

Executive Summary



By Heather Boushey and Ann O’Leary

This report describes how a woman’s nation changes everything about how we live and work today. Now for the first time in our nation’s history, women are half of all U.S. workers and mothers are the primary breadwinners or co-breadwinners in nearly two-thirds of American families. This is a dramatic shift from just a generation ago (in 1967 women made up only one-third of all workers). It changes how women spend their days and has a ripple effect that reverberates throughout our nation. It fundamentally changes how we all work and live, not just women but also their families, their co-workers, their bosses, their faith institutions, and their communities.

Quite simply, women as half of all workers changes everything.

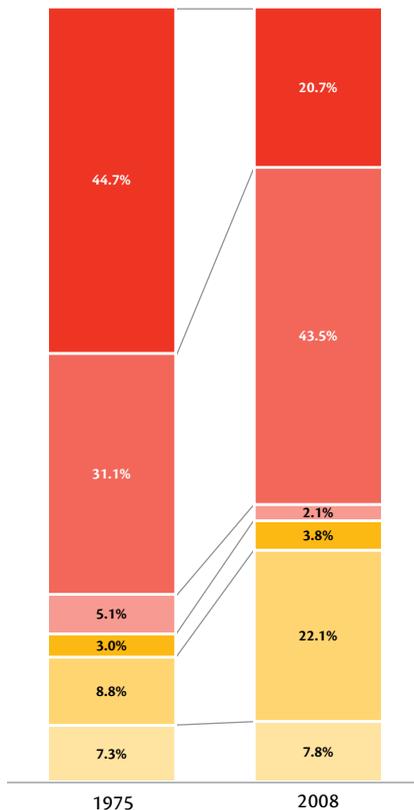
Recognizing the importance of women’s earnings to family well-being is the key piece to understanding why we are in a transformational moment. This social transformation is affecting nearly every aspect of our lives—from how we work to how we play to how we care for one another. Yet, we, as a nation, have not come to terms with what this means. In this report, we break new ground by taking a hard look at how women’s changing roles affect our major societal institutions, from government and businesses to our faith communities. We outline how these institutions rely on outdated models of who works and who cares for our families. And we examine how our culture has responded to one of the greatest social transformations of our time.

FIGURE 1

The new normal

Changes in family structure and work, families with children under age 18, 1975 and 2008

- Married, traditional (only husband employed)
- Married, dual earner
- Married, both parents unemployed
- Married, non-traditional (only wife employed)
- Single parent, employed
- Single parent, unemployed



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics, Economic News Release: Table 4. Families with own children: Employment status of parents by age of youngest child and family type, 2007-08 annual averages; Bureau of Labor Statistics, Indicator 18: Parent's Employment, Employment status of parents with own children under 18 years old, by type of family: 1975 to 1993.

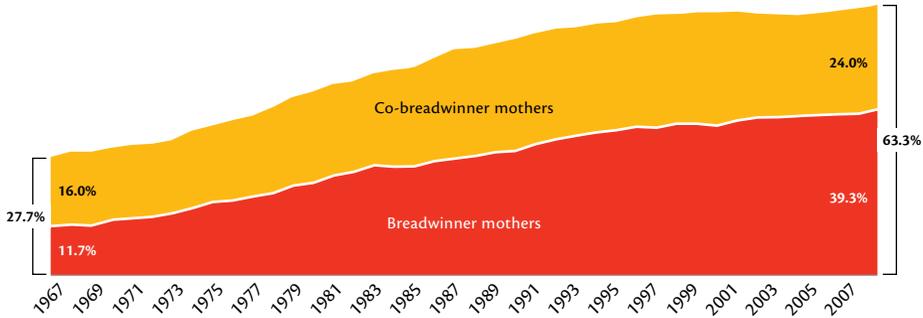
Our findings should not be surprising to working men and women. Today, four-in-five families with children still at home are not the traditional male breadwinner, female homemaker. And women are increasingly becoming their family's breadwinner or co-breadwinner (see Figures 1 and 2). The deep economic downturn is amplifying and accelerating this trend. Men have lost three-out-of-four jobs so far since the Great Recession began in December 2007, leaving millions of wives to bring home the bacon while their husbands search for work. Women working outside the home, however, is not a short-term blip. This is a long-term trend that shows no signs of reversing.

Although our report is titled "A Woman's Nation Changes Everything," this is not just a woman's story. This is a report about how women becoming half of workers changes everything for men, women, and their families. The Rockefeller/*TIME* nationwide poll, conducted in early September as the chapters of the report were being finalized, finds that the battle of the sexes is over and is replaced by negotiations between the sexes about work, family, household responsibilities, child care, and elder care. Yet, while men generally accept women working and making more money, men and women both express concern about kids left behind. Whose job is it? Men and women agree that government and business are out

FIGURE 2

The new workforce

Share of mothers who are breadwinners or co-breadwinners, 1967 to 2008



Source: Heather Boushey and Jeff Chapman's analysis of Miriam King, Steven Ruggles, Trent Alexander, Donna Leicach, and Matthew Sobek. Integrated Public Use Microdata Series, Current Population Survey: Version 2.0. [Machine-readable database]. Minneapolis, MN: Minnesota Population Center [producer and distributor], 2009.

Notes: Breadwinner mothers include single mothers who work and married mothers who earn as much or more than their husbands. Co-breadwinners are wives who bring home at least 25 percent of the couple's earnings, but less than half. The data only include families with a mother who is between the ages of 18 and 60 and who has children under age 18 living with her.

of touch with the realities of how most families live and work today. Families need more flexible work schedules, comprehensive child care policies, redesigned family and medical leave, and equal pay. The aim of this report is to take this conversation up to the national level, to engage men and women in thinking about what this new reality means for our vision of ourselves, our families, our communities, and the government, social, and religious institutions around us.

In short, this report lays the groundwork for how our society can better support the new American worker and the new American family.

The chapters in this report examine a host of ways in which our lives have changed forever because women have entered the labor force in ever greater numbers. The policy implications vary from issue to issue, but the conclusions are clear: We need to rethink our assumptions about families and about work and focus our policies—at all levels—to address this new reality.

Clearly we aren't going back to a time when women were available full time to be their families' unpaid caretakers, so we need to find another way forward. This report builds on the decades of work on these issues and aims to spark a national conversation and attract the attention of policymakers and political leaders to focus on the implications of this transformation for our society.

Maria Shriver opens our report with *A Woman's Nation*. Her chapter describes the unique ways the Shriver and CAP teams approached this complex set of topics. She details how together we took a “deep dive” into how our culture and our society are responding to changes in women’s dual roles in the workforce and in the family. Shriver takes a historical look at the transformation of the American woman since her uncle, President John F. Kennedy, asked First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt to chair the first Commission on the Status of Women in 1961. Shriver connects this overarching social shift to the most consistent roles of her life and of most women’s lives—the roles of daughter and mother. As our country reshapes the face of its workforce, Shriver reminds us that the struggles of the women before us opened the doors for us to guide the next generation of young women through.

In her chapter, Shriver also describes the conversations she conducted with everyday Americans around the nation, discovering that men and women are indeed negotiating everything—from the daily struggle over whether the husband or wife will drop off their child at school in the morning to major life decisions about whether a family will relocate to further one spouse’s career even if it hampers the other’s. You’ll find quotes from these conversations highlighted between the different chapters of this report—insights that bring to life the equally telling analysis of how we work and live today. And alongside our chapters is a collection of essays that Maria Shriver and her team gathered from an intriguing array of women and men, among them Oprah Winfrey, Billie Jean King, Suze Orman, Patricia Kempthorne, and Tammy Duckworth; less famous but equally insightful individuals such as Col. Maritza Sáenz Ryan, First Gentleman of Michigan Dan Mulhern and Accel Partners’ Sukhinder Singh Cassidy; and everyday Americans at the forefront of these monumental changes in our society like Gianna Le, a young Vietnamese-American seeking to enter medical school this year. This chapter captures these insights and matches them to the analysis in the report to sharply define these personal experiences on the larger canvas of our changing nation.

The New Breadwinners, by **Heather Boushey**, Center for American Progress senior economist, explores the economic underpinnings of the transformation of women’s work. This chapter homes in on who’s gone to work, where women are working, why they are working, how well they are coping, and what this means for the economic well-being of women and their families. The chapter finds that while women are now half of workers and mothers are breadwinners or co-breadwinners in the majority of families, institutions have failed to catch up to this reality. Women have made great strides and are now more likely to be economically

responsible for themselves and their families, but there is still a long way to go. Equality in the workplace has not yet been achieved, even as families need women's equality now more than ever.

Family Friendly for All Families: Workers and caregivers need government policies that reflect today's realities, by **Ann O'Leary**, Center for American Progress senior fellow and executive director of the Berkeley Center for Health, Economic & Family Security at the University of California Berkeley School of Law, and **Karen Kornbluh**, former visiting fellow at the Center for American Progress, explores the implications of women in the workplace for government policy affecting workers and caregivers. O'Leary and Kornbluh argue that we need to reevaluate the values and assumptions underlying our nation's workplace policies and social insurance system to ensure that they reflect the actual—not outdated or imagined—ways that families work and care today.

Up until now, government policymakers largely focused on supporting women's entry into a male-oriented workforce on a par with men—a workplace where policies on hours, pay, benefits, and leave time were designed around male breadwinners who presumably had no family caregiving responsibilities. But allowing women to play by the same rules as a traditional male breadwinner worker is not enough. Too many workers—especially women and low-wage workers—today simply cannot work in the way traditional breadwinners once worked with a steady job and lifelong marriage with a wife at home.

O'Leary and Kornbluh suggest that a fruitful way for government to address this new economic and social reality would be to update our basic labor standards to include family-friendly employee benefits and reform our anti-discrimination laws so that employers cannot disproportionately exclude women from workplace benefits. Their chapter also argues that we need to modernize our social insurance system to account for varied families and new family responsibilities, including the need for paid family leave and social security retirement benefits that take into account time spent out of the workforce caring for children and other relatives. O'Leary and Kornbluh close with suggestions for increasing support to families for child care, early education, and elder care in order to help working parents cope with their dual responsibilities.

Next is a reflective essay, ***Invisible Yet Essential: Immigrant women in America***, by **Maria Echaveste**, Center for American Progress senior fellow and senior

distinguished fellow at the Warren Institute at University of California Berkeley School of Law. This chapter focuses in on how we often overlook the crucial work—child and parental care, home maintenance, food production, and cleaning—once done by the unpaid wives of male breadwinners but which is now the work of immigrant women. These hardworking immigrant women have helped make possible other women’s mass entry into the workforce. Echaveste points out that our economy is increasingly based on a growing service-sector industry, which in turn challenges all of us to value the work of the millions of immigrant women performing these services. Indeed, she concludes that the work these women do will be necessary regardless of how high-tech our economy becomes. They can no longer be ignored.

Sick and Tired: Working women and their health, by **Jessica Arons**, director of the Women’s Health and Rights Program at the Center for American Progress, and Northwestern University law professor **Dorothy Roberts**, explores the implications of women working and earning the family income on women’s health, as well as women’s access to employer-based and private health insurance. They find that women’s breadwinning has not always come with greater access to health benefits and, too often, women’s health is compromised as they combine work and family responsibilities. As more women work, the authors note that we are developing a greater understanding of the health implications for women and their families—everything from inequitable job conditions and workplace health hazards to the timing of when women become mothers. Further, they highlight how our current health insurance system, centered as it is on employer-sponsored insurance, fails women in a variety of ways.

Better Educating Our New Breadwinners: Creating opportunities for all women to succeed in the workforce, by professor and former dean of University of California Berkeley’s graduate division **Mary Ann Mason**, explores the implications for our education system, focusing on post-secondary education. She finds that women have made great advances in educational attainment, yet there is still clear evidence that women face barriers within our educational institutions. Further, even when women receive the same degrees as men, they continue to face lower wages and fewer high-paying job prospects due to inflexible and unsupportive work environments.

Mason examines both sides of this gender coin. Women receive 52 percent of high school diplomas, 62 percent of associate’s degrees, 57 percent of bachelor’s

degrees and 50 percent of doctoral degrees and professional degrees. But three problems persist. First, not all women have gained access to post-secondary education. Hispanic women, for example, lag far behind their counterparts. Second, women remain concentrated in the “helping” professions of health and education and are falling behind in entering the higher-paying fields of the future, including science, mathematics, engineering, and technology. Finally, more women with family responsibilities are attending all levels of post-secondary education, but they need family-friendly support to get their degrees (just as all workers need businesses to respond to the fact that our highly-educated workforce necessarily combines work and care). Mason recommends that policymakers focus on these three problems and offers some solutions to help them do so, including increasing family-friendly environments in our educational institutions and increasing compliance with Title IX with regard to science, engineering, mathematics, and technology at all post-secondary levels.

Got Talent? It Isn't Hard to Find: Recognizing and rewarding the value women create in the workplace, by **Brad Harrington**, professor of organization studies and executive director of the Center for Work & Family at the Carroll School of Management at Boston College, and **Jamie Ladge**, assistant professor of management and organizational development at Northeastern University, point out that women make up half the talent that is available to corporate America and small businesses. The authors argue that women's outstanding performance in educational institutions, especially in higher educational and professional schools, demands that employers create workplaces that attract, retain, develop, and exploit (in the best sense of the word) this tremendous resource. They detail, however, that the vast majority of employers need to let go of outdated models such as thinking that there is only one place that work gets done, one way to structure a workday, one model for the ideal career, and one leadership style that works in today's workplace.

Harrington and Ladge show that flexible work arrangements, flexible career paths, and new leadership styles better meet the needs of today's diverse workforce as well as today's flexible and fast-changing economic environment. They argue these new work policies should not be perks for only a chosen few. All workers need policies that meet the changed realities of work and family, not just elite workers. In short, the conversation is no longer about *whether* women will work, but rather about how businesses are dealing with the fact that their workforce is increasingly made up of women and most workers today—men and women—share in at least some care responsibilities.

The Challenge of Faith: Bringing spiritual sustenance to busy lives, by **Kimberly Morgan**, associate professor of political science and international affairs at The George Washington University, and **Sally Steenland**, senior policy advisor for the Faith and Progressive Policy project at the Center for American Progress, explore the ongoing role of religion and spirituality in women’s lives. They ask how traditional faith communities and new organizational forms of spirituality have responded to women’s increased employment outside the home. Their conclusion? Women are struggling to find the time for religious involvement amid the responsibilities of job and family, which in turn means religious institutions need to adapt to these new realities—especially as the support and services that organized religion provides become more important than ever.

Morgan and Steenland note that some congregations have actively engaged with today’s new realities, providing increased services that address the challenges for families that no longer have an adult who remains outside the labor force. Yet others have not, and in many cases while women have entered boardrooms and are leading companies, faith institutions have been slow to incorporate women into their leadership. Morgan and Steenland suggest several ways for faith and spiritual communities to better engage with today’s busy women.

University of Michigan communications professor **Susan Douglas** then shows us in ***Where Have You Gone, Roseanne Barr?*** how the media that we’re surrounded by every day have in some ways overshot reality and in many ways not caught up on the way women work and live in our society today. The mainstream media outlets often suggest that women have “made it,” portraying women as successful executives at the top of every profession, yet in real life there are far too few women among the highest ranks of the professions, and millions of everyday women struggle to make ends meet and to juggle work and family. Douglas suggests women need to challenge these misleading portraits with facts, vigor, and humor.

Douglas’s provocative chapter is accompanied by an essay titled ***Sexy Socialization: Today’s media and the next generation of women***, by **Stacy L. Smith**, a fellow at the Center for Communication Leadership and Policy at the Annenberg School of Communications, and two of her colleagues, **Cynthia Kennard**, a senior fellow at the Center, and **Amy D. Granados**, a policy analyst at Annenberg. The three authors highlight what today’s 8-to-19-year-olds are taking in about the role of men and women in the workplace and society through the lens of various media, focusing on how troubling male and female sexual stereotypes could affect the life

and career choices of our next generation. The authors express concern about the future of women breadwinners in the coming decades because of these stereotypes, but hold out hope that the media industry itself will change as more women rise within its ranks or launch new media outlets on their own.

Our report then shifts focus to a series of chapters and essays that we hope will get people talking about all of our analytical research. In *Has a Man's World Become a Woman's Nation?*, **Michael Kimmel**, sociology professor at the State University of New York, Stonybrook, surveys the varied responses that men have had to women's entry into the workforce and to losing the title of sole breadwinner. He finds that most men have chosen the path toward acceptance of greater gender equality and often relish the extra earnings women bring into the family—but that some groups of men continue to struggle with the idea of widespread employment of women and mothers as it has made them question their very notion of masculinity.

Above all, though, Kimmel finds that while both men and women want the kind of support that makes it possible to have a dual-earner, dual-caregiver family, these issues are more often misperceived as only “women's issues” in Washington and statehouses around the nation. Men need family-friendly policies so that they can have the sorts of family relationships they say they want to have, as well as careers that enable them to work and live better in our changing 21st-century economy. Kimmel closes his chapter with a call for men to rally behind efforts to make it better for women and men together to work and live in our changing economy and society, not rely on women alone to do so.

Next, we learn that negotiating around the kitchen table can be good for your marriage. In her reflective essay, *Sharing the Load*, Evergreen State College sociologist **Stephanie Coontz** provides evidence that the most stable, high-quality marriages are those where men and women share both paid work and domestic work. This is a shift from generations ago when the most stable marriages were those where husbands specialized in paid work and wives did all the domestic work.

In this section we also include two concluding reflective essays, one by senior correspondent for *The American Prospect* **Courtney E. Martin** and the other by political strategist and media consultant **Jamal Simmons**. They explore what it all means for today's generations of women and men who grew up in a world that was less likely to question the desirability of the equality of women but understands that does not yet mean true equality.

Simmons focuses on how the woman you commit to today may have the same name and social security number as the woman you are with tomorrow, but she may want completely different things in her life at different times throughout your lives together. For him, the rules seem to be maddeningly flexible. Martin notes that the women (and men) of her generation have come of age at a time when feminist values are simply in the water. But she argues that we need comprehensive policy reform that reflects an accurate picture of the workers and families as we really are, not as we imagine ourselves to be. She closes by saying that “It’s a good thing we’ve been so pumped up on post-gender idealism, because there are some big battles ahead.”

To gauge just how representative these conversations and observations are of actual conditions in American homes and workplaces, we close the report with a hot-off-the-press landmark nationwide poll. This Rockefeller/*TIME* poll of 3,413 people nationwide takes a broad and deep look at what men and women think of their changing roles in society and their attitudes toward each other as spouses, parents, bosses, and co-workers. Center for American Progress fellows **John Halpin** and **Ruy Texiera**, **Kelly Daley** with global research company Abt SRBI Inc., and former *Los Angeles Times* pollster **Susan Pinkus** conducted, analyzed, and then concisely summarized the poll findings for us in their chapter ***Battle of the Sexes Gives Way to Negotiations***.

The poll results reveal a truce in the battle of the sexes, demonstrating that men and women are in agreement on many of the day-to-day work and family issues. The old line in the sand separating them has largely washed away. Indeed, both men and women agree that women’s movement into employment is good for the country. Virtually all married couples see negotiating about the rules of relationships, work, and family as key making things work at home and at work. The authors conclude that the one clear message emerging from this poll is that the lives of Americans have changed significantly in recent years, yet the parameters of their jobs have yet to change to meet new demands. They find that political and business leaders who fail to take steps to address the needs of modern families risk losing good workers and the support of men and women who are riding the crest of major social change in America with little or no support.

Rather than pining for family structures of an earlier generation, the authors report that the poll found that men and women agree that government and businesses have failed to adapt to the needs of modern families. Americans across the board desire more flexibility in work schedules, paid family leave, and increased child care support. Given the ongoing difficulties many people face in balancing work and family life, it is not surprising that large numbers of Americans—men and women alike—view the decline in the percentage of children growing up in a family with a stay-at-home parent as a negative development for society. Yet, ever practical and pragmatic, this poll demonstrates that Americans understand that everything has changed in their work and lives today and that consequently they are working things out as best they can while looking to their government and their employers to catch up.

The academic research, anecdotal evidence, personal reflections, and poll results that make up this unique report all confirm that recognizing women now constitute half of the workers in the United States is only the first step. The second is identifying what we need to do to reshape the institutions around us. We can then begin to take the necessary actions to readjust our policies and practices. When you finish reading our report, we're confident you'll agree that more than four decades after President Kennedy's Commission on the Status of Women, we've learned that while there's much to cheer about, we still have a long way to go. We as a people must transform the way our government, our businesses, our faith-based institutions, and our media deal with the realities of a woman's nation so that all of us can better cope with the transformation of how we work and live. The ultimate goal is a more prosperous future for all women and men in a nation that recognizes the unique value of each of us to contribute to the common good at work and at home. We believe that we can get there together, and that this report takes an important step along that path.