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Source: *Gender and Society*, Vol. 15, No. 5 (Oct., 2001), pp. 687-709

Published by: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3081970>

Accessed: 14/11/2008 13:09

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CULTURAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF FAMILY SCHEMAS

The Case of Women Finance Executives

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This article uses interview data to examine changes over time in the cultural constructions of executive women's family responsibilities. The author delineates two gendered cultural structures: the family devotion schema and the work devotion schema. Respondents are caught in the conflict between each schema's competing vision of a worthwhile life. Older respondents are more likely to accept the devotion schema's definition of an irreconcilable conflict between work and family, prompting many to avoid marriage or childbearing. In contrast, many members of the youngest cohort, who came of age after the early 1970s women's movement, are refashioning the family devotion schema by subcontracting out domestic responsibilities while maintaining demanding careers. Yet, the family devotion schema continues to haunt all cohorts, enduring in its cognitive, normative, and emotional power. Gender, as expressed in cultural models of family, remains a powerful constraint on the hearts and minds of even professionally successful women.

Despite progress in dismantling barriers to gender equality, gendered cultural models of work and family life continue to constrain women's workplace achievement. Although some analysts perceive a trend toward companionate, egalitarian marriages (Barnett and Rivers 1996; Goldscheider and Waite 1991), motherhood still does not easily accommodate highly demanding jobs. Only about one-third of married mothers are employed full-time (Hayghe and Bianchi 1994), and those who are lag behind men in work achievement and earnings, in part due to their domestic responsibilities (Spain and Bianchi 1996; Waldfogel 1997). Moreover, women in elite, male-dominated occupations are less likely to be married or have children than are their male colleagues or other women (Korn/Ferry International 1993; Wajcman 1998).

AUTHOR'S NOTE: A National Science Foundation Doctoral Dissertation Improvement Grant provided partial support for this research. An earlier draft of this article received the 1997 Sally Hacker prize from the American Sociological Association's Sex and Gender Section. I am grateful for comments on earlier drafts by Andy Abbott, Mike Allen, Penny Becker, David Jacobson, Ann Mische, Gender & Society anonymous reviewers, and especially David Blair-Loy.

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GENDER & SOCIETY, Vol. 15 No. 5, October 2001 687-709
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This study examines how schemas, the cultural facets of structure (Sewell 1992), set the parameters for the work and family lives of women with full-time, executive careers. I conducted a qualitative study of an extreme case: female finance executives in an elite, male-dominated world. The data reveal traditionally gendered cultural structures I call schemas of devotion to work and devotion to family. In addition to organizing cognition, devotion schemas evoke intense normative and emotional commitments. They are partially internalized and also constitute shared, public understandings. The work devotion schema, traditionally masculine, demands an immense time commitment and emotional allegiance to one's employer or career. Adherence to this schema is a prerequisite for advancement to senior executive positions. On the other hand, the family devotion schema assigns primary responsibility for housework and child rearing to women and demands that their primary commitments remain with home, family, and children. My respondents' lives illustrate the interplay and conflict between these two schemas and suggest the emergence of a new model of motherhood.

To analyze that interplay over time, I divided the sample into three birth cohorts: the World War II era, the early baby boom, and the mid baby boom. Each cohort has achieved extraordinary professional success. Yet, each has been forced to reckon with the competing forces of the devotion to work and the devotion to family schemas. All cohorts have far lower childbearing rates than the national population for women of similar ages. Older respondents were more likely to accept the devotion schema's definition of an irreconcilable conflict between work and family, prompting many to avoid marriage and/or childbearing. In contrast, many younger respondents have tried to incorporate an emerging egalitarian ethic of marriage into their family lives. They have refashioned the family devotion schema to reinvent the role of wife and mother as an often absent general contractor who subcontracts domestic responsibilities to others while maintaining a demanding career. Yet, the traditionally feminine devotion to the family schema continues to haunt all three cohorts, enduring in its cognitive, normative, and emotional power. This study demonstrates how gender as expressed in the devotion to the family schema remains a powerful constraint on the hearts and minds of professionally successful women.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My theoretical framework is informed by Sewell's (1992, 27) formulation of structure as composed of "mutually sustaining cultural schemas and sets of resources that empower and constrain social action and tend to be reproduced by that action." I build on gender theorists who see gender as an "institution" (Lorber 1994) or a "structure" (Risman 1998) that creates distinctions and inequalities throughout society.

I am sympathetic to Risman's (1998) project of seeing gender as a structure at every level of analysis and understanding the relationships between structure and

agency. I also agree with Gerson's (1985, 37) argument that analysts must study "how women themselves, as actors who respond to the social conditions they inherit, construct their lives out of the available raw materials." My research focuses on aspects of structure that Risman, Gerson, and others undertheorize: cultural schemas as institutionalized and partially internalized models for cognition, morality, and emotion. I contend that analysts cannot fully comprehend the pervasiveness of the gender structure or the complexity of human agency without understanding how these cultural schemas constrain and enable action.

Schemas are the virtual dimension of structure (Sewell 1992). I define a particular cultural schema as an ordered, socially constructed, and taken-for-granted framework for understanding and evaluating self and society, for thinking and for acting. Schemas are objective in the sense of being shared, publicly available understandings. They are also subjective and partially internalized, thereby shaping personal aspirations and identities.

In contrast, some scholars use the term *schema* (or a synonymous term) more narrowly to denote a socially constructed, cognitive map in people's heads. For Lipsitz Bem (1983, 603), a schema is an individual's "cognitive structure, a network of associations that organizes perception." These gendered associations are made salient and functional by the culture. Risman (1998, 27) also emphasized culture's role in structuring cognition; she defined "the cultural aspect of the social structure" as "the taken-for-granted or *cognitive* [emphasis added] image rules that belong to the situational context." Lipsitz Bem, Risman, and West and Zimmerman (1987) all shared a concern with normative rules and situations of moral accountability in which individuals feel compelled to appropriately present themselves as men or as women. Yet, these analysts primarily treat these rules as another set of *cognitive* constraints rather than as aspects of a *moral* universe analyzable in its own right. Lipsitz Bem's more recent formulation of the "gender lens" is closer to my framework. For Lipsitz Bem (1993, 2-3), gender lenses are assumptions that "shape how people perceive, conceive, and discuss social reality" and thus shape material reality. But while Lipsitz Bem (1993, 153-55) noted that one's thoughts, feelings, and normative self-definitions are shaped by the gender lens, she did not fully develop the emotional and normative dimensions of the gender lens nor how these dimensions relate to agency and change in particular historical settings.

In contrast, I argue that culture provides powerful normative evaluations and evokes intense emotions in addition to ordering cognition. I locate this aspect of culture in schemas of devotion, which are particularly gripping cultural models that orient us toward where we devote our time, energy, and passion. In a historical time and place, they tell us what to care about and how to care about it. I use the term *devotion* rather than *commitment* or *interest* to emphasize that these schemas define more than just cognitive maps or rational interests. Devotion schemas specify that which we are invited or compelled to devote ourselves to, body and soul. Like pseudoreligious articles of faith, they promise to provide meaning to life and a secure connection to something outside ourselves. Thus, I envision a more powerful and invasive role of culture than that seen by Risman (1998, 29), who examined

how "interactional pressures and institutional design create gender and the resultant inequality *even in the absence* [emphasis added] of individual desires." In contrast, I argue that gender schemas help *create* those individual desires and thus powerfully reinforce interactional and institutional patterns.

I find that executive women's choices are shaped by two powerful cultural structures: the work devotion schema and the family devotion schema (Blair-Loy 1997). These are gendered models of devotion to the firm and the family. As Gerson (1985, 193) noted, "Women face a set of dichotomous choices in which work and family commitments are posed as competing alternative commitments." This competition is particularly keen for executive women.

The schema of devotion to work is a middle-class, masculine, twentieth-century model of devotion to a managerial career that helps shape managers' commitments and employers' expectations (Potuchek 1997; Whyte 1956). This model developed in part due to the pressures of late capitalism but has since become semiautonomous from purely economic factors and has a normative force of its own (Schor 1991). This traditionally masculine schema calls men to consuming professional careers while expecting their wives to provide domestic care. This schema may also affect women moving into elite managerial and professional positions.

The family devotion schema assigns responsibility for housework and child rearing to women. It prescribes that women spend most of their adult lives intensively caring for their families (Coser and Coser 1974; Hays 1996).¹ This schema presumes a heterosexual marriage, in which wives are dependent on husbands for livelihood and social status, while husbands rely on wives for physical and emotional care of themselves and their children. These marital roles ideally engender mutual reciprocity with a permanent marriage (Skolnick 1991).

The schema also prescribes a model of motherhood. Hays (1996, 129) has delineated the "ideology of intensive motherhood," a cultural structure emerging in the nineteenth century of a mother's "child-centered, expert-guided, emotionally absorbing, labor-intensive, and financially expensive" care for a child she considers sacred (see also Skolnick 1991). Women's devotion to the family trumps all other commitments. Even if they also do market work, it is their primary duty to give their children absorbing and time-consuming care. This schema prescribes that women find fulfillment in the creativity and intimacy of involved motherhood.

These two schemas of devotion mandate gender roles that have become increasingly contested in the wake of the women's movement and the influx of married women and mothers into the labor force. Although contested, the family devotion schema maintains a strong cognitive, emotional, and normative grip on many people's hearts and minds. Hochschild (1989) revealed the durability of the "second shift" for married women, even among feminists, and Brines (1994) argued that female responsibility for housework is stably rooted in the symbolic expression and maintenance of gender. However, other scholars see emerging egalitarian marriages among dual-career couples (Barnett and Rivers 1996; Goldscheider and Waite 1991). Thus, the literature suggests that the family devotion schema is tenacious but in a state of flux.

This article focuses on a group at an extreme end of the distribution of employed women, where I look for instabilities in the family devotion schema and newly emerging understandings of wifehood and motherhood. Alternatively, if we see that the family devotion schema continues to help shape executive women's family decisions or that relinquishing it is a very difficult process, we will have found evidence of cultural structure's durability.

METHOD AND DATA

Method

This qualitative, exploratory case study relies on a reciprocal process of inductive insights and deductive analysis (Glaser and Strauss 1967). Although case-based approaches cannot make general statements of empirical regularity about large populations, they can uncover and interpret constellations of forces that change or reproduce social processes (Ragin 1987).

In contrast to studies of representative or typical samples, I pursue the strategy of the extreme case. Human agency is shaped by at least two axes: the amount of resources and the level of social and cultural constraints (Sewell 1992). Agency may be most visible to the analyst in cases in which highly resourceful agents face pronounced structural and cultural constraints (Blair-Loy 1999). My case is high on both axes: Respondents have ample resources and face formidable structural constraints, including conflicting schemas of what constitutes a life worth living. My findings are not statistically generalizable but may be hypothesized to occur in similarly situated cases and may illuminate similar processes in less extreme cases. I conducted in-depth interviews until achieving theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967). I coded respondents' sequences of family and career events and looked for patterns in work and family behavior and in respondents' interpretations of that behavior.

Data

The data consist of life histories of 56 women in high-ranking, finance-related jobs. Respondents belong to a professional and networking organization based in a large U.S. city, which only admits women holding senior-level finance-related jobs. I assume that members of this group are, by definition, professionally successful. Each respondent filled out a questionnaire detailing her work, family, and education history from age 17 to the present. I then interviewed each one on her family, career, accomplishments, and regrets. They have all reached senior levels in their firms, and their job titles include senior vice president, chief financial officer, managing director, partner, managing partner, and chief executive officer. Since launching finance careers, none have ever stopped working for pay, and only 2 women have ever worked part-time.

In 1994, respondents ranged in age from 36 to 60. All have bachelor's degrees, and most (86 percent) have graduate degrees. Twenty-one respondents (38 percent) are mothers. Forty-seven women (84 percent) were married at least once. Of these, 20 were ever divorced, but 6 have remarried. In 1993, their annual compensation ranged from approximately \$75,000 to one million dollars, with a median of \$250,000. In past years, some women made additional millions selling stock. With the exception of one African American, all respondents are white. The findings are thus limited in terms of racial generalizations. All names are pseudonyms.

Cohort Definitions

Historical events differentially affect the structural opportunities and interpretive frameworks of different cohorts (Mannheim 1952; Whittier 1995). The resurgence of the women's movement was a historical event that helped establish the enforcement of equal employment rights, fostered gender-egalitarian ideologies, and encouraged young women to enter male-dominated occupations (Jacobs 1989; Shu and Marini 1998). The very early 1970s are widely regarded as the period in which the contemporary women's movement took off as a mass movement; it erupted onto college campuses, garnered national media attention, and enjoyed exponential growth (Klein 1984; Marx Ferree and Hess 1985). Under pressure of feminist lobbying groups and changing public opinion, feminists won unprecedented victories in Congress and the courts in the early 1970s, including several landmark triumphs for women's rights in education and the workplace (Klein 1984).

Yet, these legal changes did not begin to be implemented until a few years later. For example, women's employment rights had been enacted in Title VII of the Civil Rights of 1964 but were not enforced until the early to mid-1970s (Kessler-Harris 1994). Title IX of the Education Amendment of 1972 prohibited sex discrimination in schools, yet it had little effect until 1976 (Reskin and Hartmann 1986). Public opinion throughout the 1970s and 1980s also grew more favorable toward egalitarian gender roles (Oppenheim Mason and Lu 1988).

This literature suggests three periods for college-educated women entering the adult work world. Women finishing college before 1969 would have come of age in an era of traditional gender role attitudes (Oppenheim Mason, Czajka, and Arber 1976). In contrast, women graduating between 1969 and 1973 would be in college or poised to enter the work world when feminism ignited as a mass movement and an unprecedented number of legal challenges to employment discrimination were under way. Women finishing college between 1974 and 1980 would join the labor force after many of these legal changes had become more institutionalized in the public realm and egalitarian ideologies had grown more acceptable in public opinion. In short, the women's movement helped make new ideological and material resources available to women aspiring to prestigious, male-dominated careers. I expect that these new career opportunities would affect finance executives' cultural understandings and actions regarding family.

Thus, I created three cohorts. The first cohort was born around the time of World War II and graduated from college between 1956 and 1968, before contemporary feminism was a mass movement ($n = 21$). The second cohort, from the early baby boom, graduated from college between 1969 and 1973 and was in college when the feminist movement was erupting on college campuses and gender barriers in the workplace and education were being challenged in the legal and political domains ($n = 15$). The third cohort, from the mid baby boom, finished college between 1974 and 1980 when workplace gains had become more securely established ($n = 20$).²

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

All Cohorts Face Contradictions between Work and Family Devotion Schemas

For all three cohorts, countless meetings, travel, “face time” at the office, and evenings and weekends spent entertaining clients add up to very long days. These work hours are rooted in the devotion to work schema. Although many respondents may have originally felt that the pressure to work long hours was coercively applied by employers, they have internalized this ethic and now, as senior managers, enforce it among their subordinates (Blair-Loy 1997).

Respondents claimed that most of their male colleagues had nonemployed wives who helped care for them at the end of the exhausting workday. In contrast, only one respondent had a husband, employed part-time, who was primarily oriented toward caring for the family.

The majority (62 percent) of the sample responded to these work demands and the lack of a caregiving spouse by not having children. For example, Penny Smith, a third-cohort partner in an accounting firm discussed how she and her husband had decided to remain childless:

[The decision not to have kids] was difficult and it took us a long time. . . . Someone needed to be available. Not that somebody needs to be home full-time. We could certainly afford whatever kind of child care we would want to have, so that wasn't an issue. But that somebody needed to have flexibility and availability in their schedule. And I wasn't willing to give that up in mine, and he wasn't willing to give that up in his. . . . So we got a dog (laughter).

Despite her laughter, she acknowledges that the decision to remain childless was “difficult” and took “a long time” to make. Jen Carpenter, in the second cohort, decided by default to remain childless: “I never really made a conscious decision not to have kids. It was circumstantial. It's never been the right time at work. . . . But I still have pangs when I hold a baby.”

These respondents are similar to the “transitional,” “ambivalent” women Ireland (1993, 41) identified who, for professional or other reasons, delay childbearing until it is too late. Other women I interviewed seemed more intentionally childless, like Ireland's (1993) “transformative,” “child-free” women. For both groups, child-

lessness is at least partly a response to the irreconcilable demands of the work and family devotion schemas.

We see further evidence of the contradiction between these schemas in some respondents' reluctance to rely professionally on women with children. Martha Ungvarsky, a childless chief financial officer (CFO) from the third cohort, says she openly discriminates against mothers when she hires an outside accountant or lawyer: "I find myself choosing men here every day over a woman with a child. If I had kids, I might not have made the same commitment to my job." This CFO also finds that motherhood hinders the careers of her own professional staff and explains why a senior vice president will not be promoted:

My senior VP has kids. She handles it well. She's got her routine. She's very disciplined. She's unique. But she only works 45 hours a week, and she couldn't stay all night to finish a deal. . . . There's a big time commitment for partners. . . . If you don't have kids, you can do it. There is no glass ceiling. It is a matter of commitment and time.

Despite her competence, such a woman is unpromotable to the highest ranks because she lacks the "commitment and time," the pseudoreligious devotion to work.

Even women who are mothers can be impatient with the pull that child rearing exerts on coworkers. Third-cohort member Elizabeth Gold, one of the two highest-ranking women in her firm, complained that female subordinates wanted to spend too much time with their children:

First, you must have a live-in nanny. I spend \$30.00 a day on cabs sending my kids to school. Yes, I spend more money than my male counterpart with a wife. But how can you be catapulted into senior levels if you are in the car pool every morning? You can't be a fabulous mom and a valuable senior member. You have to make trade-offs.

This conflict between being a "fabulous," intensive mother and a "valuable" executive is rooted in the contradiction between the family devotion and work devotion schemas.

Ms. Gold also complained about women taking their entire allotted three-month maternity leave, reasoning that if the firm could get along without them for three months, the firm did not need them at all. A female executive's pregnancy is problematic because it is a reminder of the work devotion schema's chief rival, the family devotion schema. Similarly, when another third-cohort member, Catherine Hanke, told her boss she was pregnant, he warned her not to say anything but to allow him to "disseminate this information" so that he could "put a positive spin on it." Although she was not fired, she believes that her advancement will slow.

In all three cohorts, the work devotion schema remains unaltered, yet the family devotion schema exerts a strong normative and emotional pull. The three cohorts try to resolve this contradiction in different ways. The next three sections explain the differences by showing how these women draw on cohort-specific ideal and

material resources to interpret and reconcile the conflict between dedication to their careers and devotion to their families.

First Cohort Avoids Marriage or Motherhood or Sequences Work and Family

Table 1 illustrates that about two-thirds of the 21 first-cohort members were married at the time of the interview. Yet, almost one-quarter never married, which is a rate much greater than that of the national population.³ These always-single women found the family devotion schema and their career plans irreconcilable and avoided conflict by not marrying. For example, first-cohort banker Betty Maus said,

but, no, I've never been married. I never really believed that there's a man important enough to make the compromises that you have to be married. And then quite frankly, you get to a point where you just don't have to.

She found the "compromises" of subordinating herself to a man according to the family devotion schema were not worthwhile, especially when she had no need of a man's income. In a society in which marriage is normative, the rejection of marriage appears to be an innovative solution to the conflict between work devotion and family devotion schemas. At the same time, this solution is an implicit acceptance of both schemas's demands.

In the first cohort, seven (44 percent) of the ever-married women have no children (a far greater childlessness rate than the national average; see Table 1). Like the always-single women in this cohort, these childless women circumvented the family devotion schema by avoiding family formation. This behavior implies an acceptance of the schema's claims "that career and motherhood are incompatible" (Gerson 1985, 187).

Among the nine first-cohort mothers, five did not work at full-time finance jobs until their children were in school. Thus, they fulfilled at least some of the responsibilities of a devoted mother before launching demanding new careers. This delay in launching finance careers until their children were in school was facilitated—or required—by the fact that women's access to finance positions was severely limited until the early to mid-1970s (Blair-Loy 1999).

Once they began finance careers, some mothers oriented their employment around their primary duties defined by the family devotion schema. For instance, when Dee Dee Shoemaker's children entered school, she decided against a lucrative consulting job in a large public accounting firm in favor of a job trading on the stock exchange so that she could be home in the afternoons when her children came home from school. Despite the allure of the consulting job, she preferred a job that would let her fulfill her complementary contribution to her marriage.

Most respondents, however, worked longer hours. After they started their finance jobs, there was usually a painful period of negotiation during which the entire family became accustomed to the new demands on the woman's time.

TABLE 1: Family Status of Sample versus National Population

	<i>Sample Rate</i>		<i>Ratio of Sample Rate/ All White Women Rate^a</i>
	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	
Cohort 1 (World War II era, born 1937-46, graduated 1956-68, interview age 48-60)			
Cohort <i>n</i>		21	
Never married	24	5	3.8
Married ^b (9 first + 5 remarriages)	67	14	0.9
Divorced ^b	10	2	0.7
Childless among 16 ever-married	44	7	5.2
Cohort 2 (early baby boom, born 1947-51, graduated 1969-73, interview age 43-47)			
Cohort <i>n</i>		15	
Never married	13	2	1.4
Married ^b (no remarriages)	33	5	0.4
Divorced ^b	53	8	3.8
Childless among 13 ever-married	77	10	6.4
Cohort 3 (mid baby boom, born 1952-58, graduated 1974-80, interview age 35-42)			
Cohort <i>n</i>		20	
Never married	10	2	0.7
Married ^b (13 first + 1 remarriage)	70	14	0.9
Divorced ^b	20	4	1.8
Childless among 18 ever-married	50	9	3.8

a. My sample ages differ from the national sample as follows:

Cohort 1: My sample is 48-60 years; the national sample is 48-57 years.

Cohort 2: My sample is 43-47 years; the national sample is also 43-47 years.

Cohort 3: My sample is 35-42 years; the national sample is 38-42 years.

National sample marital-status percentages are calculated from the U.S. Bureau of the Census (1992, 18, Table 1). Childlessness figures for cohorts 2 and 3 are from the U.S. Department of Commerce (1992, 71, Table 94). Age ranges are taken from 1991 ages (45-54 for cohort 1; 40-44 for cohort 2; 35-39 for cohort 3). National figures for marital status refer to white women living in a metropolitan area. The childlessness figure for cohort 1 is weighted by the proportion in the sample from age group 45-49 in 1991 (71 percent of sample), which was 9.4 percent childless when aged 40-44 in 1986 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1988, 66, Table 95), and the age group 50-54 in 1991 (29 percent of sample), which was 5.9 percent childless when aged 40-44 years in 1981 (U.S. Department of Commerce 1986, 61, Table 92). National childlessness figures are for ever-married white women.

b. Married means currently married or remarried; divorced is as of the interview date.

For example, Marge Parsons was born in 1946, married an accountant in 1968, had children, and worked part-time in a nursery school. She discussed growing up in Alabama: "Women didn't do things other than traditional female jobs. . . . And that's how I looked at work, as something you do until you get married and have children. But I also found staying home with children very grueling." After her children reached school age, she pursued a law degree. She tried to continue to fulfill her homemaking responsibilities by scheduling classes while her children were at school. But once she started practicing law, her husband resented her success.

And Jim resented it for a little bit, for a long time. It was threatening to him for awhile. . . . When I first started out of law school, I moved up very rapidly in terms of salary. As I started getting closer to his salary, it became very threatening to him.

Her children also had difficulties adjusting to the loss of their full-time mother. "We had a lot of problems with our kids during that period. . . . I mean, my oldest kid got into drugs and he's fine now, but it was a hard time."

Marge Parsons continually used the term *difficult* to describe the transformation in her family's understanding of her role. Yet, as Jim learned to accept her career commitment, she and he gradually forged a new understanding that incorporated egalitarian elements.

He used to be very proud of me for my homemaking skills. I mean, he would hold me up in front of everybody and talk about what a good cook she is. And at some point, he stopped talking about that and started talking about what a good lawyer I was. I'm not really sure when that happened, and it clearly was well after I had been practicing law.

The Parsons' marriage survived the contested and painful transformation of a hierarchical family into something closer to an egalitarian one. Nonetheless, Ms. Parsons organized the account of her life by comparing her family with the ideal family mandated by the family devotion schema.

More than half of the first-cohort members tried to circumvent the family devotion schema by avoiding marriage or motherhood; this circumvention implies an implicit acceptance of the family devotion schema's limits. Just more than half of those who did have children tried to modify the family devotion schema by sequencing family responsibilities. As Marge Parsons illustrates, the sequencers could not completely escape the contradiction between the family devotion and work devotion schemas. One way to try to resolve this dilemma is to weave some egalitarian strands into traditional marriages. In this way, the Parsons and the other married first-cohort couples with children were pioneers. In contrast, seven other first-cohort members' marriages did not survive the contradiction between the wife's emerging career commitment and the family devotion schema with which she and her husband were raised.

Second Cohort Lives Torn by Contradictions between Devotion Schemas

Marriage. The conflict between the wife's growing career dedication and the family devotion schema was even sharper for the second cohort than it had been for the first cohort. Thirteen out of the 15 second-cohort members married, but 8 are now divorced. Only 1 divorced woman attempted a remarriage, which also ended in divorce. While 5 of the 7 ever-divorced first-cohort members later married new husbands who would accommodate their careers, only 1 of the 8 divorced second-cohort members ever remarried, and this remarriage also ended in divorce (see Table 1). Divorced second-cohort members seemed to reject marriage more

decisively and bitterly than their ever-divorced counterparts in the first cohort. They experienced a fundamental contradiction between an independent career and the role of wife prescribed by the family devotion schema. I argue that this is due to the era in which they came of age and married and due to the timing of their marriages relative to career launch.

With the exception of one woman who delayed marriage until 1983, all of the 13 ever-married second-cohort members married for the first time between 1968 and 1978 (with a median year of 1972). This was a period when the wider culture took the family devotion schema for granted. For example, in the mid-1970s, two-thirds of Americans agreed with the statement that "it is much better for everyone involved if the man is the achiever outside the home and the woman takes care of the home and family" (Farley 1996). Gender-egalitarian understandings had yet to be institutionalized in the broader culture.

However, many second-cohort women had been exposed to feminist ideology in college and held contested family schemas that included both the old hierarchical and new egalitarian strands. Their husbands and boyfriends tended to believe more strongly than they did in the model of female roles ordained by the family devotion schema. For example, Marina Lugviel, a CFO of a large corporation, said that in the late 1960s and early 1970s, even relationships with politically radical men were stratified by gender.

Well, for many of us, roles changed. Thank God. But when we first lived with someone or got married, we were expected to do everything at home. The man comes home, reads the newspaper, puts his feet up. . . . And there was a lot of tension as the result of that. . . . Women in the 1960s and '70s who were part of demonstrations or whatever or in Students for [a] Democratic Society, women would do that stuff and still be submissive at home.

Second-cohort women entered adulthood with contradictory schemas and lived with or married their male peers who generally embraced the family devotion schema. The women entered these relationships with little income or other resources. Seven of the 13 ever-married cohort members were married *before* they entered the finance labor market; 5 others married three or fewer years after their finance careers began.⁴ Most began marriages without the income that might have given them bargaining power to insist that the couple adopt the embryonic cultural understanding of an egalitarian marriage.

The workplace was an important source of new schemas of egalitarian gender roles. In the early 1970s, second-cohort women could take advantage of newly sex-integrated business schools and management training programs (Blair-Loy 1999). Once launched, their finance careers caused unanticipated changes in their marriage relationships.

Whether or not the relationship survived, second-cohort women's finance careers undermined the meaningfulness of the family devotion schema in their lives. Demanding and rewarding jobs, organized under the work devotion schema, left little time or energy for homemaking. Moreover, new resources of income,

prestige, and emerging ideologies of workplace equality subverted the hierarchical relationship between husbands and wives.

Mary Woods illustrates how dedication to her work proved to be incompatible with the family devotion schema that she and her former husband had initially shared.

I loved the corporate environment. . . . I didn't want my career stifled because I didn't have an MBA, that magic degree. I got it while I worked full-time. That was the start of the nail in the coffin of my marriage. I was divorced shortly afterward. . . . We just grew apart. At one point we had talked about having a family. Those were his expectations. At some point, I made an unconscious decision not to. It took me two and a half years to get my MBA. I was just not around. I worked or I was at classes, evenings and weekends. I graduated, and I was like—I'm back now. But he'd filled that void. . . . I shouldn't have expected him to be there.

Ms. Woods' devotion to her job created a *de facto* challenge to the family devotion schema and led her, perhaps unintentionally, to abandon her responsibilities under this schema. The couple was unable to adapt or create a new schema under which the marriage could be salvaged.

As another example, Sue Jeffers believes that the contradictions between the devotion to family schema and her new career dedication were irreconcilable.

My breakup with my . . . husband was career exacerbated due to the fact that I wasn't the person he initially married. . . . I used to be home at night to put dinner on the table. Once I had my MBA, I was home at 8:00 P.M. and would leave by 5:00 A.M. He thought I was getting big for my britches. . . . But at some point, everyone he played cards with, their wives were home in the evening. He tried to be supportive.

But her husband was unable to accept her transformation into an independent professional. Ms. Jeffers graphically described an instance when she returned from a business trip and found her husband crying from loneliness. Under the rules of the old schema, she had abandoned him.

In contrast to the last few respondents who emphasized a job's impact on a personal marital relationship, Mindy Stone cites societal understandings of marriage as a threat to career success and financial independence. She married during college, she graduated in 1970, and she and her husband both began banking careers in 1972. She explains why her career accelerated after 1979.

When I divorced in 1979, my salary jumped 50 percent. We were making the same amount of money [before the divorce]. Either my employer was holding my salary close to his at his bank, or they now realized I was a free agent and they were at risk of losing me.

Twenty years later, she began cohabiting with a man in her luxurious house. She has no plans to remarry. She says, "No, I won't get married again. Society strips women of too many rights. . . . It angers me. . . . People are always surprised that a

single woman could buy such a big house." Several other first- and second-cohort women cohabit with men they met later in life and do not plan to marry. When marriage is fraught with connotations of subservience, it is unsurprising that these now older, independent women reject it.

Most second-cohort marriages were ruptured by a conflict between the wife's emerging allegiance to work and the family devotion schema's complementary, hierarchical model of marriage. Due to a lack of material and ideological resources, most failed in their semideliberate attempts to transpose an egalitarian understanding onto married life. They were unable to bridge the gap between work and family devotion schemas with new cultural rules.

On the other hand, five second-cohort women have maintained intact marriages. At least two appear to have egalitarian and companionate relationships. The members of one couple both work in financial services and spent their last long vacation hiking together in the Himalayas. The other couple is composed of two bankers; the husband has geographically relocated twice to support the wife's career. Like the currently married first-cohort couples, these stable second-cohort couples pioneered an emerging egalitarian marriage schema that would become more widely established among the third cohort.

Motherhood. Only one second-cohort woman has both an intact marriage and a child. The other four surviving marriages are childless. I suspect that most of these surviving marriages are childless because the absence of children puts less strain on the still nascent egalitarian strands in second-cohort marital unions. By the third cohort, the egalitarian strands will have become somewhat more robust and better able to incorporate parenthood into intact marriages.

The family devotion schema puts most of the child-rearing burdens on the mother. Even second-cohort members who struggled for egalitarian relationships with their husbands took for granted that children needed to be cared for by their mother.

Given this assumption, it is not surprising that 12 of the 15 second-cohort members (77 percent of the 13 ever-married women) never became mothers. For example, Mindy Stone remarks, "I couldn't give up the financial independence. . . . Raising kids is a big responsibility." Despite their desire for egalitarian relationships with men, most second-cohort members still believe in the durable cultural model of intensive motherhood, which would conflict sharply with their hard-earned career success and financial independence. Childlessness is their response to this dilemma. Some respondents experienced it as a painful loss, a forced choice given the limited options available under the reigning devotion schemas (Ireland 1993).

Choosing both work and motherhood was an option for only the three second-cohort members who foreshadowed a new definition of motherhood that became more common by the third cohort. In this new definition, mothers "are able to maintain themselves as involved mothers, despite their required absences" (Uttal 1996, 308). I call this emerging ideology the "distant mother" to describe respondents'

recurrent physical absences from the home due to long workdays and frequent business trips. (This phrase makes no assumptions or judgments about mothers' emotional closeness to their children or other aspects of their parenting styles.)

For example, Sarah Jacobs was recruited as a partner to an entrepreneurial law firm in 1976, the same year her son was born and shortly before her divorce. She hired a live-in nanny and put in very long hours. She says,

I knew before I was pregnant that there was never a way I was giving up my career and just sitting at home. . . . I couldn't have done it. It wasn't my nature. It wasn't what moved me. This profession gives me, in a lot of ways a real piece of me. . . . It's been enormously good for me, and not just financially.

Ms. Jacobs emphasizes that she found fulfillment in her career and not in holding her baby. She continually justified her adequacy as a mother during our interview. For instance, she bought a city condominium near her office and her son's private school rather than move out to the suburbs. She elaborates:

I never missed a school play, ever. . . . Never missed a parent-teacher conference. Never not read a paper before it went through. Even if I somehow had to figure out how to get it faxed to me on a business trip. Did I make milk and cookies? I have food in the house. Do all these woman [who stay home] actually serve dinner? No, I really didn't [cook dinner every night]. Do I think my kid is suffering for it? Not particularly. . . . The fact is that I think I spend more time reading his papers and discussing his books with him and giving him my input on what he wrote and making sure he studied than a lot of mothers would who stay home.

Her words have a sarcastic and defensive tone that is not audible among third-cohort women who were also often away from home. This is because she is an apostate vis-à-vis the mothering ideology that was widely shared while her son was young. Her justifications of herself as a good mother, perhaps even superior to "a lot of mothers who stay home," are implicitly in response to the family devotion schema she has forsaken. Ms. Jacobs is a cultural pioneer, who foreshadows the new distant mothering ideology. She relies on nannies and fax machines to fashion a parental relationship based on intellectual sharing rather than on spending lots of time together. By the mid-1980s to early 1990s, when third-cohort women began having children, the notions of subcontracting the traditional mothering labor out to others and spending little time personally with one's children became more firmly established in the cultural repertoire.

Third-Cohort Members Partially Redefine the Family Devotion Schema

In the third cohort, there is a resurgence of intact marriages and childbearing (see Table 1). Fourteen of the 20 third-cohort members are married, 9 are mothers, and 2 more are trying to conceive. Recall that only one woman from the second cohort had both an intact marriage and a child. In contrast, 7 third-cohort members have both a stable marriage and a child. Despite demanding careers and their embrace of

the work devotion schema, just more than half of the third-cohort members are mothers or are trying to conceive. And most have intact marriages.⁵

Marriage. Among ever-married respondents, the context in which second- and third-cohort women contracted their first marriages differed in at least two important ways. Compared with most second-cohort women, most third-cohort women married at later dates. While a majority of second-cohort women married in the late 1960s and early 1970s, 12 of the 18 ever-married third-cohort members married in the 1980s or 1990s.⁶ By that time, an emerging egalitarian schema of marriage, in which the spouses have equal power and similar rather than complementary work and domestic roles, was one part of the cultural repertoire (Farley 1996). An egalitarian schema of marriage was far from universally accepted, but the economically and educationally advantaged women in this sample were well placed to adopt it.

A related difference is that third-cohort members generally delayed marriage until after establishing themselves in their careers. The third cohort married at later ages than the earlier cohorts, partly because it enjoyed more career opportunities. By the time third-cohort members finished college, women's access to, and advancement in, finance careers had become more institutionalized. While more than half of the members of earlier cohorts worked in nonfinance jobs before eventually entering finance, virtually all of the third-cohort members specialized in finance during or immediately after college and moved quickly up job ladders (Blair-Loy 1999).

The third cohort's delay in marriage enhanced not only the schemas available to them but also their material resources. Fourteen of the 18 third-cohort ever-married women were first married *after* they had already devoted between 1 and 16 years (a median of 10 years) to their finance careers.⁷ In contrast, more than half of the first- and second-cohort women had married before or about the same time as starting finance careers. Third-cohort members' work experience provided them with cultural models of gender egalitarianism and work devotion, and the financial resources to begin developing more egalitarian marriages.

For example, Debbie Havton, an entrepreneur, worked in finance for 12 years before marrying a much younger man in the late 1980s. She says,

I was making significantly more money when we got married. . . . We handled the different incomes by having a formalized budget. Each of us has the same discretionary income. It has to do something to the male ego, but he never discussed it. We knew we were at different points in our careers.

Similarly, Penny Smith married an artist in the mid-1980s after working in finance for nine years. She claims that by the time she met him, she was already a "workaholic."

So anybody who was gonna date me had to accommodate that, and he did. And I hadn't had terribly many relationships with men in part because my work came first and

they came second. . . . It just wasn't a big deal to him. He is very self-confident, has no self-esteem problem, very independent, has his own set of friends. So if I was available, fine, if I wasn't, that was okay too. He does his own thing, he still does.

In contrast to second-cohort husbands like Mr. Jeffers, third-cohort husbands like Penny Smith's spouse are more accustomed to getting along on their own. By the time third-cohort members married, they and their partners took their career commitment for granted.

Motherhood. Respondents' adoption of the work devotion schema and an emerging egalitarian marriage model precluded the third-cohort wife from taking on a much greater burden than the husband for child care. Moreover, she and her husband took her prior career dedication for granted. These somewhat more egalitarian marriages put pressure on the motherhood role mandated by the family devotion schema. Third cohort members are reformulating the family devotion schema into a model that incorporates the mother's frequent extended absences.

All third-cohort mothers used full-time care. Two relied on regular child care from their own mothers; the rest pay for a live-in nanny or a full-time baby-sitter. Most respondents were responsible for hiring, scheduling, supervising, and—if necessary—firing their child care workers. Most of these caregivers were from racial and ethnic minority groups; many were immigrants. One respondent echoed a view widely held by this cohort that “infants and toddlers, as long as they are getting quality care, it can be done by almost anyone.” To maintain their image of themselves as adequate mothers, third-cohort members decide that young children really just need custodial care (Uttal 1996). Later, they let private schools provide much of the intellectual and moral development deemed necessary for older children.

Anna Lampe, a real estate developer who earns three times the salary of her professional husband, illustrates both a limited egalitarian schema of marriage and the schema of a mother who is often absent but who is supported by paid child care. She reports that her husband is “very good at being flexible. We have a sharing relationship in every sense of the word.” Anna says they have been “fortunate” to have had the same nanny for three years, who cares for their preschool children Pam and Joel. Anna takes the “early shift” at home before the nanny arrives at 8:00 A.M. Her husband is home by the time the nanny leaves at 6:30 P.M. Anna often works at the office until late. After dinner, her husband works past midnight in his home office. Another executive, Dorothy Green, hires a housekeeper to clean but relies on her mother for child care. She says, “I have the best possible situation. My mother sits for my children. . . . [My husband and I] both travel a lot. If necessary, my mom stays overnight.”

Dorothy Green and Anna Lampe both paint their family arrangements as “fortunate” or “the best possible situation,” that is, as desirable and normatively acceptable. Because egalitarian schemas had emerged in the broader cultural repertoire and because of wives' resources of incomes and professional identities, their attempt to transpose egalitarian schemas onto family life could partially succeed.

A few pioneers in the earlier cohorts also model the physically distant mother supplemented by a paid caregiver. First-cohort member Harriet Simpson became a corporate lawyer 11 years before having a child in 1985. Now a managing partner in a large law firm, she works long hours and earns 95 percent of the family income. Her husband helps the nanny raise their daughter. This arrangement accommodates her intense work devotion.

I work long, hard hours now. . . . I was never conflicted about a career. Once I decided to go to law school, I intended to do it full-time for the rest of my life. It never would have occurred to me to change my level of involvement.

Like Sarah Jacobs (whose son faxes her his homework), Ms. Simpson's justifications of herself as a good mother are directed against the family devotion schema, which she explicitly rejects as an excuse for women to weaken their career commitment:

As a mom who works full time, you can't believe that you are at all times the most significant person in your child's life. . . . If you secretly want your child to cling to you, that's what will happen. If you aren't completely convinced that you want to keep doing what you're doing, it's very easy for children to be the reason to lessen commitment. It's almost an excuse if you're afraid to go the distance.

Harriet Simpson discusses both the privileges and the responsibilities of being the primary breadwinner. She enjoys not having to cook but worries about her financial responsibility to her family:

I feel the pressures when you're largely responsible, the pressures that men in the same position feel also. . . . That they'll be taken care of if I die. I worry about the responsibility of amassing enough money.

Ms. Simpson explains that she cares as deeply about her family as any intensive mother but expresses that care by being a good provider.

Yet, embodying the new schema of distant mothering is not automatic or easy. Ms. Simpson's and Ms. Jacobs's elaborate justifications are hints of the ideological work mothers do to relinquish the family devotion schema's assumption of mothers' intensive and continual presence in their children's lives. Others speak directly about the difficulty of abandoning the family devotion schema. Third-cohort member Anna Lampe, who had said how "fortunate" she was to have a long-term nanny, nevertheless feels conflicted about her work and family arrangements.

I often don't see my children one and a half hours every night. . . . I want to participate in Pam's activities. I've missed her snack days. I can't even remember to find time to buy a few bottles of juice and bags of cookies. It's traumatic, for her and for me.

By the last sentences, she had lost her professional demeanor and was close to tears. Providing for her daughter's snack day was one of the few mothering duties she personally performed, and thus it took on great symbolic weight. Forgetting that duty was an indictment against her worthiness as a mother. In her and in many executive mothers' minds, the "distant mothering" schema and the family devotion schema are tangled in painfully competing strands.

Catherine Hanke, a third-cohort financial services executive, was strongly tempted to stay home full-time for a while after her baby was born. She explained,

When I had the baby, my very supportive husband, he really is, he does fully 50 percent of the housework and child care. He said I had to decide what works best for me. . . . if I should stay home for one to two years before going back. A piece of me thought that is what the really perfect mother would do. . . . It was an internal battle, between wanting to perceive myself as a perfect mother but knowing I couldn't fit into it. It was my own role definition crisis. [But] I would have lost my sanity if I'd stayed home.

Cultural change often occurs as the outcome of a struggle between different ideologies, different models of a worthwhile and desirable life, enacted in the lives of people responding to social structural change. In the midst of cultural conflict, third-cohort members are trying to create a new culture of motherhood. Yet, their efforts are marked by ambivalence and pain as they struggle with the family images ordained by the family devotion schema.

From the perspective of third-cohort finance executives, much has changed. They can embrace the roles of marriage and motherhood rejected by many older cohort members because these roles have been somewhat transformed. The third-cohort mothers have more or less successfully transposed a limited egalitarian schema onto their domestic roles. Like fathers, they are dedicated breadwinners, do little housework, and parent from a distance.

Yet, this creation of a new culture is limited by the logic of the older family devotion model. The distant-mothering schema preserves the gendered and hierarchical logic of the devotion to the family schema. Men are still breadwinners and overseers. It is women's responsibility to subcontract out the traditional mothering labor to women who are from racial and ethnic minority groups and/or from lower social classes.

CONCLUSION

The women in this study represent an extreme end of the distribution of employed women. They have attained extraordinary financial and professional success in male-dominated occupations, achieving parity with comparable men and indeed surpassing many men in similar occupations. They have embraced the

traditionally masculine schema of devotion to work and fulfilled its strenuous demands. Yet, at the same time, the respondents remain beholden to the schema of devotion to family. They are living out their lives in the conflict between these two schemas. Although the different cohorts responded differently to this conflict, the family devotion schema remained a cognitive, normative, and emotional polestar in their lives.

At the level of this occupational group, the logic of the family devotion schema remains gendered and hierarchical for the third cohort. Most housekeeping and child rearing are still performed by women, who are often members of a subordinated class and minority racial ethnic groups. Respondents, not their husbands, retain ultimate responsibility for their children's care. This family responsibility will continue to clash with their work devotion.

At the level of the individual, cognitive, emotional, and normative assumptions from the family devotion schema continue to shape respondents' interpretations of their family situations. First- and second-cohort members were particularly likely to remain childless, partly due to an implicit acceptance of the family devotion schema. Even many third-cohort mothers remain haunted by the normative image of what Catherine Hanke calls the "perfect mother," the enduring remnants of the family devotion schema. Even among these resourceful and privileged executives, gender as expressed in the family devotion schema maintains a tenacious grip on women's hearts and minds. Further research should study the extent to which, in more general populations, this durable cultural model continues to attenuate women's career commitment and compromise their work accomplishments (Garey 1999).

My devotion schemas are useful analytic tools in understanding change and stability in executive women's work and family lives across three historically specific time periods. These schemas elucidate how people can simultaneously conform to and challenge gendered social structures. The family devotion schema had to be modified before most respondents could build demanding careers while raising children. But women could not alter this schema without certain ideological and material resources, which most first- and second-cohort members lacked. In contrast, the third cohort entered finance after cultural ideals of gender egalitarianism were at least partially institutionalized at work. They married relatively late, after men had begun to share this cultural idea and after amassing the high incomes that gave them power in family decisions. They thus enjoyed the ideological and material resources that allowed them to transpose the egalitarian schema from the workplace onto their domestic roles and thereby combine demanding careers with having children.

This case study illustrates how schemas and resources enable action (Alexander 1988; Sewell 1992). Usually, people more or less unwittingly reproduce social structures. Yet, when actors find themselves at the intersection of contradictory or multivalent sets of social structures, they may have enhanced opportunities for action because they can reinterpret a given set of structures differently according to competing cultural schemas. Agency occurs when people extend or transpose

schemas onto new situations, thus changing the definition of the situation. This allows them to reinterpret and recast social structures. The third-cohort members more or less successfully transposed egalitarian schemas newly learned at work onto their family lives, changed their and their families' definitions of marriage and motherhood, and thus could combine motherhood with demanding executive careers.

At the same time, this analysis illustrates how cultural schemas can constrain action (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). Specifically, it portrays the tenacity of gender as expressed in the family devotion schema, even among these beneficiaries of the women's movement. Gender remains a "master status" that executive women continue to feel and do in older ways, despite emerging opportunities in the professional workplace (Hughes 1945; West and Zimmerman 1987). Gender does even more than structure institutions, order interactions, and organize cognition. Through devotion schemas, it powerfully and personally mandates the moral and the desirable; it helps define the life worth living.

NOTES

1. This model began forming when production began shifting from family farms to factories and distinctions appeared between men's wage labor in the public sphere and women's domestic work in the private sphere (Cott 1977; Skolnick 1991). Family norms are generally defined by the white middle-class family. Working class, minority, and immigrant women have always worked for wages while doing domestic work (Nakano Glenn, Chang, and Rennie Forcey 1994).

2. Limitations of the cohort comparison include (1) the greater opportunity for selective attrition in the older cohorts and (2) the possibility of future attrition of married mothers from cohort 3.

3. I did not ask about sexual orientation. No one identified herself as a lesbian.

4. Second-cohort members contracted their first marriages between nine years before and six years after starting finance careers, with a median of being married for one year before career launch.

5. Table 1 gives a snapshot picture, not a representation of these rates over the lifetime. Heuristic extrapolations of the likelihood of divorce over time by cohort suggest that the second-cohort members' higher incidence of divorce is not due to differing lengths of marriage. Similarly, second-cohort members' lower incidence of childbearing than the other cohorts is not due to differing lengths of marriage. Detailed calculations are available from the author.

6. The third cohort's first marriages occurred between 1974 and 1993, with a median of 1982.

7. Overall, third-cohort marriages were contracted between 1 year prior to and 16 years after beginning finance careers, with a median of starting the career 5 years before marrying.

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