

**“My boss is not interested  
in the problems of  
professional women”**

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presentation for  
The Work/Family Dilemma: A Better Balance  
February 2, 2007

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# Newspaper coverage of work/family conflict

*“Opt Out” or Pushed Out?: How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflict* – analysis of 119 print news stories

- 70% of articles surveyed stress “pulls” rather than workplace “pushes”
- Overwhelmingly focus on women in professional/managerial class (PMC) jobs (58% of *NYT* articles), which only 8% of American women hold
- Consistently focus on white, married women *after* they drop out and *before* they divorce

Source: Joan Williams, Jessica Manvell & Stephanie Bornstein, *“Opt Out” or Pushed Out: How the Press Covers Work/Family Conflict* (2006) ([www.worklifelaw.org](http://www.worklifelaw.org))

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# Creates a misleading impression

- “My boss is not interested in the problems of professional women.”
- “We are not interested in the problems of professional women.”
- Research now documents how work/family conflict plays out across class lines
  - Low-wage workers
  - Professional/managerial class (PMC)
  - The missing middle



# Low-wage women

- Much more likely to be single mothers
- Much more likely to depend on family members or friends for child care
  - Child care is more likely to break down
  - Many children are home alone in dangerous neighborhoods, especially after school
  - Far more likely to be providing 30+ hrs/wk unpaid assistance to elders
- More likely to have to interrupt work because of family care—30% during one study week

Sources: Albelda & Cosenza 2000; Heymann 2000; Presser & Cox 1997; Rose & Hartmann 2004.



# Low-wage women

- Lack of public transportation in many U.S. cities leaves many parents in a bind
  - Single mom fired for tardiness; took three buses to take her kids to school and child care and reach her job.  
*(Chicago Transit Authority, 1997)*
- More likely to be dealing with ill health and to lack health insurance or paid sick days
- More likely to have inflexible jobs (78%)
- Much more likely to work “unsocial hours” and to face rotating shifts, which makes child care nearly impossible



# Everyday life

- Impact of mandatory overtime at short notice on single mothers
  - Mental health aide ordered to work extra 8-hour shift. Asked supervisor: Did she know a babysitter? Could her kids stay overnight at the center? Fired. Reinstated by arbitrator: “It is her efforts to be a good parent that have created her problems at work.” (*Rochester Psychiatric*, 1986)
- When California restaurant worker’s child care fell through, she brought her daughter to work; the child sat quietly at an empty table while her mother completed her shift. The mom was fired at the end of the day.



# Professional/managerial class

- Long hours
  - The Ideal Worker works long hours
  - Nearly 40% of college-educated men work 50+ hours
  - Drives neo-traditional patterns
- Highly educated women more likely than others to seek a “part-time” 40-hour/week schedule
- U.S. has steep part-time penalty
  - “Scut work” at low pay; dead-end jobs
  - Part-time workers earn 21% less per hour
  - Penalty is 7x greater than in Sweden; 2x than in UK

Sources: Moen 2002; Gornick & Meyers 2003; Reed 1994.

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# Professional/managerial class

- The more education a woman has, the *more* likely she is to be employed
  - Although very rich women (top 5%) least likely
- PMC women more likely than other women to work part time
- Those who work 44 hrs/wk earn on average *twice* what those working 34 hrs/wk earn
- Take little time off: 2.2 years on average
- Economically vulnerable if they divorce



# Everyday life

- “For many women, part-time work remains an elusive dream.”
- “Haircut”
- Schedule creep
- “Anyone who cuts back [on work] is not a team player, and is not considered for [quality]... assignments....In most companies, you’re taken off the fast track and you miss out on plum assignments.” (Gardner, 2001)



# The missing middle

- Inflexible jobs
  - 2/3 who earn \$71,000+ have access to flex; less than 1/3 who earn less than \$28,000
- Tag teaming: 1 in 4 U.S. families
  - 3 to 6x higher rate of divorce
- 1 in 4 families also care for elderly relatives
- 3/4 of adults say they have no control over their schedule
- Dual-job families work much longer hours in U.S.
  - 6% in Sweden, 64% here, work 80+ hrs/wk

Source: Joan C. Williams, *One Sick Child Away From Being Fired* (2006) ([www.worklifelaw.org](http://www.worklifelaw.org))

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# Stories: inflexibility

- *“When I was a young bus driver and my children were very small (ages 4, 2 and 1), I worked the late shift and my wife went to school during the day. We couldn’t afford child care, and **this way one of us was always home**. One day in the middle of winter..., [t]he **babysitter didn’t show up** or call to say she wasn’t coming. I had to bundle up the kids and take them to work. They had to ride my bus with me. After about two hours I was lucky enough to see my wife studying in a coffee shop, so I **stopped the bus and ran in and handed her the kids**.”*
  - John Goldstein, Past President, Milwaukee Labor Council from Labor Project for Working Families, *A Job and a Life: Organizing and Bargaining for Work Family Issues* (2005)



# Stories: mandatory overtime

- *“Our members were being fired because they refused to stay for **mandatory drug and alcohol tests, which last up to 3 hours.** They had no problem taking the tests; the problem was that they were triggered at or near the end of their shifts. And with little or no advance notice they could not stay even as paid overtime, because **they had to get home to take care of their kids.**”*

– Robert Molofsky, Past General Counsel, ATU



# Everyday life

- Press operator at Chicago Tribune fired for being 20 minutes late for work after she stayed up until midnight monitoring her mother's blood pressure, than came home to a crying toddler; fell asleep in a rocking chair and woke up late. (*Chicago Tribune*, 2003)
- UPS driver fired for “theft of time” when he took long lunch hours to help his wife, at home with an infant, a toddler, and a breast infection. (*UPS*, 1998)



# Everyday life

- Telephone service clerk ordered to attend a **2-week-long training** right when she returned from **maternity leave**. With less than a week's notice, she could not arrange babysitting. Given choice of being demoted to operator or being fired. (*GTE*, 1981)
- Grandfather fired for insubordination when he refused to work overtime because **he had to leave to care for his grandson**. (*Tractor Supply*, 2001)
- Husband fired when he refused OT to avoid leaving his sick wife at home alone. **“His wife had stood by him in sickness and tragedy, and he was trying to return the favor. He owed it to her.”** (*Allied Paper*, 1983)



# Work/family public policy

1. Paid leaves: parental leave and sick leave usable for care of family members
2. Quality, affordable non-family care, including universal preschool, child care, and after-school care
3. Working hours legislation, including paid vacation, limits on mandatory OT, right to request flexible or fewer working hours
4. Protections against family responsibilities discrimination



# Discrimination

- Motherhood is a key trigger for gender stereotyping
- 400% increase in maternal wall cases in last 10 years over the previous decade
- Stereotyping
  - Businesswomen/housewives (Fiske & Glick)
  - Mothers held to higher performance and attendance standards and offered \$11,000 less in salary for same position (Correll, 2006)



# Family responsibilities discrimination (FRD)

- Affects women at every income level, from grocery clerks to sanitation workers to administrative assistants to executives
- Common forms of FRD:
  - Refusal to hire (firefighter) (*Senuta, 2002*)
  - Refusal to grant light duty to pregnant workers (nurses' aides, police) (*Lehmuller v. Sag Harbor, 1996*)
  - Refusal to promote (attorney) (*Trezza v. The Hartford Inc., 1998*)
  - Interference with family and medical leave, for men as well as women (*Schultz v. Advocate Health, 2002*)



# What FRD looks like

- Firing women once they have children
  - “Mothers aren’t dependable, and belong at home with their children.” (*Bailey v. Scott-Gallaher*, 1997)
  - “You have to decide: do you want babies or a career here?” (*Hallberg v. Aristech Chemical*, 1999)
- Giving mothers dead-end work or no work  
(*Sigmon v. Parker Chapin Flattau & Klimp*, 1995)
- Retaliating against a mother who protested race discrimination by taking away her flex schedule  
(*Washington v. Illinois*, 2005)



# Conclusions across class boundaries

- Leave is vitally important:
  - Both family and medical leave and sick leave that can be used for care of family
- But it is part of a large puzzle
  - It takes 20 years, not 3 months, to raise a child
- Control over mandatory OT, via *voluntary* overtime systems with notice so caregivers can arrange care
- Quality part-time jobs *with* benefits and *without* stigma or schedule creep
- Enable workers to take personal leave in 2-hour segments
- Paid vacation
- Address discrimination against workers with family responsibilities