothers* and everybody else. Williams calls it the "maternal wall."

Michelle Budig, a sociologist at the University of Massachusetts, testified before Congress about just how high and wide that wall is.

- All else being equal—type of job, education, years of experience, and hours on the job—childless women earn 94 cents of a childless man's dollar. But mothers earn only 60 cents of a father's dollar.
- Fathers, in contrast get a "fatherhood bonus," earning as much as $5,000 more than men with no children.[26]
- Mothers' pay drops with the birth of each additional child, ranging from 15 percent per child among low-wage workers to 4 percent for high-wage workers.
- Even after controlling for interruptions like taking maternity leave or working part-time, Budig found a persistent and unexplained 5 percent wage gap between mothers and women without children.

Social patterns reinforce the gap. Men tend to marry or partner with younger women. When couples start a family and decide that they both can't work like ideal workers anymore, the men typically have been in the workforce longer and earn higher pay. So it's not much of a stretch to see, from both a financial and cultural perspective, why it's usually the mother who steps back.[27] Women are twice as likely as men to work part-time.[28] And because part-time pay tends to be crappy, with the average part-time worker in sales, for example, earning 58 cents for every full-time worker's dollar, the cycle of lower earnings for mothers becomes self-reinforcing.[29]

The ideal worker is a big reason why some educated mothers simply disappear from the workplace, more so in the United States than in any other industrialized country.[30] Jane Leber Herr, an economist at the University of Chicago, analyzed national surveys of college graduates and found that fifteen years after graduating, nearly all the childless men and women were still working. But close to 30 percent of women with MBAs who had become mothers were out of the workforce, as were about one-quarter of the lawyers and those with master's degrees who had become mothers. Around 15 percent of Ph.D. mothers were gone. The one outlier was mothers with medical degrees. Fully 94 percent were still on the job, largely because doctors have the power to

control and predict their own schedules.[31] "You would think that, given the rise in education of women, their experience, their presence in high-investment, high-income, high-value fields, the proportion of those who leave the labor force would have gone down," Herr told me. "What's shocking is that it hasn't."

Some have called this disappearance of women "opting out" of the workforce and choosing to stay home, and they worry about the consequences if their marriages end: Divorced older women are more likely to live in poverty.[32] But Joan Williams said the ideal worker often gives women no choice. "Women are being pushed out both by gender discrimination and by this 'all-or-nothing' workplace," she said. "I don't call that choice. I call that lack of choice."

The all-or-nothing workplace is exacting a steep price on the future. Fertility rates around the globe have been falling since the late 1960s, when greater numbers of women began going to college, birth control became more readily available, and women began working in ideal worker jobs previously held only by men. Now 97 percent of the world's population lives in countries with declining fertility rates, writes Jonathan V. Last, author of *What to Expect When No One's Expecting*.[33] When men and women do have children, more are having them later in life. From 1970 to 2006, the proportion of first births to American women over thirty-five increased nearly eight times.[34] Families are smaller. Now more people feel the ticking of both the male and female biological clocks. Emerging research has linked the aging sperm of older fathers to a higher likelihood of passing autism, schizophrenia, and other developmental and psychiatric conditions on to their children.[35] For women, delay can lead to a greater risk of birth defects and infertility.[36]

Delay can also mean that women simply run out of time, what the economist Sylvia Ann Hewlett calls a "creeping non-choice." Twenty percent of American women between the ages of forty and forty-four have never had a child, double the number thirty years ago.[37] When Hewlett surveyed "ultra-achieving" men and women between the ages of forty-one and fifty-five, she found that only 19 percent of men were childless. But nearly half the women were, and not always by choice.[38]

*

Even when mothers do put in ideal worker hours like Rivelli did, many do not escape caregiver bias. Nearly one-third of the wives in dual-income couples now outearn their husbands.[39] So that bias has real financial consequences for working families.

Dawn Gallina was a corporate lawyer in Northern Virginia working for a senior partner at Mintz Levin. After their daughter was born, her husband, also a lawyer, had given up his practice to take care of her. Though Gallina put in the grueling 2,200 or more "billable hours" a year required of most lawyers at big law firms,[40] she deviated from the norm by working some of those hours at home to make time for her family.

While other associates stayed at their desks, eating the take-out meals ordered by the firm, Gallina tried to leave the office at 6:30 most nights to make it home for dinner and bedtime. Then she went back to work on her laptop, often taking client calls from the West Coast long after 11 p.m. She was always available; her BlackBerry was always on.

Her problems started, she said, when she put a photo of her two-year-old daughter on her desk. The partner she worked for had a wife at home and never saw his kids, she told me. "His perspective was, if I can't see my kids, why should you see yours?"

The only mother in the office, Gallina said she soon became targeted for extreme face time. "I was the only one who would get called into the office on Saturdays all the time, even when there was nothing to do. It was almost like being hazed." Her supervisor routinely FedExed her work on vacations, even though it wasn't due for months. He even asked Gallina, who has an MBA and a law degree from Drake University and a master's in law from Georgetown University, to make coffee. "I made it. I made it," she said, chagrined. "My thought was, 'Well, if this is a big test of my dedication, then I'm going to pass with flying colors.'"

The final straw, Gallina said, came when she was considering getting pregnant with her second child. Her boss told her, "Pregnant women don't make partner." When she complained to higher-ups, her work suddenly became suspect. She was denied a bonus, she said, while at the same time the firm raised her billing rate to clients. Then, when she was working at home one day when her daughter was sick, she was fired. By courier.

Gallina sued, citing family responsibilities discrimination, and settled with Mintz for half a million dollars.[41]

Gallina went on to have a second child. She now works for a French law firm in Richmond, Virginia. "It's not a face-time culture," she said. "People here have families and understand that if you want to catch your son's baseball game, you can do that and still do good work."

Mintz Levin has since been named to *Working Mother*'s Best Law Firms for

Women, Yale Law Women's Top Ten Family Friendly Firms, and received gold standard certification by the Women in Law Empowerment Forum.[42] At which point, one might ask, what the…? How can a firm be both the defendant in a high-profile family responsibilities discrimination case[43] *and* one of the best places for women to work?

But Mintz Levin is not alone. Of the one hundred companies listed in the 2012 *Working Mother* Best Companies, thirty-five have been sued in family responsibilities discrimination lawsuits, most within the past decade. Twelve companies have been sued more than once.[44] At the same time that the pharmaceutical giant Novartis was enjoying a prominent spot on the list, it, too, was being found guilty in federal court of a pattern of gender discrimination throughout the company. One manager demanded "two child-free years" of one employee, while another manager allegedly pressured a woman to have an abortion. The court awarded up to $250 million in punitive damages to thousands of female sales reps. "If this is what it's like to work for one of our country's 100 best companies for working mothers," Sharon Lerner wrote in *Slate*, "one shudders to imagine what it'd be like to work for one of the worst."[45]

Carol Evans, president of Working Mother Media, acknowledged that several firms on the list have had lawsuits filed against them for violating the very principles the magazine seeks to reward, though the cases are noted and, if the company loses, they're barred from the list for a period of time.

Ironically, Evans said, the discrimination lawsuits, or the threat of them, can force companies to change in ways that eventually land them on the coveted Best Places to Work list. "Sometimes a big lawsuit will be a wake-up call for them," she said. "And by the time it wends its way through the courts, the company's almost superlative because they've had this big slap in the face."[46]

*

I began to wonder about the flip side of the equation. What if a *father* doesn't want to be the ideal worker anymore? Does he, too, face caregiver bias?

Meet Ariel Ayanna. He asked that same question. In court. Ayanna accused his law firm of having a "macho culture." When he was fired just months after he took parental leave to care for his ailing pregnant wife and children, Ayanna sued, citing family responsibilities discrimination. Ayanna, thirty-one, is a corporate lawyer, though on the day we meet with his attorney in a quiet café in Boston, he's wearing khakis and a black T-shirt, and with his tousled brown hair, looks more like a tough but fair intellectual college professor.

He is one of seven children, he tells me, and has always been around kids or taken care of them. “I’ve been babysitting since I was eight.” He laughs. “In college, I was a nanny. It’s just second nature to me.” Growing up, his father worked as an investment banker on Wall Street but still made more time for the family than his own father had. Ayanna sees himself as the next step in a natural evolution toward more equal parenting and work. He and his wife, a medieval historian, had their first child when Ayanna was still in law school. Because of his ease with children, Ayanna said it was never a question that he would be the one to assume primary responsibility for their son’s care.

After graduating with honors, Ayanna got his first job as a corporate lawyer in the Boston office of big law firm Dechert. He loved the challenge of the work and won accolades and high performance evaluations, earning a $30,000 bonus in his first year. And all the while, he was regularly leaving the office in the evening to be home with his family, often cooking dinner, scheduling doctors’ appointments and playdates, putting his son to bed, and then going back to work on his laptop and BlackBerry. Though he worked flexibly, he had no trouble meeting his target for billable hours or doing good work. Once, Ayanna says, when a senior associate asked for a last-minute project and wanted it on his desk by the next morning, Ayanna worked on it from home until late into the night. The senior attorney “said it was better than he would have done,” Ayanna says, “but he still complained that I left the office ‘early.’ That was the culture.”

The culture was reinforced, not in formal policies, he says, but in hallway chatter, raised eyebrows, pointed ribbing at lunches, and the ubiquitous meals ordered in and expected to be eaten at one’s desk. Two male associates, “golden boys,” Ayanna calls them, who were held up as model employees, were constantly competing over who worked longer and harder. One said he worked on his BlackBerry while his wife was in the hospital. He won. Another said he had the firm pay to fly his wife to visit her family across the country so she’d stop asking him to come home from work. He won.

Ayanna’s troubles with the firm started, his lawyer, Rebecca Pontikes, says, “when he began acting like a girl,” asking for a transfer to Munich when his wife won a prestigious Fulbright scholarship to study in Germany. In the world of the ideal worker, “trailing spouses,” the ones who leave careers for the benefit of the other spouse, tend to be women.[47]

In Germany, Ayanna’s wife became pregnant with their second child. When she was about to deliver, his wife, who suffers from chronic mental illness, had a serious breakdown and was hospitalized. With no family nearby and no other

help, Ayanna asked to take parental leave to care for her, their son, and a few weeks later, their new baby. But at Dechert, it was rare for men to take parental leave, Ayanna argued in his brief.

When he returned to the Boston office following his leave, he was assigned to a partner who valued long hours of face time, Ayanna says. The partner refused to give him work if he wasn't physically in the office, Ayanna alleged in his case. Struggling to care for his family, yet unable to work at home as before, Ayanna failed to meet his billable hours target. He received a poor performance evaluation, despite partners noting his "intellectual horsepower," and he was fired.

Dechert, in its court filings, maintained Ayanna was fired for cause.[48] On the day the case was to be tried, in February 2013, lawyers for Dechert and Ayanna, who now works flexible hours for a different firm, signed a confidential settlement.[49] The "golden boys" at Dechert, Ayanna says, have since become partners.[50]

The case highlights what Joan Williams calls the "flexibility stigma." Just as Ben Hunnicutt told me that leisure has been lost because work now answers the religious questions of who we are and how we find meaning, Williams said that the total work devotion of the ideal worker has become a religion itself. "If you're not giving your all, putting work ahead of family or any other obligation, then you are violating the work devotion ideal. You become suspect. Lazy. Undependable. A slacker," she said. Women who request flexibility may be tolerated because of their historical caregiving role, but often sidelined at work, she added. But men like Ayanna, who seek to work a different way, can be harshly punished. "It challenges our deeply ingrained understanding of the 'proper' behavior for men," she explained. "Like, when I hear of a man staying home full-time to take care of kids, very often my initial reaction is, 'Well, he's getting a good deal,' or 'What kind of loser is he that he couldn't get a job and is sponging off his wife.' And I don't have that reaction when I hear a man is supporting a woman so she can stay home."

To test those kinds of automatic reactions, Laurie Rudman and her colleagues at Rutgers University asked 137 male and female study participants to rate a fictitious employee named Kevin Dowd. In one scenario, he requested caregiving leave. In another, he asked for more work hours. Although everything else about Dowd was identical, the participants rated the caregiving Dowd as a poorer worker and saw him as weak, less masculine, less intelligent, and less ambitious. They weren't as inclined to give him rewards or promotions and were

more likely to think he ought to be punished. “We’d done previous studies and found a ‘wimp’ penalty for guys who are modest during a job interview. But that led to people not wanting to hire him,” Rudman told me. “That’s different from wanting to fire you or dock your pay or downsize you.”

Rudman said she was startled to find that women judged the leave-requesting Dowd more harshly than the men did, a sign, she wrote, of the “extent to which women have been co-opted by [the] Ideal Worker.”[51]

Although technology is making it easier, faster, and more efficient to work from anywhere, at any time—even at home between playdates and dinner—the power of the ideal worker keeps everyone stuck on their butts in their chairs at the office. Researchers at the University of California at Davis’s graduate school of management and the London Business School found that, regardless of the quality of their work, people who work remotely, like Ayanna and Gallina did, are less likely to be seen as responsible and dedicated and more likely to get lower performance evaluations, smaller raises, and fewer promotions than their face-time warrior ideal worker colleagues.[52]

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But isn’t the ideal worker the best worker? The most productive? Most creative? Smartest?

Actually, he’s not.

Workers caught up in the total work devotion standard of the ideal worker are mired in an unhappy and unproductive funk. A 2011 Gallup poll found that 71 percent of Americans reported feeling emotionally disconnected and disengaged from their workplace.[53]

Surveys are finding that people would gladly leave their jobs for one with more flexibility. Nearly *two-thirds* of all employed workers, both women and men, say they’d rather own their own business for the freedom that would give them to control their time.[54] Research shows that forcing long hours, face time for the sake of face time, and late nights actually kills creativity and good thinking, and the ensuing stress, anxiety, and depression eat up health-care budgets. Stretched by long hours and ideal worker demands, one-third of the civilian U.S. workforce doesn’t get enough sleep, costing companies $63.2 billion in lost productivity every year. The writer William Chalmers, in his book *America’s Vacation Deficit Disorder: Who Stole Your Vacation?*, estimates that the stressed-out ideal worker culture of no vacations, endless work, and exhausted butt-in-chair face-time “presenteeism” costs the U.S. economy as

much as $1.5 trillion a year.[55] The single largest cause of burnout is lack of personal control on the job—expected to be the ideal worker with no life and free to satisfy the boss's every whim.[56]

In fact, a raft of new research is finding that better work gets done when workers have more control over and predictability about their time and workflow, and when managers focus on the mission of the job rather than the time in the chair and recognize that workers are more engaged, productive, and innovative when they have full lives at home and are refreshed with regular time off. Leslie Perlow and Jessica Porter, of the Harvard Business School, compared two groups of workers at a Boston consulting firm. One group worked fifty or more hours a week, didn't use all their vacation time, and were constantly tethered to the office with electronics. The other group worked forty hours, took full vacations, and coordinated time off and after-hours on-call time so clients' needs could be covered but people could regularly, predictably, and without guilt totally unplug from the office. Which group produced better work? The team with time off, not surprisingly, reported higher job satisfaction and better work-life balance. But they also increased learning, improved communication with their team, worked more efficiently, and were ultimately more productive than their ideal worker colleagues.[57] Other studies have found that employees who take full vacations are not only more likely to stay with the firm but also receive higher performance reviews,[58] and that workers are not only more creative but that turning off the constant barrage of e-mails and the ideal worker requirement to respond to them immediately enables people to concentrate and get more done with less stress.[59]

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So given the weight of evidence *against* the ideal worker, that he *isn't,* in fact, the best worker, why is he so hard to shake?

Because, Joan Williams said, no one believes it. "The belief in the ideal worker way of working is so deep that even when you introduce evidence that contradicts it, people just don't buy it. It shows you that what's operating is much deeper," she said. "It's not about the rational weighing of evidence. We're talking about work as people's religion."

An intriguing set of studies suggests another reason: He's the boss. In studies of more than seven hundred married men, researchers from Harvard, New York University, and the University of Utah found that men in traditional marriages with wives at home tend to occupy powerful positions in the upper echelons of

organizations. They also tend to think that workplaces with more women don't operate well and that organizations with female leaders are "relatively unattractive." These ideal worker bosses more frequently deny female employees opportunities for promotion, considering them less qualified than men, even when their résumés are virtually identical. The researchers dubbed these men powerful "resistors" to a more egalitarian—and realistic—way of working and living.[60]

Psychologists are discovering another reason for the staying power of the ideal worker: It's the way our brains are wired. Our brains, as Torkel Klingberg said, have evolved little beyond the hunter-gatherer days when, on the savannah, survival was a matter of quickly judging threat from nonthreat. Today, this instant sorting leads to the automatic, unconscious beliefs that we don't even realize we have, which helps explain why stereotypes, no matter how grossly inaccurate, can be so powerful.

Mahzarin Banaji, an experimental psychologist who studies this unconscious bias at Harvard, has explored the power of stereotypes through an anonymous online test she and her colleagues devised called the Implicit Association Test. In analyzing more than two million tests, Banaji and others have found large implicit biases favoring whites over blacks, heterosexuals over homosexuals, Christians over Jews, and rich over poor, even though many of the test takers professed they harbored no such explicit biases.

To study the ideal worker norm, Banaji and her colleagues have test takers sit ready at keyboards. They are told to sort male and female names like Sarah, Derek, Matt, and Tammy with concepts like career, corporation, dishwasher, or house. Using timers, researchers have found that large majorities of test takers are much more easily able to sort career-related words with male names and home-related words with female names, as if it's automatic. When asked to do the opposite, match career words with female names and home-related words with male names, most stumble, make mistakes, and require more time. Both men and women have to stop and think, a sign, she said, that they are struggling to override their innate, automatic bias.

In fact, women have to struggle more. Their research found that 77 percent of the male test takers showed strong unconscious bias for male = career, female = family. But how's this for cognitive dissonance? Fully 83 percent of the *women* showed that same unconscious bias, even though they professed to have none. Banaji argues that the tests are a powerful predictor of whether people will act in biased ways, even if they intend not to. The test, she told my colleague Shankar

Vedantam in the *Washington Post Magazine*, "measures the thumbprint of the culture on our minds." And she has found that the ideal worker thumbprint—unless one becomes aware of it and actively works to change it—has left its mark on both men and women. So, both sexes tend to associate men with careers and women with home.[61]

To test her results for myself, I went back and crunched some more data in the General Social Survey. As late as the 1990s, nearly one in five Americans still disapproved of married women working, whether or not they had children. To the question, "Should a woman with a preschooler work?" half of the men surveyed in 2002, the most recent time the question was asked, said no, she should stay home. And four in ten *women* thought so, too,[62] percentages that hadn't moved much from when the question was posed in 1988 and in 1994.

The survey does not ask whether married men and fathers of preschoolers should work. The assumption is, clearly, they should.

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About the time I was exploring the roots of the overwhelm at work, Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg made a splash by admitting she left the office at 5:30 to be home for dinner with her two children. I'd heard about high-tech firms' famous flexible work styles—one former Google exec told me people could work from a beach in Hawaii as long as work got done on time. Sandberg's confession seemed a hopeful sign that perhaps the new economy jobs of Silicon Valley were liberated from the grip of the ideal worker. Could Silicon Valley, I wondered, lead the way for the rest of the work world?

It took less than a day of reporting to come to this disappointing conclusion: God, I hope not.

The young, testosterone-fueled geek culture has revved up the ideal worker standard to a superhuman level. Work hours are not just extreme, they eat you alive. Projects are so poorly managed, often by boy geniuses with few social skills, that work is routinely done in an exhausting last-minute, seat-of-the-pants, save-the-day "hero mind-set," according to the Anita Borg Institute for Women and Technology. That mind-set, they write, "is sending the message that those who have family responsibilities need not apply."[63]

Marianne Cooper, a sociologist who has studied extreme work hours in Silicon Valley, said that working to the point of collapse to meet impossible deadlines has become a way to prove manliness and status in the high-tech world. "There's a lot of … He's a real man; he works 90-hour weeks. He's a

slacker, he works 50 hours a week," engineers told Cooper.[64] It's the kind of culture that applauded when pregnant Marissa Mayer announced she wouldn't take maternity leave after being appointed CEO and president of Yahoo!

Catherine Keefer, forty-two, reveled in the all-hours work culture when she first moved to the Bay Area and got a job where most women end up in high-tech: the "pink ghetto" of marketing. Work felt like the center of a very exciting universe. It was fun. There were Ping-Pong tables, upscale cafés serving specialty coffees, and valet dry-cleaning services so you'd never have to leave. And she never did. "Then the kids came," Keefer said. Unlike Sandberg, Keefer discovered that it was virtually impossible to walk out the door at 5:30. With a workaholic boss and often pointless meetings called at the last minute in the late afternoon, or projects dumped on her desk just as she was trying to get out the door, and being married to another techie who regularly worked until 2 a.m. for a start-up, life in the high-tech world was simply incompatible with having a family.

"I got run over," she says.

By the time I met Keefer, she, like many other mothers I met in the Bay Area, had quit her job and become a consultant. She was doing the very same work for the very same company, but in her own time and on her own terms. And for less pay, no benefits, and zero chance of promotion.[65]

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I began to realize that I, too, had spent my entire career caught in the cult of the ideal worker. My mother stayed home. The only role model I had for what it meant to be a good worker was my dad, and he was always working. When he wasn't at the University of Portland, where he worked first as an accounting professor, then a dean, and later vice president, he was spending much of his evenings and free hours at university functions and fund-raisers, or teaching night classes to pay for braces and ballet lessons for his four daughters. We rarely saw him. And when we did, he was often distracted, deep in thought and worrying about work. He was always serious. Work seemed important and hard. So, when I started to work, I worked like he did. An editor once anxiously told me that I really should go home for the day. It was 10 p.m.

After Tom and I got married, I was absolutely terrified about how I would be able to fit children into this crazy work-focused lifestyle. I waited until it was almost too late. When we finally brought our miracle baby home, I was torn. The ideal worker in me now desperately wanted to be the ideal mother, too.

I sank into a deep depression when my son was seven weeks old, realizing we couldn't afford to keep our little bungalow in the close-knit community we loved if I didn't work. I made more money at the time than my husband, and my job provided our health care. We'd already lived in a cheaper place with bars on the windows in a scary neighborhood, and didn't want to bring a stroller into that anxious world. We could have moved to a town house in the exurbs, but that would have meant a hellish commute for Tom and turned him into an absent father. And I worried that if I jumped off the speeding train of work in the corporate world, even for a little while, I'd never be able to jump back on. And in truth, I'd always *wanted* to do both—to do good work and to be a really great mom. I just didn't know how. And it is only in retrospect that I realize that I never even *asked* Tom what he wanted. I just assumed he would keep working, like my father had.

When our son was six months old and my maternity leave was up—a patchwork of time I cobbled together from unpaid Family and Medical Leave, the paid maternity leave my company offered, sick time, vacation time, disability, and several weeks of unpaid leave—I felt increasingly sick about the long hours reporters like me typically worked. I loved journalism. With our bills, I knew quitting wasn't an option. But I desperately wanted time to be with my child. So I asked for a four-day workweek.

My boss at the time said no, even though another mother and a man nearing retirement worked that schedule.

I asked to work one day a week from home.

No.

I left that job as a national reporter to join the *Washington Post*'s Metro staff, so even if it was late, I could always be home for dinner and story time.

Two and a half years later, at nearly thirty-nine, I had our daughter. I spent much of my maternity leave with her working on two projects, my infant snuggled peacefully against my chest in a BabyBjörn. When I asked my new managers for a four-day workweek, one warned me that I would "ruin my career."

"Can't you just leave early every now and then?" he asked.

But I knew I never would. That's not what an ideal worker in an overachieving culture does. As much as I hate to admit it, my inner workaholic needed formal permission to cut back. Over the years, some managers, both men and women, were great. One fantastic woman editor told me, "I never care where you are or when you work, as long as you get your stories done." I

happily worked twice as hard for her. But others, both men and women, clearly thought that working part-time made me a less desirable, less productive worker. One, after I turned in what would become an award-winning series, said, “She did *that* on a four-day workweek?” But when the time came for my performance evaluation, another manager compared the number of times my byline appeared in the paper with those of others who worked full-time. I obviously came up short.

Still, I loved what my kids came to call “Mommy Monday.” For the six years I worked that schedule, I was so happy for that precious time with my children and felt so loyal to the editors that I was more than willing to do what it took to show it could work. I answered work calls while changing diapers or flipped my day off as news or story deadlines required. I felt strangely proud to tell the other mothers on the playground who had given up careers to stay home that I “only” worked part-time, as if to say, “See, I put my children ahead of my career, too!” I was fully aware, however, as I watched colleagues and my husband advance, take glamorous overseas assignments, sign book deals, and win awards, that in the demanding ideal worker world of daily newspapers, I might have hung on to the speeding train, but I wasn’t going anywhere fast.

As I neared forty, I wondered if we would have a third child. I had saved all our favorite baby clothes, toys, and books and stored them in big Tupperware bins under the eaves just in case. A coworker urged me never to let corporate America dictate the shape of my life and family. But I already had.

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I sit with Joan Williams, whom *The New York Times* has dubbed the “rock star” of work and family issues, in her spartan office at the WorkLife Law Center in San Francisco contemplating the ideal worker.

Right now, she says, we’re all stuck.

Mothers who venture to work are on their own. At home, they’re still considered primarily responsible for all things domestic and still defined in a way that men are not—by their children’s achievements and the tidiness of the house. At work, most are at the mercy of their immediate supervisors. Sure, some companies have family-friendly policies like flexible and part-time work, many of which were put together as “women’s initiatives” to stem the tide after human resources departments noticed how many were leaving after starting families. The policies may even look good. On paper. But let’s face it, with the ideal worker culture so firmly entrenched, in many workplaces you know only

mothers are expected to use them, and you're not going very far if you do. So you either choose the flexi mommy track, opt out, hire help, or gut it out.

To top it all off, the fact that many women haven't "made it," that so few women have climbed to the upper echelons of business, academia, politics, science, and other fields, is seen as a sign—not that there's something wrong with the workplace, but that there's something wrong with women. That women aren't as ambitious or smart or *something*.[66]

She's stuck.

Fathers are stigmatized when they seek to deviate from the ideal worker, to do more than just slip out under the radar to attend the occasional Little League game, to actually spend the time intimately caring for children and being an equal partner at home. "Men with children have a sharp choice," Williams said. "They can choose *not* to be equal partners with their wives, in which case having children will *help* their careers with the fatherhood bonus. Or they can choose to *be* equal partners and *hurt* their careers even more than women. As long as that's the case, we'll have a few brave souls, but that's it. Brave souls."

He's stuck.

With smartphones and Skype and e-mail and other fast-emerging technologies keeping us all tethered to work, the ideal worker is now expected to be on call and ready to roll all day, every day, all the time. And because the ideal worker is just that, a demanding, voracious ideal, no one can ever measure up. No matter how much you do, how hard you work, how much you sacrifice, how devoted you are, you can never attain that ideal. You will never be the ideal worker.

We're all stuck.

Williams, fifty-nine, knows the syndrome intimately. She began her own career as an environmental lawyer. "Then I had a baby." She saw her home life revert to traditional gender roles and fall out of balance.

"You want equality in the workplace? Die childless at thirty. You won't have hit either the glass ceiling or the maternal wall," she says. "People say there will never be equality in the workplace until there's equality in the home. But to me, it's really the reverse. There will never be equality at home until there's equality in the workplace, until we redefine the ideal worker. Because until then, men will feel they have no choice but to meet that ideal, even if they don't believe in it, because they want to be 'successful'."

Right now, she says, the only way to shake the hold of the ideal worker is to hit him with family responsibilities discrimination lawsuits. "It's extremely

demoralizing how little progress we've made. The conversation today is very much the same as it was in the 1970s. We don't have social supports for working families. We don't have workers' rights. What do we have? Discrimination law," she says. "Family responsibilities discrimination lawsuits may not be the most important way to bring about change. But right now, it's the only thing we have."

That, and changing the conversation. Seeing that the overwhelm never was just a "mommy issue." That it's a father issue. A children's issue. A workplace issue. A household issue. A family issue. A human rights issue. It's an issue for society, especially one that purports to value families so highly. The overwhelm is an issue for everyone, really, living in a country whose very mission is to guarantee the right of its citizens to pursue happiness.

Williams, whose daughter teases her about working like an ideal worker so others won't have to, leans back in her chair. There was a time in America, she says, when things could have been different.

"You should go ask Pat Buchanan."

BRIGHT SPOT: STARTING SMALL

The equality we fought for isn't livable, isn't workable, isn't comfortable … We have … to get on to the second stage: the restructuring of our institutions on a basis of real equality for women and men, so we can live a new "yes" to life and love, and can *choose* to have children.

—Betty Friedan, *The Second Stage*

When she was pregnant with her first child and losing sleep thinking that she'd have to return to work just weeks after giving birth, Dionne Anciano had no idea that the state of California is one of only three in the nation that offer paid parental leave. New Jersey and Rhode Island are the others.[1]

The California law, which passed in 2002, allows workers to take off up to six weeks a year to bond with a newborn, newly adopted child, or newly placed foster child, or to care for a family member. While on leave, workers draw 55 percent of their usual earnings, up to a weekly cap of about $1,000. Employers pay nothing. Neither does the government. Workers foot the entire bill: The funds come out of a state temporary disability insurance fund that all employees regularly contribute $3 a month to through a payroll tax.[2] New Jersey has a similar system. Washington state passed a paid leave law but has yet to fund it. Efforts to pass a national paid family leave law in Congress have gone nowhere since Pat Schroeder first tried in 1985.

"It was such a relief just to be able to *recover*," said Anciano, who found out about the policy only after a client asked her to design a brochure about it. Anciano married at forty-one and had her baby after extensive fertility treatments and a difficult pregnancy at forty-four. Instead of having to put her daughter in child care after only a few weeks, Anciano was able to stitch together four months of paid leave, vacation, and sick days. Her husband was doing the same when I visited her. And, with the help of their families, their daughter would be cared for by family members for most of the first year of her life. "I can't tell you how important that is to me," Anciano said.

Advocates and supporters of paid family leave, like Paul Orfalea, the founder and chair emeritus of Kinko's, who urged businesses to become "responsible corporate citizen(s),"[3] say the law acknowledges the simple fact that workers have families and provides companies with a uniform policy to plan for it. But opponents, like the California Chamber of Commerce, argued that absences like Anciano's are disruptive to businesses. They're both right, Anciano's employer, design firm owner Tia Stoller, told me. "As an employer, there was anxiety about how I'd deal with her being gone," Stoller said. "But as a mother, I wanted her to have as much time as possible with her new baby." When Stoller had her son twenty-two years ago, there were no family leave laws. "I would have loved to have had maternity leave," she said with a sigh.

But for all her anxiety about Anciano's absence, once Anciano was on leave, "it was really okay," Stoller said. "We didn't work longer hours, but we worked more intense hours. We were, like, 'Wow, look at what we can do in a day.'"

Stoller's experience is not unusual. Despite the chamber's fears, a majority of California businesses report that the paid leave law has had a positive or neutral effect on profits and productivity, and 99 percent said it boosted employee morale. Workers who'd taken leave reported feeling more bonded with their children and better able to care for them. More were breast-feeding for longer periods and they'd had more time to arrange for child care to return to work.[4]

Herb Greenberg, founder and CEO of Caliper, a Princeton recruiting company, is one of the biggest supporters of the New Jersey paid family leave law that passed in 2008. If workplaces and work policies make it too hard for a woman to both work and have time for family "then she's lost a lot in her own life, and the world has lost, too," he said. "Family leave isn't just about women. It affects men as well."

In fact, it was *men* who were instrumental in getting the California paid family leave law passed in only one year, said Sheila Kuehl, a former child actress and Harvard law grad who, as state senator, shepherded the bill through the General Assembly. "Fathers *wanted* time to bond with their children. If you have time in those first months, it changes everything," she said. Men showed up to lobby for the bill. Paper ties with copies of the bill on it were delivered to all the male lawmakers on Father's Day. "Men showed that this is really important to them."[5]

I asked Anciano if I could talk to her husband, Rich, who was currently caring for their daughter on his paid leave. It was close to 5 p.m. She picked up the phone to call and ask. "Oh. Okay," she said. "Don't worry about it."

She turned to me and in six short words conveyed the power of fathers taking solo parental leave and finally seeing for themselves how annoying it is when, at the end of an intense day with the baby, when you're exhausted, in a messy house with wild hair, no real clue where the day went save for clipping the baby's fingernails, and your partner, surveying the disarray, asks, "So what did you *do* all day?" Anciano smiled apologetically and shook her head. "He hasn't had a shower yet."

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Joan Blades sits in front of her laptop at the dining room table in Berkeley, the San Francisco Bay sparkling in the distance. Blades, one of the cofounders of the progressive Internet phenomenon MoveOn.org, is now using the same organizing and Internet savvy to stir up a new movement to push both U.S. workplaces and U.S. family policy out of the deep freeze of the 1950s. Though she and her cofounder, Seattle-based Kristin Rowe-Finkbeiner, call their one-million-member group MomsRising and their agenda *The Motherhood Manifesto*, they seek to reshape policies and remake ideal worker workplaces not just for mothers but for everyone. The overwhelm, they want people to understand, is not an epidemic of personal failures, of whiny moms unable to juggle work and home efficiently. It's a massive structural failure in society, and it's holding everybody back. "Of the last four Supreme Court justices appointed, two men and two women, both the men had children and neither of the women did. This is not an accident," Blades says. "Look, 80 percent of women become mothers by the time they're forty-four,[6] which means the profound bias against mothers is a bias against all women," she tells me. "And having a family is kind of core to the human experience. If we want to continue as a society, we have to have families."

Using the Internet, MomsRising collects stories of outrage, frustration, and struggle: mothers who had to go back to work days after giving birth, families nearly broken by the cost of child care, unconscious bias breathtakingly deep. One oncologist's home loan was turned down when the bank discovered she was on maternity leave. Though she planned to return to work, the bank assumed she'd be quitting to stay home with her baby and wouldn't be able to afford the mortgage. She sued and won a $15,000 settlement.[7] "Our storybank lets our members know they're not alone," Blades says. "It lets reporters know that there are real people behind statistics. And, most importantly, it lets elected leaders

know about issues that they may not have seen as actual issues."

"A lot of elected leaders have no clue what's going on with American families," Rowe-Finkbeiner agreed when I spoke with her later by phone. "Working families aren't telling them because the time you need policies like paid leave the most is often the busiest time of your life."

The MomsRising organizers know that their natural constituency—tired and overwhelmed families—is too tired and overwhelmed just trying to keep it all together to do much else. So rather than try to organize protest marches, they get people to push change in the space of a few minutes. Busy and distracted people can read a short e-mail and forward it to a lawmaker, click on a Twitter link, post a comment, or add their story to the bank on the website in a matter of seconds. "We know moms and dads are busy," Blades said. "Between work and raising a family, they have very little time to take action, much less comb their hair and brush their teeth."

MomsRising and other organizations are springing up to push forward where they say the mainstream feminist movement veered off course. Rowe-Finkbeiner interviewed more than five hundred women for her book, *The F-Word: Feminism in Jeopardy*, and discovered the majority felt feminism, in pushing them to be ideal workers, was out of touch with the complicated reality of their lives. Dina Bakst cofounded A Better Balance in New York to fight for better family policy after her own experience working for a traditional feminist legal organization left her disillusioned. The older, single feminists running that organization wouldn't let one young mother work from home. They refused to allow another to take extended maternity leave or for two young-mother lawyers to share one job. "They viewed it as detrimental to accommodate working mothers. They didn't want motherhood to 'hold women back,'" Bakst told me. "That's when I realized we had it backward. It was the law, the workplace, and these outdated family policies that need changing. The fact that we as a society fail to value the work of caregiving, that's what's really holding women back." And men.

"It's just wrong, the sense that it was up to us women, that we had a *duty* to be out there working and showing what we could do," Blades tells me. "The next wave of the women's movement has to include men. It has to include families."

Blades and Rowe-Finkbeiner sound an awful lot like … Betty Friedan. Friedan is most remembered for sparking the modern feminist movement with her book about the limited horizons and stultifying inner lives of middle-class 1950s housewives like her in *The Feminine Mystique*. But in 1981, Friedan

looked at what the women's movement had wrought and became dismayed. She was distressed that radical feminists, who proclaimed "marriage constitutes slavery for women,"[8] had become so vocally antimother, antifamily, and antimale. Though the women's movement did so much to open doors to higher education and careers for women, Friedan was concerned that its attention was being diverted by "the emotion-ridden issues of sexual politics" and "abortion hysteria,"[9] and risked not only alienating women but failing to do the harder work of transforming the institutions and attitudes of society so that all people could do good work, share in raising families, and have time for life.

Friedan watched mothers trying to do it all, too exhausted to be angry. She spoke to fathers who longed to be more involved with their kids, who felt so tied to work that they didn't dare try. She saw how isolated and guilty everyone felt. So Friedan wrote *The Second Stage* and argued that *family* was the new feminist frontier. Radical feminists were apoplectic. The book was largely ignored.[10]

Friedan was ahead of her time. But now, the MomsRising leaders hope, the time is ripe for change. Their agenda is ambitious. The obstacles, Blades admits, are huge. Politics at the national level are fractured, divisive, and polarized. The economy is sluggish, the federal debt and deficit are enormous, and Americans hate taxes and distrust government social programs, especially ones that so easily pick at the scabs of the culture wars, the mommy wars, and the deeply divided and deeply held views about what's best for mothers and children.

So MomsRising is taking a different tack. They are politically agnostic. "Finding common ground is extremely important. I have friends in the Christian Coalition and we agree on all the *Motherhood Manifesto* issues," Blades said. Nor are they dogmatic. "There are paid family leave policies in over 170 countries and no two are alike," Rowe-Finkbeiner said. "We're not arguing to import something from somewhere else. We want to come up with our own policies that work for our nation."

How?

By starting small.

Rather than seeking sweeping federal legislation, MomsRising has been involved in efforts to get city councils and state governments to pass paid sick days bills, like the ones in the cities of Seattle, Washington, D.C., Portland, Oregon, New York, and San Francisco, and the state of Connecticut.[11] They're writing letters and e-mails in support of local paid family leave laws and local telecommuting policies like those actively promoted in Atlanta, Dallas, Phoenix, Philadelphia, and Chicago.[12] They're hoping that once people see that the

changes are easing the overwhelm for everyone, the movement will catch on. Blades looks up from her computer and smiles. “You just have to start wherever there’s an opening.”

BRIGHT SPOT: IF THE PENTAGON CAN DO IT, WHY CAN'T YOU?

When Robert M. Gates asked Michèle Flournoy to become his under secretary of defense for policy in 2009—the first woman ever to serve in the number-three spot in the Office of the Secretary of Defense—she had a candid discussion with him about time. Flournoy, a graduate of Harvard and Oxford, had been a confirmed workaholic in the days before she had kids. And she well knew the Pentagon proudly wore its culture of total work devotion like the colorful ribbons arrayed on a general's chest. In "the Building," you work long hours. You work in the office where everyone can see you. You travel at the drop of a hat. You don't see your family? Tough. No one else does, either. You feel burned out? Pain, as the Marines like to say, is weakness leaving the body. Suck it up.

Flournoy proposed something different. "In my interview, I said, 'I'm the mom of three school-age children. I will work my ass off for you and do my best. But I need flexibility,'" she told me when we met one morning for breakfast. "'And more nights than not, I need to be home to see them before they go to bed. I need touchstone time with them.'"

Not one to boast, Flournoy, fifty-one, tall, thin, and athletic from her years of rowing in college, her wavy brunette hair pulled into a ponytail, and dressed in an understated sweater set, doesn't mention that this job is considered the "brains" of the Pentagon. The under secretary of defense for policy is responsible for strategic thinking, for anticipating threats and the nature of future conflicts—both conventional and counterinsurgencies—and the military strength that will be required to meet them. Flournoy's predecessor, Douglas J. Feith, was a high-profile architect of the U.S. invasion of Iraq. In other words, this position is a big deal. And Flournoy was telling Gates she wanted to be home for story time.

Gates said, "Absolutely."

Gates made sure Flournoy had secure systems set up in her home so she would be able to do everything there that she could in what she called the "aquarium"—the secure office where she worked in the Pentagon. Most nights, Flournoy went back to work—at home—after getting the kids to bed. Gates himself was disciplined about his time, others at the Pentagon told me, and often tried to leave by 6 p.m. to send the message to others to go home and have a life. Flournoy paid for a car and a driver so she could work on her way to and from home. Flournoy said she made a point of checking with each child about when her presence was most important. Then she was disciplined about her time at work, set clear boundaries when she could, and made sure that her children had predictable mom time that they could rely on. "The fact that I felt so supported by him made me think, 'How can I turn around and support my staff?'"

Flournoy soon realized that political appointees like herself come in and, understandably, want to make the biggest impact in the shortest amount of time. In the process, they work to death the military and civilian workers who were there before and will stay long after the political appointees leave. Not only do people's personal lives suffer, but the work suffers also. "In policy, your only asset is people," she explained. "I told Gates, 'This is the staff to think about the future, to anticipate what you don't have the time to think about. If they're exhausted, spent, and demoralized, they're not going to be able to do the thinking that will really help.'"

She saw how for so many military personnel, an appointment to the Pentagon often came between intensive deployments overseas in combat zones. "This was supposed to be their downtime," she said. "If they are always working and never seeing their families, that is unacceptable." She read in business literature that the biggest jumps in performance come not from incremental time management or productivity tweaks, but from changing entire work cultures and investing in "human capital." So she began listening to people. She walked around to different offices and heard about how out of balance and out of time people felt. She was inspired by what technology could do: One senior State Department official, a father who insisted on being home for dinner, would conference in for evening meetings via secure videolink. "I knew we had to do something," Flournoy said, "but I didn't know how to do it."

Flournoy brought in a consulting firm and, starting with the two busiest policy offices in the Pentagon, began not just rewriting policies on the books but also rewiring the culture of the workplace by creating a top-to-bottom Alternative Work Schedule. She appointed two men with young families to

spearhead the effort and found that men were among the most enthusiastic supporters. “I presented it not as a woman’s issue, but as a morale and staff issue,” she said. “Because this has never been just a woman’s issue.”

For the culture change to work, everyone, including her, participated in developing a new Human Capital Strategy that would shift mind-sets and work habits. The shift required managers to think more about what a good employee looked like. If someone wasn’t in the office, coworkers and managers could no longer assume he or she was AWOL. Working smarter did not mean working *less*. It meant working *differently*. Managers were encouraged not to send out e-mails in the middle of the night but to schedule them to go out during work hours. Perhaps a manager hadn’t expected an immediate response at 3 a.m., but the junior recipient might worry that the manager did—something that Leslie Perlow, Harvard Business School professor and author of *Sleeping with Your Smartphone*, calls part of the merciless “cycle of responsiveness” that makes work feel intense, unending, and all-consuming.

Under the new Alternative Work Schedule Flournoy pioneered, employees and managers worked together to clarify the expectations, goals, and mission of each job. Employees were held accountable for getting quality work done by certain deadlines. But they were given more control over their schedules, for when, how, and where they met those deadlines. That, in turn, helped them plan more predictable workloads. With work time more manageable, family time could be scheduled in, so people could, without penalty, volunteer in children’s classrooms, get to the kindergarten play, take an elderly parent to the doctor, train for a triathlon, or just have a life outside the office. In any ten-day period, if someone had worked long hours, he or she got a day off. Unlike in the past, where one person was assigned responsibility for a certain subject, Flournoy asked managers to ensure people could work on a variety of portfolios so workloads could be shared and no one would be missed or work stopped if he or she was out. Workers were no longer seen as more valued if they were the first in and last to leave. Instead, performance reviews evaluated output, she explained, not hours put into face time. Flournoy held regular town hall meetings and took “pulse” surveys every six weeks to see how the shift was working—or wasn’t. “Some managers had to be coached; others had to be moved,” she said. A time audit found that workers were wasting hours on “stupid stuff,” like formatting memos and correcting typos. So she recalibrated expectations—memos could come to her in their “lovely imperfection” as long as the content was good. “I wanted them to spend their time on strategic thinking, not

correcting typos," she said. "Correct them in the memo to the Secretary, yes. To me, no."

Pretty quickly, the pulse surveys showed that morale was way up. And so was the quality of work. "Thinking was sharper," she said … "We created an environment where people were better rested and could bring a freshness and perspective to their work. Then [Gates] saw it."

Flournoy realized that the shift had finally taken hold when a retired Marine colonel accompanied her to a noon speech. She asked if he'd like a ride back to the Pentagon. He respectfully declined. He said he'd put in enough time at work that week and was using his Alternative Work Schedule to take his son sledding for the rest of the afternoon. "That's when I knew we'd arrived," Flournoy told me. "In the military culture, if a seasoned officer not only felt okay about going sledding with his son in the afternoon, but felt okay enough to announce it to his boss's boss, I thought, 'Okay, they're getting it.'"

Before she left the Pentagon, Flournoy sought to institutionalize the Alternative Work Schedule, embedding it in policy[1] and performance measures so that it would not atrophy. The experience left her convinced that if the two busiest offices in one of the most demanding work environments in the country could successfully shift to make time for life, so could everyone else. I would later meet with Dr. Kathleen Hicks, who worked under Flournoy on defense strategy. She said that despite the often heavy workload, the new management culture made the work more bearable. Hicks, who has three children, said that with Flournoy's leadership loosening the stranglehold of the face-time culture and with advances in technology, she was able to be home more for dinner and be more present with her family on the weekends. Even if she had to carry her BlackBerry around, she said, at least she wasn't in the office.

When I met Flournoy for breakfast in the summer of 2012, she had just left the Pentagon to "rebalance" her life and be more available to her three children under age fifteen. Her own career, she said, has always been a fluid "sine curve" of intensity and pullback, though she's never pulled all the way out of the workforce. After taking time with her family, Flournoy returned to the board of the Center for a New American Security, the influential defense think tank she cofounded, advised the Obama campaign, joined a management consulting firm as a senior adviser, and became a fellow at Harvard's Kennedy School.

The change gives her control and predictability over her schedule in a way that her position in the Pentagon could not. "There are still a lot of balls in the air, but I get to decide how to manage them," she said. "I'm the parent of a

varsity football player, so there are days this fall that I have to be helping out at the football concession at 3 p.m. That time is already blocked on my calendar. I couldn't have done that with the same certainty at the Pentagon." Flournoy has always trusted that she will be able to jump back into the fray after stepping to the side, and she always has. Indeed, with her reputation for commonsense pragmatism and the principled use of force, she is often mentioned in defense circles as a potential secretary of defense. This stepping out, she explained, is just another cycle in the undulating arc of her career.

Why her? I ask. Why was she, like so many wives, the one to pull back and not her husband? "The decision was not based on gender." Her husband, Scott Gould, is a naval reservist and was serving as deputy secretary of the Department of Veterans Affairs. "Either one of us stepping back would have been great for the kids. But what drove the decision was who could get more done in the last year of the administration's first term. He was working to cut homelessness and increase services for vets—very hands-on important work that affected real people. And me? Ask anybody in Washington, in the last nine months of any administration, there are not a lot of new policy initiatives. It was me who finally said, 'The president can afford to lose you less than he can afford to lose me.'"

For as much as the Alternative Work Schedule has changed the workplace culture at the Pentagon, at least in the policy shop, Flournoy recognizes its limitations. The world is an unpredictable place. Crises flare up unexpectedly, and in a job like that, the first duty is always to serve the president. "The part that was difficult for me," she said, "is that the White House and the rest of the world are not on an Alternative Work Schedule." Flournoy came into the Pentagon as the highest-ranking woman fully mindful that younger women were counting on her to "open doors and blaze a trail for them," she told *The New York Times* in 2009. She left hoping that she showed that the trail doesn't have to be so narrow, that a career doesn't have to travel in a straight line, that while work is important, life is bigger. And she leaves behind a legacy of an entirely changed work culture in one key corner of the Pentagon, designed not only to help more women rise to the top but also to ensure that everyone has time for what's important in his or her life.

PART THREE

LOVE

BRIGHT SPOT: MOTHER NATURE

Women are just as prone as other apes to worry about the well-being of new babies. But what hunter-gatherer mothers do not do postpartum is refuse to let anyone else come near or hold their baby. This is an important difference … Babies are never left alone and are constantly held by someone, but that someone is not invariably the mother.

—Sarah Blaffer Hrdy, *Mothers and Others*

She [the Angel in the House] was intensely sympathetic. She was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish. She excelled in the difficult arts of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg; if there was a draught she sat in it —in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own, but preferred to sympathize always with the minds and wishes of others.

—Virginia Woolf, "Professions for Women"

I pull up to Sarah Blaffer Hrdy's walnut farm in the foothills of the Vaca Mountains in northern California and park near a grove of elegant cypress trees. The hacienda-like house is open, gracious, and filled with the colorful folk and tribal art she's collected during more than thirty years of fieldwork studying the mothering of monkeys, apes, and other primates in order to better understand the maternal behavior of our own primate species. Hrdy, a Harvard-trained evolutionary anthropologist, member of the National Academy of Sciences, professor emeritus at the University of California, Davis, and one of the world's foremost experts on mothering, leads me into her large farm kitchen. She corrals her enthusiastic Rhodesian ridgebacks, pours me a cup of coffee, and slides me a bowl of walnuts.

I had sought out Hrdy because, to be honest, after my afternoon with Pat Buchanan and my foray into intensive mothering, I was confused. Was it better, indeed "natural" as some argued, for mothers to stay home with their children? Were women, as one of my at-home mother friends liked to argue, simply

biologically “wired” to be the primary caretaker, so why fight it? Should I, like the self-sacrificing “Angel in the House” from the popular Victorian poem by Coventry Patmore that Virginia Woolf railed against, just quit the job? Sit in the draft? Take the smallest serving? Eat the burned toast? Drive the car pool? Wear those helicopter wings with pride? Was this whole endeavor to understand time at work, at home, and whether I, as a mother, deserved to have time to play somehow just a futile and ill-advised upending of the natural order?

Tall, willowy, and soft-spoken, with a hint of her Texan upbringing, the sixty-five-year-old Hrdy wants me to look at a photograph of a!Kung woman. The woman, part of a hunter-gatherer tribe in the Kalahari Desert in Africa who live much like early humans did some two hundred thousand years ago in the Pleistocene era, is eight months pregnant. She carries a twenty-five-pound bag of mongongo nuts she’s gathered and a five-pound bag of water and food. Her thirty-pound four-year-old son rides on her shoulders. Hrdy estimates the mother has carried the boy about forty-nine hundred miles so far in his lifetime.

“This is a working mother,” she says. “The whole idea that mothers stayed at camp and the men went off to hunt? No way! These women were walking thousands of miles every year with their children. Or if it was not safe, they were leaving them back at camp.” She pauses to drive that point home: Sometimes mothers *left their children back at camp*. The children were with their fathers, older siblings, grandparents, relatives, and other trusted, nurturing adults—people Hrdy calls “alloparents” (“allo” means “other than” in Greek). “It’s natural for mothers to work. It’s natural for mothers to take care of children,” she says. “What’s unnatural is for mothers to be the *sole* caretaker of children. What’s unnatural is not to have more *support* for mothers.” And not just mothers who work outside the home. “Moms who stay at home still need and deserve a lot of help,” she says.

With so much support from alloparents early in human evolution, mothers’ lives were more integrated between work and home, she says. “What’s different today is that the workplace is no longer compatible with being a mother. It’s as simple as that.”

It’s not so much that women are wired to be mothers—in fact, Hrdy argues in her pioneering book *Mother Nature* that women aren’t. They are wired to have sex. And if there’s enough fat on her and she’s ovulating, she’ll get pregnant. That’s why human babies evolved to be born roly-poly and so darn cute, she says. That’s why they are so good at staring deeply into adult eyes and reading emotions. To survive, human babies early on had to learn to counteract what

Hrdy calls natural maternal ambivalence until they could latch on and breast-feed and the flood of milk-producing prolactin and feel-good oxytocin hormones coursed through a mother's body and bonded her to the baby.

And now, science is discovering that men, too, are wired to bond with and nurture babies. For years, the fact that some men gain weight and experience morning sickness while their wives or partners are pregnant—so-called couvade syndrome—was dismissed as psychosomatic. That is, until scientists found that primates like male marmosets and cotton-top tamarins do the same thing. Researchers are now finding that fathers, like mothers, produce high levels of the hormones cortisol and prolactin. Cortisol, the fight-or-flight stress hormone that, when it's constantly flooding the body, can cause so much damage, is also linked to infant bonding and empathy. Prolactin, which stems from the word "lactate," is what stimulates breast milk for a woman and, for a man, is associated with greater responsiveness to a baby's cry. A father's level of the aggressive male hormone testosterone drops by about one-third in the first three weeks after a child's birth. And brain studies in certain primates are finding that fatherhood enhances regions needed for planning and memory, two critical parenting skills.[1] What does that mean? Male parental care is so important that their bodies physically change to adapt to it. "Men," Hrdy says, "have tremendous capacity for nurture."

How is it, then, that mothers have come to be seen as the "natural" carers? Time, Hrdy says. There is no doubt that there are biological differences between men and women, though both have innate nurturing instincts that await "activation." Whatever brain gender differences may exist, solid neuroscience has found that it's not so much that men and women are *born* with different brain wiring but that, over time, the malleable brain is more likely to be shaped by *life experiences.*[2] Hrdy argues that with time and experience, what may start as slight differences between men and women—regardless of whether they're biologically innate or socially programmed—become magnified. And that was as true in the Pleistocene era when men left camps for extended periods to hunt as it is today, when men are still largely expected to be breadwinners going off to work.

Once a baby is born, Hrdy says, women don't just instinctively know what to do. But with extended time alone with the new baby—brought on typically because of breast-feeding, maternity leave, and custom—they learn through trial and error and experience. So they're able to clue in faster than men to what a baby needs. Most men simply have not had as much time on their own, she

argues, to develop the same competence and confidence. And when fathers do have time and proximity to their children, they are far more likely to actively share in raising them. Researchers studying the Aka pygmies of Central Africa found that when a family lives near a mother's kin, her extended family helps so much that the father cares for his children only about 2.6 percent of the time. But when the family lives near *his* family, where she has less support and his becomes critical, he takes on nearly two-thirds of the care.[3]

To test the theory that time and experience are what magnify even small differences, Hrdy explains that social scientists timed response rates in new parents. Both mothers and fathers responded in a flash when they heard a recording of a wailing baby. Hrdy snaps her fingers. But if the baby was merely fussy, the researchers found mothers responded just a little bit faster.[4] (The opposite is true in the response times for primates like titi monkeys, Hrdy found, and titi infants "naturally" prefer their fathers.[5]) In humans, "the difference in response time is very small. The man has the capacity to respond, but her threshold is just a little lower," Hrdy says. "What this means over time is, the baby frets and Mom picks the baby up and soothes the baby. The baby gets used to Mom. So then the dad comes and, if Mom isn't there, picks the baby up. The baby is not quite as familiar with the father and keeps on fretting. And the dad starts to think, 'Why do I bother? The baby wants its mother.' As [biologist] Ed Wilson put it, 'At birth the twig is already bent a little bit.' But through experience, over time, the gender gap widens." Imagine, she says, if changing workplaces and gender norms enabled fathers to have more time alone early on with babies. "These are exciting times."

If humans are wired for anything, Hrdy argues, it's to trust and care for one another. Infants have evolved to instinctively scan the world for people they can count on, appeal to, and elicit care from—not just parents, but alloparents. It's an impulse, Hrdy says, born of a long human history of what she calls "cooperative breeding." In brain scans of adults looking at images of babies' faces, neuroscientists have found that reward centers and brain regions associated with communication, attachment, and caregiving instantly activate. And not just in parents' brains but also in the brains of adults with no children at all.[6]

Other primates that share so much ancestral DNA with humans—chimpanzees, gorillas, orangutans—leave the care of infants exclusively to the mother, as do about half of the 276 species of primates. So, since the time of Charles Darwin, mostly male scientists assumed the same was true for humans. But humans are different. Anthropologists studying primitive hunter-gatherer

bands like the!Kung, Hazda, Aka, and Efe report that in every one, babies are passed around to others—both male and female—almost from the moment of birth. And everyone helps care for and feed the children. Among the Efe of Central Africa, researchers found that babies average fourteen different caretakers in the first days of life. By the time a child turns four, he or she will have spent 60 percent of his or her daylight hours in the arms of alloparents.[7]

How did that cooperation get started? Survival, plain and simple. “If mothers didn’t have social support from alloparents, they didn’t have children,” Hrdy says, “because the children would be dead.”

Cooperative breeding, Hrdy argues, is responsible for the uniquely long human childhood and a key reason why humans developed such an enormous brain. In short, it is this very novel drive for people to share in the care and feeding of the young that made us human in the first place.

She lays out her argument for me: No mammal in the world takes longer than humans to grow to adulthood. It takes more than thirteen million calories to raise a human child from infancy to independent adulthood. In the Pleistocene, as now with hunting-and-gathering societies, meat from the hunt accounted for no more than 30 to 40 percent of those calories. “Hunting was always a very dicey occupation,” Hrdy says. “A man could go out for days and days and not come back with anything.” And when the hunters did return, the meat was often divided up with politics in mind—currying favor with this powerful male, repaying that friend, forging ties with another. So for a child to survive—and nearly half did not—they needed to get 60 to 70 percent of their diet from foraging. There was simply no way one mother could supply all that food on her own, or even a mother and a father. They needed the help of alloparents. So much so that anthropologist Kristen Hawkes, who observed that older Hazda women past childbearing age were the hardest-working and most efficient gatherers of food, came up with the “grandmother hypothesis”—that human women, alone among primates, survive so long after menopause *because* they have been such valuable alloparents.[8]

Sharing care and staving off starvation are what enabled human childhood to become long in the first place, Hrdy theorizes, just as the young of other animals that share care have longer periods of dependency. And that longer childhood, she says, “was a wonderful opportunity for big brains to evolve.” Sharing care may have also forced adult brains to become more sophisticated in order to cooperate and share information. Chimpanzees, with their mother-only care and shorter childhoods, she says, have brains that are two and a half times bigger

than you'd expect, given the size of their bodies. Human brains are nearly seven and a half times larger.[9] "Somehow the early Darwinian models just assumed humans evolved to have big brains because the males were going to be better hunters. Or we evolved to have big brains because the males were going to be better fighters," Hrdy says. "What was going on with mothers and infants wasn't taken into account. Even though where the rubber hits the road is child survival. You could have all this mating and it doesn't matter if none of those offspring survive."

Hrdy takes me on a walk outside through the walnut farm. She explains that she began her own quest to understand motherhood after delivering the first of her three now grown children. She found herself torn between desperately wanting to succeed in her career, feeling a "whirring resentment" of her husband who left for long periods of concentrated work every day, and being desperate to give her "luscious" newborn the best care. Hrdy herself was raised by a series of governesses. But at the time, she was deeply influenced by psychoanalyst John Bowlby's new attachment theory—that the more responsive and consistent a mother is with an infant early on, the more secure the child will grow to be. (Bowlby later modified his view and came to realize, like Hrdy, the importance of alloparents.) Hrdy was worried. If she left her child to go to work and delegated care to others, would she be reverting to the unenlightened ways of her mother's generation or, worse, depriving her infant of emotional security? A nagging question lurked in the back of her mind: "Am I a bad mother?"[10]

Those conflicting feelings between wanting to work—in a demanding field with few women and fewer mothers—wanting a parenting partner in her husband, and wanting to give her children the emotional security they needed, propelled thirty years of research that is now considered unparalleled in redefining our understanding of human evolution and the roles of mothers and fathers. "Even what I failed to learn in time to help me rear my own three children, I could pass on to others," she writes in *Mother Nature.*

She's still a firm believer in attachment theory, but her own research, as well as her own experience with her husband and an array of loving child-care providers, nannies, au pairs, housekeepers, teachers, family members, and nurturing friends, showed her that infants and children develop emotional security from having close relationships to caring people around them. "It's like I had a community helping me raise my children," she says. As her children grew, her husband became the primary parent on the weekends, allowing her uninterrupted time to concentrate on her own thinking and writing. Her children

did get the responsive and consistent care they needed, she says, they just didn't get it only from her. "She's a fabulous mother," her daughter, Katrinka, a history teacher and crew coach in upstate New York has said. "She feels bad about the time when she was busy with research, but I don't remember that."[11]

For people living far from extended family or a "tribal" network of supportive alloparents, Hrdy says, it's imperative to create your own.

Even conservative Phyllis Schlafly raised her six children—and got a law degree and traveled the country giving speeches urging mothers to stay home, railing against feminism and working mothers, calling child care "stranger care," and organizing protests against the Equal Rights Amendment—with the help of alloparents. "She had domestic help … She wouldn't have called them nannies, but she had people in her home," Schlafly's niece, writer Suzanne Venker, told the *Los Angeles Times*. "Did she mention that fact enough to get her point across to young people about how she managed to do it? No, she did not."[12]

BRIGHT SPOT: GRITTY, HAPPY KIDS

I would maintain that thanks are the highest form of thought, and that gratitude is happiness doubled by wonder.

—G. K. Chesterton

The days that make us happy make us wise.

—John Masefield

One afternoon, when Tessa was in third grade, I was stressed out of my mind, working on a deadline story about an alleged Somali war criminal, when our high school babysitter called at the last minute to say she couldn't pick up Tessa from school and get her to her ballet class. The class was at 4:30, an impossible time for most working parents. And, without giving it a second thought, I began making plans to take her myself.

By the time I'd rushed to get her from school, flew home, and threw a snack at her while frantically juggling my BlackBerry, we had all of about eight minutes to dash across town and get her to class. She sauntered down the stairs after taking forever to pull on her little pink tights and announced that her teacher now required her hair to be in a bun.

"I thought a headband was okay."

"My hair got too long last week."

"And you're telling me this now? We have to go! NOW!"

She crossed her arms and raised one eyebrow. "But the teacher said."

The BlackBerry started ringing again. My heart raced. My head hurt.

I cursed. "Forget the teacher. Get in the car."

As I careened across town, I have to confess, I wondered for a millisecond if we could squeeze in a stop at CVS to buy hairpins. When we blew past it, she shot daggers at me from the backseat. I'd had it.

"Tessa! Your mother works for one of the best newspapers in the

COUNTRY," I started in. "I am working on a FRONT-page story on DEADline. I am taking time out of MY busy day to get YOU to YOUR ballet class. I would think you'd at least be GRATEFUL."

Silence.

Then came a steely little voice from the backseat: "What about *The New York Times*?"

The story has gone down in family lore as an example of Tessa's pluck. But over time, I've become more disturbed by it. Not by her behavior. By mine. Why did I automatically assume that when the babysitter couldn't make it, *I* had to step in? Had my poisonous guilt, my desire to be the perfect mother, the blind panic not to disappoint my children or have them miss out because I wasn't home all the time so clouded my vision that I couldn't even *see* how insane that decision was? But more important, what was I teaching *her*? Beyond giving her a working mother role model of an angry, cursing, crazy harpy, I was teaching her that she was at the center of the universe. Far from the lesson I *thought* I was teaching her—to stick with something and not become a quitter—I was teaching her the opposite. I was teaching her that she was entitled.

When I began this search for time to work, love, and play, I ran into my friend Deb. She, like me, was tearing her hair out. She found herself driving car pools all over creation, pulled into the competitive world of her kids' travel sports teams, music lessons, and playdates, and caring for a special needs child. "All this rushing around," she said. "Just tell me if it's worth it."

So this is for Deb: No. No, the research shows, it's not worth it. Not if it's making everybody crazy, no one is having any fun, there's no time to connect, adults are losing their identities in the service of their children, children think the world exists to serve and entertain them, and there's no space for anybody to … just be. Middle-class parents are now so "child-centered" that they may be fostering a "dependency dilemma" and raising youths who can't think, make decisions, and venture out on their own. That's the conclusion of researchers at UCLA's Center on the Everyday Lives of Families after studying thirty-two dual-income, middle-class families in L.A. Both mothers and fathers felt guilty when work intruded on family life. They felt pressured to create "perfect" family time together. These parents, researchers observed, sought to make their kids happy by buying them a lot of stuff, giving in to their demands, and never asking them to help with chores. They're hardly the only ones. Economists have found that advertisers spent $16 billion a year marketing to guilty parents and acquisitive kids, and that the average American child receives about seventy new

toys a year.[1] “We may have reached a tipping point,” anthropologist and study director Elinor Ochs has said. “Perhaps we’ve moved from being child-centered to being child-dominated.”[2]

Research shows that encouraging kids to participate in activities they like is important, but that cramming more stuff onto the schedule is not better.[3] And there’s good evidence that it makes things worse. And all that bright, zingy addictive technology we give them to make them happy, to keep them quiet when we’re busy, that we ourselves are addicted to, is making us all more impatient, impulsive, forgetful, and self-centered.[4] “We’re exhausting ourselves,” pediatrician and parenting educator Kathy Masarie had told me, “and creating an inferior product.”

For years, Suniya Luthar, a psychologist at Columbia University’s Teachers College, and her colleagues have been tracking groups of children, from both the impoverished inner city and the affluent suburbs of New York City. What she found came as a shock: Affluent kids are two to three times more likely to suffer from depression, anxiety, and high levels of distress than kids living in harsh urban poverty. And wealthy kids were more likely to use drugs and alcohol.[5]

“I’m one of these parents,” she admitted. (She texted me from the beauty salon where she’d taken her daughter to get her hair done for prom.) “So I’m certainly not going to be casting stones. But the subculture we live in can be very noxious.” It’s a fiercely competitive subculture, she said, that values material success and is convinced that means getting your kids into one of the handful of slots at an “elite” college. “We are manufacturing this madness.”

In the process, time for many children has become structured, organized, and accounted for down to the minute. Free time has dropped from 40 percent of their day to 25 percent, and much of that is consumed with TV and electronic media.[6] Parents’ hovering and fears of a dangerous world full of strangers have, researchers found, shrunk childhood “habitats.” Where a generation ago, as Karen Graf’s mother recalled, children may have roamed freely for miles and spent hours outdoors, making up games and playing pickup ball games, today, many children’s zones of independence extend no farther than the end of the block,[7] and only 6 percent of children between the ages of nine and thirteen play outside on their own in a typical week.[8] Organized sports leagues have become so structured that there’s little room for *fun*. Kid participation peaks at age eleven.[9]

Jean Twenge, a psychology professor at San Diego State University and author of *Generation Me*, has found in her research that five times as many high

school and college students are depressed and anxious today than were youths during the Great Depression. Today's overhelicoptered children, bred on parental overpraise and the worship of self-esteem, are entitled, spoiled, self-centered, value being rich, have inflated egos, and feel … miserable.[10] They feel they don't have the power to control their own destiny, Twenge reports, so they tend to be cynical and feel easily victimized. And having been so programmed all their lives, they hit young adulthood and aren't even sure of what they like, much less who they are. All that schlepping around in the car, from voice lessons to the tutor to baseball practice, doesn't build the intimacy or the independence that gives rise to a quality that researchers are finding is key to both success and happiness. A quality they call *grit.*

Grit is the ability to set your mind to something and stick with it when the going gets hard. Studies have found that the more grit children have, the higher their grade point average, the more likely they are to get through a tough program, outrank others on competitions like the National Spelling Bee, be better educated, and have a more stable career. Grit is a better indicator of success, these studies found, than either SAT score or IQ.[11] The more grit, the more likely you are to follow a passion, persevere, and do the sometimes arduous work *on your own* to reach a goal. And the more you do that, research shows, the more likely you are to be happy.[12] And isn't that what we all say we want for our kids?

Christine Carter, a social scientist with the Greater Good Science Center at the University of California, Berkeley, is part of the growing Positive Psychology movement. She studies that ephemeral state we call happiness and how to raise happy children. In our single-minded focus on our kids' achievement, we have it all backward, she says as we watch the sun set over the San Francisco Bay from the window of her bungalow in the Berkeley hills. "The underlying American assumption is, if our kids get into a great college, they'll get a great job, *then* they'll be happy," Carter says. "But that's not necessarily true. What we need to be parenting for is happiness first. Focusing on grit becomes more about them fulfilling their *own* potential rather than honing showy skills that look spectacular on a college admission application."

That's because achievement, all that showy résumé building, does not necessarily lead to happiness. Instead, she says, feeling positive and happy in the first place is what fosters achievement. A meta-analysis of 225 studies on achievement, success, and happiness by the psychologist Sonja Lyubomirsky of the University of California, Riverside, found that happy people, those who are

comfortable in their own skin, are more likely to have “fulfilling marriages and relationships, high incomes, superior work performance, community involvement, robust health and a long life”—in other words, success.[13] And that positive, happy state, she says, arises from grit.

Grit isn’t something you’re born with, Carter says. It’s something you can learn and exercise, like a muscle. If you’re a parent, you can teach grit. How? Let your children struggle. A little challenge, a little anguish, even, is good for them. When children learn to resolve their own conflicts, without Mom or Dad swooping in to the rescue, they build grit, self-confidence, and the creative problem-solving skills that lead to higher academic achievement.[14] Teach them to try new things, she says, to take risks, follow inklings, see if they turn into passions, work hard, maybe master something, maybe make mistakes, but love the journey itself, not the reward.

Carol Dweck, a psychologist at Stanford, has spent years studying mind-sets. In one experiment, she and her research team gave kids a short test and then praised them. To one group, they said, “Oh, you must be very smart,” an attitude they said reinforces a “fixed mind-set”—that one’s abilities are inherent and set in stone. To another group, they said, “You did really well, you must have worked really hard.” That kind of praise, they said, reflects a “growth mind-set”—or someone who believes that success is a result of grit, effort, and hard work rather than innate aptitude. The researchers then offered the two groups a second test. The children could choose an easier puzzle or a harder one. The majority of kids who were praised as “very smart” opted for the easier puzzle. They were afraid, Carter explains, of making a mistake and being “found out” as not so smart after all. But 90 percent of the kids whose grit had been praised chose to tackle the harder puzzle and keep learning. “When you’re growth oriented, you’re driven by love, passion, and who you are,” she says. “When you’re in a fixed mind-set, you tend to perfectionism. You’re driven by fear and who you think other people want you to be. And perfectionists, by definition, can never be satisfied. They’re never happy.”

To raise “gritty,” happy kids, Carter teaches parents to first lose the self-sacrifice. Depressed parents have been linked to negative behaviors in their kids, she says, while positive emotions tend to be contagious.[15] So it’s important that parents start by taking care of themselves and their marriages or partnerships. She advises families to become more mindful of how they spend their time and how they talk to one another, to build support networks, create easy routines, meaningful rituals, and savor the small moments of connection.

And most important, teach them *gratitude.* “Teach your kids to count their blessings,” Carter says. Adults who often feel grateful are more generous, more empathetic, and “have more energy, more optimism, more social connections and more happiness than those who do not,” wrote Melinda Beck in *The Wall Street Journal*, reporting on a decade of gratitude research. “They are also less likely to be depressed, envious, greedy or alcoholics. They earn more money, sleep more soundly, exercise more regularly and have greater resistance to viral infections.”[16] And, Beck writes, researchers are beginning to find the same benefits in children. “Kids who feel and act grateful tend to be less materialistic, get better grades, set higher goals, complain of fewer headaches and stomach aches and feel more satisfied with their friends, families and schools than those who don’t.”

As we talk, Carter’s two daughters burst in the door with Carter’s parents. The divorced Carter says she works hard to create her own family’s “happiness habits”—like sharing three good things that happened during the day before bed. Human happiness is built not on indulgence, she says, but on meaningful connections with other humans. And for kids—as well as adults—you develop those connections, you foster creativity, build grit, and become most fully yourself—in imaginative, joyful, unstructured free time devoted to … play.

PART FOUR

PLAY

BRIGHT SPOT: REALLY *PLAN* A VACATION

Every summer, as she prepares for vacation, Carolyn Semedo-Strauss stuffs her minivan with luggage. Next to the suitcases and duffel bags, she crams in bags of yarn and boxes of books, like a promise to herself, in the hopes that she'll actually spend time enjoying a quiet moment alone. Most years, the boxes come home untouched. She rounds up her three kids and all the electronic gadgets, music, books, crayons, games, and gear to keep them relatively appeased for the ten-hour drive from Virginia to Massachusetts. She kisses her husband goodbye and heads out for her family reunion. It's a sprawling African American family, with eleven siblings, and every year they converge from all over the country for a few brief days at their parents' home. With so much of her time taken up in the whirlwind of logistics, rushing to see everyone and making sure everyone *else* is happy, her vacation time leaves her mind in an exhausting "tangle" and doesn't *feel* very leisurely.

Roger Mannell, a psychologist at the University of Waterloo in Ontario, has directed perhaps the only lab studies of leisure time. His research has found that when people have a sense of *choice* and *control* over what they do with their free time, they are more likely to get into flow, that engrossing and timeless state that some call peak human experience. "Part of the problem with leisure is that people aren't quite sure what they really *want*. They don't know what leisure time is for them," Mannell said. "And they never slow down long enough to figure it out."

In his experiment, Mannell told his subjects they were participating in two different learning tasks. But the real experiment was what they did and how they felt during a thirty-minute period of "free" time between the two tasks. One group was given a *choice* about what to do; the other was *told* what to do. Mannell then asked each group to estimate how long they'd waited between tasks. Those who had no choice were almost uncannily accurate—reporting that

twenty-nine excruciatingly boring minutes had passed. But those who were given free choice became so engrossed in what they were doing, in flow, they lost track of time altogether. On average, they felt the waiting period was only nine minutes long. Mannell did further studies and found that people who felt they naturally had more control over their lives also experienced more flow, while those who felt that external forces were more in control of their lives felt less.[1] To Mannell, consciously choosing leisure is the first step to reclaiming it. "The institutions we move in and out of in our daily lives have some responsibility for creating saner lives and need to change. But something in us needs to change as well," Mannell said. "If we are really serious about finding more free time and having control over it, then we need to make the choice to pursue things that are really meaningful to us."

I told Mannell that in conversations with dozens of women as I researched this book, many lamented that their sense of time pressure and mind clutter followed them on vacation. "You get in this frenzied state, so that when you do have time, you don't know what to do with it," one told me. Said another, "Even on vacation, I just haven't been able to feel unburdened, untroubled, and turn-yourself-inside-out joy." Many women said that whether it was a trip to an all-inclusive resort, a beach vacation, a camping trip, or a road trip to visit family, vacation often just meant more work for them. "Who decides, who plans, who organizes, who makes arrangements? Me. Me. Me. And me," said Mara. Time to let go? She laughed bitterly and described a resort vacation where even a swim with the dolphins was just one more item to be checked off her to-do list, along with getting up early to grab seats by the crowded pool, slathering sunscreen on kids, and constantly checking the lost and found for the stuff they kept losing. "I just perpetuated what I do at home," she said. "I was irritating even myself."

Mannell suggested I design an informal experiment and get a group of women to think about what they *really wanted* to experience during their time off and write it down. That, he said, would *force* them to make time to think about meaningful leisure so they could deliberately choose it. Carolyn Semedo-Strauss was the only one in the group who actually did. In the fall, I met Semedo-Strauss at a coffee shop. She ran a hand through her long, thin twists of dreadlocks and then pulled out a thick book where she'd listed what she wanted to do and how she wanted her time to feel: She wanted to read for pleasure, write, see a sunset, have quality time with her family, feel fully present and not so scattered, and create lasting memories.

"How'd it go?" I asked.

She didn’t read and she didn’t write. But making a list of what she did want made it much clearer what she didn’t want: being in charge all the time. “So I sat back and enjoyed the hot dogs, like everyone else for once,” she said.

One day at the beach, the kids were flying kites with the cousins, playing soccer, and searching for shells. She sat contentedly in the warmth of the sun, enjoying the rich aromas of the family cookout they’d just finished eating and the ease of being with her extended family. Around sunset, thick black storm clouds gathered on the horizon, casting shadows of the family all around her in sharp relief. She brought out her camera. *Snap*. “That’s when it hit me—*this* is what I wanted,” Semedo-Strauss told me, her eyes gleaming, smiling at the sunset, the family time, the presence, and the lasting memory she had, indeed, created.

PART FIVE

TOWARD TIME SERENITY

BRIGHT SPOT: TIME HORIZONS

There does come a time when ambivalence comes to an end, when the choices are clearer and living with them is more comfortable. It has everything to do with time. Laura Carstensen, a professor of psychology and founding director of the Stanford Center on Longevity, spent years interviewing older people. She worried that aging people were lonely, anxious, depressed, or afraid of dying. She encouraged them to come to social gatherings or tried to get them to meet other people. “They would say, ‘I don’t have a lot of time for people.’ And I would say, ‘Looks to me like you have a *lot* of time.’ It took me a long time to realize they weren’t talking about time in a *day*; they were talking about time in their *lives*. They had a completely different perspective on time. A lot of things don’t make sense anymore when time is running out.”

She began to see that when a person’s “time horizon” is short, if he or she has only five or ten years left to live, say, it becomes increasingly clear just exactly what is important. Ambivalence is replaced with a sharper sense of certainty. All of which makes it easier to decide how to spend the precious resource of time, now that you can see how finite it truly is. “Very open-ended, vast future time horizons turn out to be really hard on people emotionally. When I think about the childbearing years, you’re anxious not only about yourselves and your own future, but you’re very anxious about your children’s futures. Are they playing with the right kids in preschool? Getting good enough grades? What’s going to happen if they don’t do well in math?” Carstensen told me. “But as our time horizons grow shorter, we start to see the world differently. We start to see that what matters most are often the simple things—the smell of roses, watching your grandchildren splash in a puddle, the smile on the face of an old friend you’re meeting for coffee. It’s those little moments that you start to focus on.”

And by being focused on what’s important and the beauty of the small moments, she said, older people are actually happier. To test her theory, Carstensen put young and old people into a brain scanner, showed them both

positive and negative images, and registered how the amygdala, the area of the brain that controls emotions and fear, responded. She found that young people showed heightened brain activity when shown both positive and negative images. But older people registered responses only to the positive images, leading to what she calls the "positivity effect."[1]

Collapsing one's time horizon is a skill, Carstensen said, that the young can learn from the old. "My experience as a grandmother is, when I'm with my grandchildren, I'm *really* with them. But when my son was young, I was with him, but I was also working, preparing something else, and trying to get him to do his homework," she said. "It's hard to say this in a way that doesn't sound horrible, but if the world as we know it were going to end in a year, you wouldn't be worrying about the homework."

I called Sue Shaw, one of the premier feminist leisure researchers. Shaw had just retired and moved with her husband to a cottage by a lake in Ontario, Canada. I was curious what a shortened time horizon and the end of ambivalence meant for the experience of leisure. Shaw no longer checks her e-mail much and has shed years of paperwork and files. She spends her days walking in the woods, reading, and even enjoying the cleaning and maintenance projects she and her husband do together. "I have a fair amount of leisure time now and a fair bit of freedom to do what I like with that time. But is it some exalted high state?" she said. "Some people talk about flow as being a near mystical, religious experience. Maybe they want to seek an altered state of consciousness. But for me, that sense of flow, being totally caught up in the moment, I tend to find it in nature, in the countryside, or when I'm having a good chat over a glass of wine with a friend. It's a fleeting thing. It's not something I try and measure in time, because the hours are almost irrelevant. There is a sense of peace associated with these moments. A connection to a broader universe, to other people or the world. I took my granddaughter out in the weekend to see the moon and stars—the moon was really full—and she was awed by it. She's only three. It's moments like these that just seem really important to the quality of our experience of time."

However short or long the horizon.

APPENDIX: DO ONE THING

Time is the coin of your life. You spend it. Do not allow others to spend it for you.
—Carl Sandburg

Work

- Time is power. Don't give yours away.
- Doing good work, having quality time for family and meaningful relationships, and the space to refresh the soul is about having a good life. It has never been just a "mommy issue." And it's about so much more than getting the hang of the latest time management system. It's about equity. It's about quality of life. It's about state of mind. It's about human rights.
- Retire the ideal worker norm. Kiss nonproductive butt-in-chair face-time goodbye. Change workplace culture, performance standards, and the way we manage. Managing the overwhelm is about more than putting a few policies on the books or punting to the Human Resources Department or coming up with a new "women's initiative" to stem the tide of talented and educated women *and men* leaving rigid organizations because they want to do good work and *also* want to be active caregivers or live full lives. It's the antiquated organizations that need to change, offering flexible work arrangements for all, training managers in commonsense family-supportive behaviors, and leading from the top by example.
- Ambiguity is the enemy in the workplace that fuels the overwhelm. Define your mission. Set clear parameters and performance measures to lay out how much is enough. When is it good enough? And how will you know? Communicate. Adjust.
- Reimagine career trajectories, replacing steep, narrow one-way ladders with lattices, broad fields with meandering paths that wind through them. Think fluidity. Could we create sine curves, career tracks of intensity and pullback, for both men and women? As a working mother friend of mine said, "If there are on-ramps back into the workplace for disgraced politicians like Eliot Spitzer, then why not for parents?"
- Understand the neuroscience of how humans work best: pulsing between periods of intense concentration of typically no more than ninety mintues, and breaks to completely change the channel.
- Embrace the restorative power of vacation. Allow knowledge workers to daydream or noodle around with an idea without fear of failure.
- Draw on the science of human motivation first by giving workers a fair

salary and benefits, then allowing them to have greater autonomy, a sense of purpose, and the ability to become masterful at what they do.

- Working in a new way does not mean working *less*. It means working *smart*. It means a healthier work environment and healthier employees, reduced health-care costs, reduced turnover costs, and reduced absenteeism. It means more innovation, creativity and, heavens, even *profits*.
- Understand that implicit bias—that men = career, women = home—is alive and well in you and others and is simply the way your brain works. Train it to overcome automatic stereotypes by changing the story and exposing yourself to men and women who do good work, are loving caregivers, and make time to refresh their souls. Managers, understand the power of "micro-affirmations." Gestures of inclusion and caring, graceful listening, generosity, giving credit to others, and offering fair, specific, and timely feedback are small but effective measures to counter unconscious bias.
- Overwhelm is a product of lack of control and unpredictability and the anxiety that both produce. Learn from workplaces that have creatively embraced a new way of working and a healthier workplace culture. Find what works best for your organization, whether it involves using scheduling software to give hourly workers more say in their work shifts, becoming a results-only work environment with Sludge Eradication sessions, instituting flexibility in time, manner, and place of work, or bounding work time with predictable hours. Use consultants. Use a design firm. Find a way to change.
- Know thyself. Even if your workplace culture isn't about to change, know how *you* work best. Are you a separator? Integrator? Segmenter? At some point we all switch from one to the other. Discover and refine your own "flexstyle." Create teams, networks, and islands of sanity and support within your organization. Clarify your own mission, battle ambiguity, and communicate it both up and down the line.
- Understand the story that drives your flavor of "not enough." Notice it. Get clear about how you define success, what you want, and *your* time horizon. As Steve Jobs said, "Your time is limited, so don't waste it living someone else's life."
- If you work in an insane ideal worker workplace and don't plan to leave, know that by not conforming, you are threatening. When others hurl sludge your way, remember the magic words: "What do you need?"

- What kind of family policies would work best for America? We don't really know. We've never had a substantive discussion. It's time to have one now. A good place to start: paid leave, short or flexible work hours, and good part-time jobs with benefits. A culture that expects *both* mothers and fathers to take parental leave. Affordable, accessible, high-quality early-childhood-education programs for all. Let's train the people who care for and work with our children and pay them more than parking lot attendants. School days, school years, and high-quality, creative before- and after-school programs that mesh more seamlessly with parents' work time, which, ideally and where possible, will be more flexible. Let's talk to one another across divides, let's listen, let's accept that there has never been one right way to do anything. And let's start small.
- Let's reclaim the phrase "family values" to mean families setting their own priorities about what's important and the lives they all want to lead together.
- Let's air out the word "feminist" and remember what it has always truly meant: a quest for the personhood of women.
- Take time to think about what you really want to accomplish in your life and what's most important to do. Schedule time for that in your day first.
- Remember most of your to-do list will never get done and a lot of it belongs in "the other 5 percent" column anyway.
- Plan. Do. Review. Find a system to manage the activities you choose to do *in time* that works for you. Create routines. Automate. Cut down on the number of small decisions you have to make in a day, reserving your willpower for the big decisions you really *do* need your full brain power to make.
- Choose ONE thing that's most important to do every day.
- CHUNK your time. Multitasking makes you stupid. Work in concentrated blocks of time with regular breaks, and fit in the 5 percent stuff-of-life crap after you've made time for what's important.
- Unplug. Set reasonable parameters for using instant communication and technology. Sometimes an e-mail at 3 a.m. is critical, but usually it's not. Stop the "cycle of responsiveness" that makes work feel intense and unending.

Love

- Banish ambivalence. Know that society's ambivalence about working mothers, caring fathers, changing gender roles, changing workplace, and dismissal of leisure time feeds your own guilt and ambivalence. Know that humans have evolved to conform and fit in with the group. And know that right now, the group isn't clear on what it wants you to do. That means *you* have to be clear about what you want, make your choices, recognize when they're constrained, and own them. Embrace whatever it is you're doing, whatever you've chosen, with passion and see where it leads. Then adapt as you go.
- Let's be HUMAN, recognize that industrial-age gender roles are outdated, and agree that it's good for people, for society, for humanity, for *both* men and women to be free to be educated, to work, to follow passions, and to raise children in whatever manner works best for each family.
- Check your unconscious bias. Are you favoring the male partner's career for fear he would suffer more if he left the workplace or cut back? Make the bias conscious. Question whether it's true. Talk. Fight. Make decisions *together*.
- Recognize that what happens when the first baby comes home from the hospital is critical: You will be setting patterns of living and being that will be harder to break later. This is when the demands of the ideal mother are tugging the hardest. This is when the gatekeeping urge to keep husband and others away is strongest. While your biology is indeed at work, so is your culture. Your partner or spouse's biology is just as clearly at work. Share care. That means Mom needs time away. And Dad needs to fly solo, not just be the "helper" or the "fun" parent. If solo parental leave is not possible, set up your own informal parental leave for Dad. Saturday morning. Sunday afternoon. And Dad, you do it all—diapers, dishes, bottles. The confidence and competence you develop will change your relationship with your children and your spouse, and your family's relationship with time.
- Find Your Own Private Netherlands.
- Recognize how critical involved fathers are.

- Create family systems and automate routines to cut down on arguing, nagging, and resentment. Share the load. As a family, figure out what needs to be done to keep the house and your lives running. Set standards that everyone can agree to. Then divide the load fairly, making sure your sons and daughters do equal work. Monitor. Assess. Keep working at it. Do NOT sigh, gripe, moan, and do it all yourself, muttering and resentful the whole time.
- Alloparents. Ask for and accept the help of loving alloparents. Create a network of support. Find creative solutions together.
- Park the helicopter. You don't have to do everything on your own and better than everyone else. As Kathy Maserie said, "Love your kids. Keep them safe. Accept them as they are. Then get out of their way."
- Seek not to hover and push achievement, but help your children develop resilience, perseverance, and *grit*. That means letting them follow little inklings that may—or may not—develop into passions. And letting them make mistakes.
- Happiness first. Happiness breeds success and achievement. The converse is not necessarily true.
- Teach your children to count their blessings, to be grateful.
- Give your kids time and space to do nothing, or just notice the shape of clouds. Get them outside. Let them, when you can, roam. And give yourself the same gift of time and space. Share moments of connection, have meals together, put the smartphone down and *be* there.
- Recognize that children do, indeed, grow quickly. And that the moment to stop and notice and enjoy is now. And now. And now.
- Keep it simple. Live within your means. Buy only stuff that you need, and find a place for it. (I know, I know, the budget. We're working on it.)
- Put down the expert books. Declare the mommy wars over—we've all been on the same side in search of the good life all along. Trust yourself. Create supportive networks of like-minded parents. As Dr. Benjamin Spock said, you know more than you think you do.
- Encourage your sons to babysit. Both men and women are, biologically, "naturals" when it comes to caring for children. It's just that the culture has always expected and given women the *time* to become good at it.

Play

- Understand that, for women, there never has been a history or culture of leisure or play, unless you consider sweeping, making cheese, churning butter, quilting, and knitting your kind of fun. It will take effort and strain to allow yourself time to play. Make the effort. Find a group like Mice at Play or create your own. Try belly dancing. Take a walk. You'll be more likely to do it if you have a group or friends to be accountable to. Be subversive!
- Before vacation or a period of free, unstructured leisure time, really *think* about what you'd like to experience and how you'd like to feel, and even write it down. Being conscious of how you want your time to feel, and putting it on your agenda, makes it more likely that it will actually happen.
- Remind yourself that play is useful. Humans need it. Give yourself permission to do it. Take a playful state of mind with you to work and also have it at home. Be more curious than afraid. Find time to wonder and be in awe. Encourage your preteen daughters to stay playful.
- Light a candle. Like the Danes, bring some *hygge* into your life.
- Take a shower with a pink pig.
- Don't wait until the dust bunnies are gone and the fridge is full to share time with friends. Spaghetti and ketchup and good hearts will do.
- Be silent every day. Even if that means taking five breaths. Being mindful for less than a half hour a day will, literally, expand your brain.
- Try something new, get out of your comfort zone, and challenge yourself to get into *flow*.
- Believe in yourself. Practice the Jedi Mind Tricks: Have masterful experiences. Find role models and mentors. Listen to and be persuaded by positive words and encouragement. And get a grip. Cultivate a "growth" mind-set to try new things and believe in change.
- Not sure what you want or where you want to go? Find an active-listening partner. Take time to become clear about your current reality and your goals. Once you've become clearer about the gap between the two, let your brain go to work imagining creative solutions about how to bridge it.
- Carry around a notebook or have a note-taking function on a smartphone,

to capture the inspirations and aha! moments that hit at the oddest times, when your nose is *not* to the grindstone.

- Give your brain a rest. Get out of your head and into your body, your breath, or the moment. Women, especially, are prone to ruminating and worrying. Notice the thoughts without judgment, choose to think in a different way, and rewire your brain. Ask for help and delegate. Write the to-do list in an enormous brain dump, then give yourself permission not to do it all. Take five minutes to pour the clutter of anxieties into a Worry Journal. Uncontaminate your time.
- Shorten your time horizon. What if we really did live like we're dying? How would that change what you view as important and the choices you make for what to do with your time? Try it.
- Banish busyness.
- Live an authentic life.

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A Note About the Author

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