CHAPTER 3

Mothers: INTERWEAVING WORK AND RELATIONSHIPS

The lives led by the mothers in our study were diverse, much more so than the fathers'. Our pager found Anne, a full-time special education teacher, preparing the family’s supper, then returning to school in the evening to judge science exhibits. Our pager found Sara, a full-time housemaker, spending the morning hemming her husband's new suit, then sharing a confidence with a friend over lunch. For the men we studied there is a single mold: They get up, go to work, and come home to their families; the essential structure of their lives is fixed. For women there are multiple templates, an array of competing and historically changing conceptions of how they should spend their time and energy.

Across cultures and historic periods, social norms have often restricted women’s involvement in public life, limiting their activities to the home. It was once argued that public life and wage labor were too coarse for women. In the 1960s, however, a new set of voices began attacking the home as a degrading prison for women. Betty Friedan painted the housewife role as one that inevitably results in alienation, exhaustion, and meaninglessness. She decried the “ludicrous consignment of millions of women to spend their days at work an eight-year-old can do.”

Taking these sentiments to an extreme, Germaine Greer asserted that a housewife’s life is not “real” and that raising children is “not a real occupation.”

Thus women’s presence in both spheres—the workforce and domestic labor—has been challenged in public debate. Sara’s decision to be a full-time housewife is held in low regard by some circles of our society, just as Anne’s full-time employment is criticized in others. Yet such criticisms are often made with little concern for what women actually feel.
In this chapter we examine what women like Sara and Anne experience as they go about their lives. What are the emotions engendered by women's role as mothers and homemakers? Is it as bleak as Friedan and Greer described it, or can a full-time housewife like Sara have a buoyant life? And what type of emotional experience do women like Anne encounter in a full-time job? Does employment increase the negative emotion in their lives, or provide something that is missing from their existence at home?

Beneath these questions is the fundamental issue of how the two-parent family is organized. The traditional division of labor between mothers and fathers was based on the assumption that their labors were comparable: he “slaved” at his job; she “slaved” at home. But is this assumption valid, especially when she is employed? The family therapist Virginia Goldner suggests that if we found the balance of “suffering and pleasure” to be unequally distributed, it would challenge how our society constructs family life.\(^4\)

**The Evolution of Women's Family Role**

The way the women in our study spend their time has been shaped by historically changing visions of “women's nature.” Nineteenth-century farm mothers were a premodern version of “supermom.” They worked in the fields, nurtured children, and often earned additional income for the family on the side. Life was often brutal; it was not uncommon for husbands to die prematurely or abandon the family, leaving women with full responsibility for the farm.\(^5\)

In the late nineteenth century, however, our society developed a radically different image of women’s nature and how women should spend their time. As husbands took wage-earning jobs, mothers—in theory, at least—became full-time guardians of the home sphere. The mother’s job, according to popular writings, was to create a “happy home” for the rest of the family; professional home economists developed the conception of “mothercraft” into a scientific vocation.\(^6\) Among the middle and upper classes emerged the ideal of the Victorian “lady,” who was thought too genteel and pious to deal with the cruel and unseemly outside world.\(^7\) This rationale and this image of women’s nature became so powerful that the U.S. Supreme Court upheld laws barring women from certain occupations.\(^8\)

But the “naturalness” of this new conception of how women should spend time was beleaguered in a number of ways. To begin with, working-class mothers, whose families could not afford the middle-class ideal, functioned successfully as both workers and mothers. They labored in sweatshops or domestic service to keep children in school and, by their efforts, elevated a whole generation into the middle class.\(^9\) Even many middle-class mothers
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participated behind the scenes in income-generating labor and brought in substantial income by taking boarders, sewing, or selling eggs. It is estimated that 25 percent of a family's total income at the turn of the century came from these sources. In very few cases were men really the sole financial providers.

Further, the conception that women did not fit in the public sphere was quickly set aside in wartime, when women readily took their place in the workforce. During World War II, women's employment rose dramatically, as "ladies" were asked to perform jobs such as welder and riveter, previously thought feasible only for men. Seemingly overnight, the war changed the public's attitude toward women working, from outright condemnation to tolerance. The "nature of woman" had been redefined, at least temporarily. Suddenly she was capable and strong enough to hold the kind of job previously thought possible only for a man.

Despite women's demonstrated capability, after World War II "ultradomesticity" once again became the ideal, and beliefs about women's "true nature" were revived. Returning soldiers needed jobs, so women were not only expected and urged to quit, but at times fired to make room for men. Reinforcing this ideal, magazines of the 1950s were filled with bright and smiling housewife/mothers, who cherished their "unique femininity." Talcott Parsons and other social scientists of the 1950s sanctified the ideal types of the instrumental male who brings home the bacon and the expressive domestic female who is a "professional" at cooking it. Although many women continued in their jobs, Parsons wrote, "there can be no question of symmetry between the sexes, and there is no serious tendency in this direction." Motherhood became glorified and home was deemed the proper place for a woman.

Yet from 1900 to today, more and more women, including married women, have sought work outside the home, and demographers project the employment rate for married women to surpass 80 percent by the year 2000. In the early part of the century, this change was attributable to improved birth control and development of occupations related to women's roles as homemakers, such as nurse, secretary, and teacher. In the second half of the century, economic factors have fueled the dramatic acceleration of women's employment: Diminishing male wages since 1970 have confronted families with a declining standard of living and given many women little choice but to seek employment. Nearly eight in ten adults now believe that "it is getting to be impossible to support a family on just one income." These repeated historical changes, then, show that definitions of "women's nature" and associated injunctions about how women should spend their time shift as society's needs shift. If society needs extra factory
workers, women are hired. If men need those jobs, women are told they should be at home. If the family needs more money, Mom goes to work. If the couple is getting divorced, the mother cares for the children and holds a job.

NO SINGLE PATTERN

Because of this inconsistent legacy, the outward structure of contemporary women’s lives varies greatly from person to person. Some women face enormous pressures on their time. All the mothers in our study were European-American, lived in working- and middle-class two-parent families, and only a handful had preschool children, yet we cannot describe a typical day for them as we did for their husbands. About a third were full-time homemakers, a third held part-time jobs, and a third held full-time jobs.

All these women reported at least a little time outside the household sphere: visiting friends, shopping, or going to the doctor. But for many full-time homemakers, like Sara, this amount was quite small. On the average, the full-time homemakers we studied spent a consuming 90 percent of their waking time in their role as wife and mother. One woman who provided forty-five random reports on her life was beeped only once outside her household role. She did go out—she drove the children places and went shopping—but it was always as a part of her role as a mother. For most full-time homemakers, the family role dominated their time.

In contrast, the full-time employed mothers, like Anne, divided their week equally between their domestic and public lives. Adding their time at work to other time away from their maternal role, they spent 46 percent of their waking hours in the public sphere. Because of their jobs, the employed women spent less time than the housewives in every category of family and household activity: less time in housework, family transportation, leisure, and talk. For Anne, who worked forty hours a week or more at her job, all these activities were packed into evenings and weekends.

Many commentators see an injustice in the number of hours that employed mothers work, especially compared to fathers’. When we consider total work time, including household work and paid work, the women employed full-time spent more of their waking hours laboring than their husbands did. These mothers put in as many hours at their jobs as men, but household work accounted for 23 percent of these women’s time and only 14 percent of the men’s time. What is striking is that husbands do not markedly increase their contribution to household work when their
wives are employed, even when their wives earn as much pay as they do.19 Employed women come home each evening to a pile-up of tasks—in the words of the sociologist Arlie Hochschild, to a “second shift.”20

When the issue is total work time, then, employed mothers like Anne have the most arduous days, and homemakers like Sara have the least arduous. The full-time homemakers we studied spent more time than other women in household work, but this does not begin to equal the total time that employed women (and men) devoted to their jobs and household work.21 Of course, such time estimates can be deceptive—we do not know, for example, whether some of the talking these mothers did should have been categorized as family management and how much of their seemingly leisurely day might be tied up by household obligations, such as waits between driving children from one activity to another. On the other hand, Betty Friedan cites findings that the typical housewife works inefficiently and that Parkinson’s Law is in effect: her work expands to fill the available time.22 If Friedan is right, then these assessments of time overestimate the actual amount of work homemakers accomplished.

Such assessments of time, however, get us only so far. To evaluate the magnitude of people’s toil, we should consider not just the minutes and hours they clock in, but also the tribulations they endure. We must ask, What is the underlying emotional quality of women’s daily experience? What balance of “suffering and pleasure” do they encounter in the different segments of their lives, and how does it compare to their husbands’?

**WOMEN AT HOME**

“I am the glue that keeps the house together,” said one of the part-time-employed women we studied. “My primary responsibility is to be a wife and mother.” Similar investment in the day-to-day care of their families is reported by Anne, Sara, and other women in the research. Tradition has assigned the sphere of children and home to mothers, and most women continue to take this assignment to heart. For nearly all the women in the study, home is the central context of their lives. Although employment reduces the number of hours women spend on domestic tasks, home and family remain a primary focus of their energy. No matter how time is examined, whether by the activities they did, where they spent time, or the thoughts they reported, all the mothers in our study were heavily involved with their families.

The fact that women are invested in their household activities, however, does not mean they enjoy them. Women are invested in part because they have been socialized from an early age to see household work as their responsibility. Indeed, we found that the teenage girls in our study reported
more favorable experiences than boys when doing such work. But have they been sold a bill of goods? Does women's homelife, with its mix of work and leisure activities, provide fulfilling hour-to-hour experiences, or is it depleting and empty, as Betty Friedan and Germaine Greer charged?

The Emotions of Child Care

Care of children is the traditional rationale linking women to the home sphere. Indeed, it is the reason many women stay home. "My kids need me," Sara explained. "You can't put the time and energy into this if you're not home." But what about her needs? What does she feel?

Sara was the mother of five children, ages four to eighteen, and while her family could benefit from the income if she were employed, she valued the flexibility she had. Our interviewer described Sara as an energetic and physically fit woman with short-cropped hair and an optimistic disposition. She had many happy moments caring for her children; for example, she described the pleasure she gets when her four-year-old says, "I need a hug." Her beeper reports, however, showed that her children kept her running and often brought her mood down. On Monday, for example, she was overwhelmed by a deluge of fast-breaking events and demands: her eldest daughter had just broken her foot; another daughter had a friend over; her son forgot his gym socks at home.

Our data show that for every happy moment taking care of children, mothers also experience an unhappy one. The mothers in our study reported more frequent pride and cooperativeness during child care than during other activities, but also more frequent anger. This is true of employed mothers and homemakers equally. A part-time sales clerk, for example, reported several of her most positive moments talking with her son and driving him to school, but also three of her lowest times: once at his baseball game complaining to the umpire about a bad call and twice during discussions with him about his messy room. Another woman enjoyed tickling her eight-month-old daughter at one moment, then at another was furious because "I can't control my baby. The baby wants all the attention; she doesn't let me do anything."

Researcher Anne Wells has found that mothers' self-esteem often takes a beating when they are with their children. Asked about the "worst time" of the week, many mothers in our study described stressful situations with their children: getting a resistant girl off to school, breaking up a fight between siblings, figuring out what to do about a son whose temper was creating a problem in the classroom.
When you add up all these negative and positive moments, mothers' average mood during child care was significantly lower than the consistently positive moods reported by fathers (see figure 3.1). The reason for the difference, of course, is that mothers experience less choice. Unlike fathers, who generally have to be in a good mood before they will take care of the children, mothers are not able to excuse themselves when things get more difficult. They cannot evade the whining, taunting, and defiance that kids sometimes dish out.

Sara often reported that she was doing something for her children not because she wanted to, but because it had to be done. Once she reported reading a children's book, *Wishes Come True*, to her four-year-old, but felt hurried and slightly angry because she'd been rushing all day and there was still much to be done. Ironically, while Sara read this optimistic story to her daughter, her own wishes counted for little. And the next day she drove through three inches of "treacherous" new snow to take her son his basketball socks. "The roads are terrible," she wrote, "but I can't tell him to play without socks." Then she added: "Why not?"

**Figure 3.1**

MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' EMOTION DURING ACTIVITIES IN THE HOUSEHOLD SPHERE

![Diagram showing emotions during household activities](image)

Figure displays average emotions for each activity.

* p < .10, † p < .05
The answer to this rhetorical question, according to the family sociologist Arlene Skolnick, is that women have internalized care of children as a "moral enterprise." Because it was part of their traditional role and part of their socialization, full-time homemakers like Sara, as well as employed mothers like Anne, feel a rock-bottom commitment to tending to their children’s well-being, irrespective of their own needs. While men withdraw from child care when they want, for women there is no choice. It is typically women who get up at 3 A.M. to deal with a child’s illness, for example. Regardless of how difficult and unpleasant looking after a child might become, the task falls to the mother.

The Daily Grind of Housework

Along with child care, mothers acquired housework as part of the duties of their traditional role. Because housework is part of their “job,” the low moods women reported during housework—states much lower than those that accompany child care—may be dismissed by some as part of the traditional exchange between women and men. We found that fathers’ states at their jobs were not always pleasant; isn’t housework comparable toil for mothers?

Our data indicate that women’s experience of housework is bleaker than men’s experience of their jobs. Women reported feeling less happy, cheerful, and strong during housework than their husbands felt at their jobs. This is true of both employed and unemployed women: both Anne and Sara reported dull, empty moments doing laundry, washing dishes, and cleaning up after other people.

More significant than their low moods, however, may be our finding that women reported less than half the rate of deep attention during housework that men reported at their jobs. They also reported much less frequent interest and less feeling of skill. In discussing men’s work, we introduced the concept of “flow,” a rewarding psychological experience of getting caught up in and enjoying a task. Men frequently experience this state at their paid jobs, as do employed women at theirs. But women’s low rates of attention and interest during housework suggest that flow is rare during their traditional “job.” Indeed, when asked to describe an occasion of deep absorption during the week, only one woman mentioned a time when she was doing housework. A housewife who had spent the weekend cooking explained that it provided a “creative outlet,” something that could hardly be said about most household chores.

The structure of housework simply does not lend itself to deep and
engaging absorption. Flow requires a "channel" of novel challenges to pit one's skills against, according to Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi; however, most housework is extremely repetitive and one is hard-pressed to find such novelty or challenge in it. One researcher found that 65 percent of housework tasks need to be done again the next day. Thus a mother who described flow experiences during church work reported that it just does not happen at home: "It's harder to focus with family. There's too much functioning by rote." Most of women's household tasks are also short, taking less than fifteen minutes, further precluding deep involvement. In fact, women often have to handle several of these tasks at once. Sara complained on Monday that she could not even get lunch made because there were so much interruptions. While many men have the freedom to spend Saturday afternoon immersing themselves in the challenge of repairing the garage roof or building a playhouse, the tasks that mostly women do—laundry, cleaning the floor, picking up after children—do not allow immersion.

Instead of "flow," researcher Catherine Berheide describes the mental state of housework as vacant or "numb"; Friedan calls it "narcolepsy." Researchers Marie Allison and Margaret Duncan discover frequent "anti-flow." It is not that women always feel unhappy, irritable, or angry when doing housework. They more often feel nothing; they feel tired and weak; they report little desire to be doing what they are doing.

Rather than being a personal challenge, much of women's housework is motivated by feelings of obligation. This sense of inescapable duty is evident in one nurse's report that she felt tired and bored "because I don't really want to be cleaning house." This sense of obligation, of course, comes from without and within. On the one hand, children and husbands are uninhibited in making claims on mothers' time. On the other hand, women are socialized to be invested in getting things done right and to experience housework as a test of their worth. Whether the issue is the cleanliness of the house or the quality of the dinner, a mother is likely to view herself—and be viewed by others—as responsible. In the case of William's wife, Alice, it is simple: "I don't like housework, but feel guilty when I don't do it."

In comparison to men's jobs, then, housework provides a less satisfying kind of psychological experience. Women face frustrations like those in paying jobs, but not the rewards. To make matters worse, many women feel that their labors are rarely appreciated. One woman said it was only when she got a job that family members realized how much she did around the house. Society attaches little value to "women's work," diminishing a wom-
an's sense of importance as a homemaker, wife, and mother. A full-time kindergarten teacher described the end of summer as one of her worst times of the year: "I felt like a maid. . . . Every year at this time in August I'm ready to go back to school. I get tired of waiting on everyone."

Housework is a black hole for women: it sucks up hours of dull, often solitary labor for which they get little back.36 But do the other domestic activities interspersed with family work make up for this emotional drain?

**Self-Care, Rest, and Eating**

The time women spend in various personal-care activities might provide the opportunity for self-nurturance and the experience of a more positive state. Yet when we look at self-care activities, such as bathing, grooming, and dressing, we find they were second only to housework in the low emotional states they created for the mothers in our study (see figure 3.1). Certainly there were exceptions: One mother was beeped during a long, luxurious bath. In general, however, these activities were not relaxing; they more often produced feelings of frustration and weakness.

The reason for these negative states, we suspect, is that self-beautification, which accounts for a major segment of this time, is an activity that produces a sense of conflict and limited choice for women in our society. From early childhood, they learn that being physically attractive is a key to success and to pleasing others. In fact, studies confirm that a woman's attractiveness increases her likelihood of being promoted at her job, and it even affects qualities of her marital life.37 One husband commented to his wife that he was tired of seeing her in the same dress—reinforcing the cultural message that looking attractive is part of women's role.

When women are putting on makeup or attempting to select the right outfit, they may be only too aware that society's idealized standards of youth and beauty—dictated by a multibillion-dollar cosmetic and fashion industry—are unattainable. In a culture where maintaining one's appearance is essential to feeling successful and confident, it is understandable that self-beautification activities would generate frustration and feelings of powerlessness.

Resting and idling are little more effective in raising women's mood in the home sphere (see figure 3.1). Anne had a pause at 4:10 P.M. Thursday, but she was preoccupied with figuring out what to make for supper. Likewise, Sara sat down for a moment on Monday at 1:44 P.M., but she was trying to think through finding a baby-sitter for her four-year-old.
Eating, however, stands out for these mothers as a consistent positive activity. When eating, women reported that they were content; in fact, they were slightly happier than men at these times. In between running all day and working all evening, Anne, for example, found eating dinner with her family to be one of her few chances to sit down and relax. In addition to eating, we might expect that women's leisure would compensate for the strain of family work.

*Mothers' Household Leisure: An Oxymoron?*

When we look at these women's TV watching, we see that this leisure activity has an even more emotionally numbing effect on them than it has on their husbands. The women reported fewer positive and fewer negative states during media than during other activities. They may turn on the TV in hopes of finding an emotional antidote to the emptiness of housework, but TV is usually ineffective in lifting their mood.

These women did experience reading as more favorable. Several mentioned the value of getting away from it all and curling up with their current book. One reported feeling relaxed while reading a romance novel, explaining that "I was doing what I enjoy," and added a comment on how mean one of the characters always was to her sister. Another noted how she considered the time between 9:30 and 10:30 PM, after the kids were asleep, her "little vacation"—a time when she could sit in bed and read. But while women were more likely to report absorbed attention when reading and little desire to be doing anything else, their emotional state was not more positive than during TV.

Active recreation, in contrast, produced more pleasurable experiences for these women, although not to the same extent as for the men. Women reported the same activities as men—sports, games, family outings—but the emotional rewards for women weren't as strong. Furthermore, these activities do not appear to have had the lasting aftereffects on mood that we saw for men's recreation.

Thus, while providing some pleasure, mothers' household leisure appears to be less "leisurely" than fathers' (see figure 3.1). Indeed, several authors have questioned whether "leisure" is an accurate term for mothers' free time at home. For one thing, household responsibilities often intrude into their minds or "lurk in a menacing way." They may be watching TV, but they are thinking about what to prepare for tomorrow's picnic, or worrying about a child's Halloween costume. For another thing, mothers' leisure is more often sandwiched between other activities. While fathers
have the luxury of getting deeply absorbed in TV or a game, mothers have to fit leisure activities into shorter, more unpredictable time periods. The phone rings, the plumber arrives, a child needs attention—and Mother’s leisure comes to an end.

Because of their household responsibilities, women are less able to establish a boundary between work and leisure at home. They experience less control over their time in the home sphere. While men see leisure as a “right” they earn by their work, many women believe they aren’t entitled to take time off for themselves. Many housewives feel they have not earned it; employed women feel that if they have any additional time, they want to spend it with their children.

Anne articulated the constraints on women’s leisure at home. After a long day of teaching and dealing with the family’s needs, she said, she enjoyed going off by herself to read. But frequently, “the children follow me. I sometimes ask them if I can please be alone. But sometimes I feel that their need to be with me is greater than my need to be alone.”

Conversation: The Medium of Mothering

Talk with others, whether in person or by phone, accounts for the remaining large segment of women’s household time. Full-time homemakers in our study reported twice as much time in “family talk” as employed women, but even employed mothers reported more talk than men.

Conversation was a major part of these women’s household activity, yet their moods during it were less positive than men’s (see figure 3.1). This contradiction—spending more time in a less pleasurable activity—is explained by the fact that this conversation often served a different function for women. Mothers are more often the family “kin-keeper,” the person who maintains contacts with relatives, as well as friends and neighbors. Robinson found gender differences in husbands’ and wives’ topics of conversation. Women talked more about home-centered things, such as child care, personal needs, health concerns, and family and friends; men more about work and news events. These same differences are suggested in our data. It is usually the wife who stays in touch with grandparents, plans gatherings with family friends, and arranges for neighbors to feed the cat during the family’s summer vacation.

Thus less of women’s family talk is pure leisure and more is care-giving, or cultivating the family’s social ties. Compared to their husbands, the mothers in our study reported much more talk with neighbors and relatives, usually their mothers, sisters, and occasionally sisters-in-law. And in a crisis situation, it was usually the mother who sprang into action. This hap-
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pened with Laura and Jay, a working-class couple. When they learned that his sister's husband, who was sick, had left home and had not returned, it was not Jay but Laura who got on the phone to help think the situation through.

Part of the reason women's talk is less pleasurable, then, is that it is often instrumental; indeed, it can be quite taxing. Women are called on to resolve family crises, as well as misunderstandings and hurt feelings. Rather than receiving gratitude for her efforts, Laura commented "families don't appreciate your help at times." In response to a different situation, she noted "how my mother gets so upset when I get anything. She gets so jealous. I'm tired of feeling guilty and trying to hide things." Women typically assume the role of trying to work through complex feelings in a family, and sometimes they find themselves in no-win situations.

Much of mothers' conversation with children is also care-giving. Many mothers have a chat with their children to check in after school. On Friday evening at 8:56 P.M., the beeper found Sara having discussions with her three teenage children about where each was going that night and who would be driving.

Mothers' talk, then, is central to their activities as mothers. It is through this medium that they become the glue that keeps the family together. Denigrations of women's household role, such as those made by Greer and Friedan, neglect this caring part of what they do. This is not "eight-year-old" stuff. Mothers' traditional household role involves much more than the material tasks of cleaning and cooking, it involves these important executive tasks of tending to the emotional and social needs of the family. DeVault (1991) demonstrated that even cooking involves much more than assembling a meal; women devote much thought and care to preparing food that family members like and, in some cases, a dinner experience that brings the family together. As Lopata (1971) wrote, "The important and difficult actions of mothers lie not so much in specific tasks or activities they perform, but in the thought they devote to managing a household."

The problem, however, is that this caring can be emotionally draining and unrewarding.

The Emotional Ecology of Women's Homelife: Paradox #1

As we look across all the women's time at home, we find that their average emotional states were less favorable than when they were away from the household sphere. And they were certainly less favorable than
fathers’ states at home. The pleasures of meals and leisure do not counterbalance the aggravations of housework, the stresses of child care, and the insecurities associated with self-care. This is true for employed women and full-time homemakers equally.

The reason the home sphere is not pleasant for women is succinctly captured by looking at where different family members feel “hurried” (see appendix 3.1). Husbands reported feeling hurried at work and much less so with their families. Likewise, children reported feeling hurried at school and much less hurried with their families. Mothers, however, felt hurried both at home and away from home. There was no letup for them. Whether they were brushing their hair or talking, they felt more rushed at home than their husbands did. Neither employed women nor full-time housewives found home a place of rest and repose. There is always another dish to wash or crisis to deal with.

The depleting effect of a mother’s household activities is suggested when we examine the mental health of those women who put the most time into them. Our analyses looked at the women who reported the most housework and those who reported spending the most time in the home sphere. Statistical manipulations were used to adjust for their hours of employment. The striking finding is that these women were more depressed. Irrespective of whether a woman was employed full-time, part-time, or not at all, spending more time doing housework and in the home sphere were associated with greater depression. Of course, this finding does not prove that one causes the other, but the suggestion is chilling: that the traditional activities assigned to women are not good for their mental health.

We thus come to the first major paradox, or trap, that defines the structure of women’s lives. On the one hand, they are strongly invested in their family role. They recognize it to be important; they have been socialized to see it as central to who they are. But they discover it to be lacking in immediate emotional gratification. Much of their labor, especially housework, is dull, repetitive, and unappreciated. Paradox #1 is that they are invested in a role that is frequently draining. A mother’s traditional role is to make the home “happy,” yet she is not happy playing that role.

Arlie Hochschild attributes this situation to a stalled revolution. As our data show, men are hardly waiting with dustmops in hand to take over an equal share of the housekeeping burden. Husbands do not increase their contribution to housework when their wives are employed. Even when fathers do contribute, Mom may have to supervise Dad’s family work, and
in some cases he may do it so poorly that she has to do it over again.\textsuperscript{51} Although there is some evidence that men are very gradually increasing their share of time in housework, they are clearly resistant.\textsuperscript{52}

But simply to blame men is to miss part of the paradox. Many women are undecided about whether they want to sacrifice the power that more equitable sharing would entail, especially when they are not guaranteed equivalent power in the job sphere. In some cases they resist or even undercut their husband's efforts to share what they see as their domain.\textsuperscript{53} One father described overseeing a young child's lunch, when his wife stepped in front of him and took over, as if he were not there. One survey found that only a quarter to a third of mothers say their husbands should be doing more housework.\textsuperscript{54} Women are fundamentally invested in their role of mother and household manager, even though it is not a pleasant one.

\textit{Sara's World: The Life of a Housewife}

The full-time homemakers in our study lived this paradox hourly. While family work is emotionally unRewarding, it was their main source of self-worth. They spent an average of 90 percent of their time in the household sphere, a substantial part of it doing family work. And despite the value many women place on social interaction, these women lived more solitary lives than women who were employed.\textsuperscript{55}

As a result of this situation, some of the full-time housewives in the study led a pretty drab existence. On the average, we found that full-time homemakers reported feeling weak more often than employed women did. In chapters 6 and 8, we introduce you to a number of homemakers who have clearly suffered from being trapped by their role.

Nonetheless, some homemakers, like Sara, were doing quite well. We found that in spite of the depleting nature of family work, many of the full-time homemakers in the study spoke favorably about their situation. They liked the freedom they had to choose when to do certain chores and the time to do what they wanted when the chores were done. The greater time they spent in the noxious experience of housework was balanced by greater time in leisure or discretionary activities outside the home. In an extensive study of American housewives, the sociologist Helena Lopata found that, far from leading a unidimensional existence, many live rich, imaginative, and complex lives.\textsuperscript{56}

Sara had dull and bleak experiences of household labor, as other women did, but she also seemed genuinely to enjoy caring for others. At the first beep she was eating out with her husband, helping him think about ways to
lose weight. The next morning she was having coffee with a friend, discussing the destructive effects of alcoholism on the friend’s marriage. That night, the beeper caught her in conversation with her husband about the medical treatment for her father, whom she thought was dying. And the next day she mobilized the family to help their eighteen-year-old daughter, who had broken her foot. Sara’s life went on like this, full of personal problems and resolutions. Her mood dipped when she worried about her father’s illness, but more often she felt cheerful when helping and added notes about how “courageous” or “resilient” people are in the face of adversity.

Sara enjoyed caring for others, but did not neglect her own needs—an occupational hazard of housewives. She said that she valued time by herself and recognized the calming effect it has on her. In between mopping the floor and tending to the dog, she snatched time to go off and work on a quilt or finish the Sarton novel she was reading. Like other homemakers, she spent much time alone, but she said, “I enjoy being alone.”

The key to Sara’s emotional buoyancy appears to be her activities outside the home. In addition to her informal counseling of friends, she spent a day volunteering at the high school cafeteria and taught a class on parenting skills on Monday nights; in the past she had done political work. She was also known in the neighborhood for her skill at designing decorative curtains and brought in some additional family income this way. “I enjoy the challenge of hanging curtains,” she reported while doing it, and when it is completed, she expresses happiness at how “great it looks.” Sara counteracted the emptiness of housework by involvement in these activities outside the home.

This introduces us to the second paradox in women’s lives. Even for a mother who enjoys caring for her family, such as Sara, her best moods occur when she steps out of her role as mother and participates in the world beyond the home.

WOMEN AT WORK

On initial examination, Anne’s life as a special education teacher looks much different from Sara’s. It more closely resembles William’s life as a high school choral instructor. At the first beep, this quiet and earnest woman was at school and wrote that she was “overwhelmed by the amount of things to do right now.” At the next report she felt friendly while teaching synonyms and antonyms, explaining, “I like my class.” And at the next report, she felt happy and cheerful leading a discussion on geometric shapes. By 1:48 P.M. she was tired and irritable, though her mood was more positive later that night when she returned to school to judge science
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exhibits. Like William's, her job kept her going from early in the morning until late at night.

On closer inspection, however, Anne's life is more similar to that of Sara and other women. In between her work at school, she rushes home to cook and take care of her family. On Wednesday, for example, she got home in time to meet her three daughters returning from school. Then she tended to the needs of her eight-year-old, who had been vomiting earlier in the week, supervised her eight-year-old's homework, and discussed with the fourteen-year-old the pluses and minuses of taking honors algebra next year.

Unlike William, Anne does not have her homelife as a place of respite. She cannot lounge on the patio when she gets home from work. Instead, she goes from her demanding job at school to her demanding job at home. When beeped at 4:10 P.M. on Wednesday, she was making supper and feeling grouchy, though her mood improved a little later when she and the children watched "Days of Our Lives." Then she reported a second dip in her mood after she came home from school again, at 7:52 P.M., to more family responsibilities. Even though he was unemployed at the time, her husband did little to help with child care or chores. Anne reported that he did not understand their daughters, and on Friday night when she needed him to stop and pick up something she needed at the store, he contended he could not, and she had to do it.

In spite of this hectic crunch, Anne said she liked being employed and liked her job. Most of the women in our study, like national samples of employed women, said they held jobs for economic reasons: with skyrocketing medical costs and rising prices for everything from housing to teenagers' tennis shoes, many families, including middle-class families, feel they simply cannot get by on one paycheck. Even one very traditional woman, who found the public world "dirty and disgusting," said, "When we looked at our debts, we realized that if I didn't work, we'd be in debt for fifteen years."

Yet most working women, including those in menial jobs, said that they would choose to be employed even if they had no financial need. Why? For Anne, we will see that her job played an important emotional function in her life and helped her endure a bitter dispute with her husband. The value of women's employment lies not only in the pay and the immediate experience at a job, but also in the role it plays within the overall emotional organization of their reality.

Emotional Strains

For the most part, the women in our study did not have exciting or glamorous jobs. One filled vending machines, another worked a switchboard, oth-
ers were teachers, nurses, clerical workers, sales representatives, and junior-level managers. Many of these jobs were service-oriented and many could be described as low-paying, dead-end, and menial.

These jobs are as taxing as the jobs that generate so much frustration and negative emotion in the lives of the fathers we studied. In fact, these mothers spent a higher percentage of their time at their jobs working than their husbands did, and they rated themselves as “hardworking” just as often as the men did. When we asked about the “worst time of the week,” many mothers mentioned events at their jobs. They told of conflicts with coworkers, impossible time pressures, and fear of being fired. One nurse described feeling devastated when a critical-care patient died. There is little question that women encounter the same stress at their jobs as men do at theirs.

Yet, surprisingly, the immediate emotional experience at work of the women we studied was not as negative as the men’s. The women’s average state at work was more favorable than their experience at home, and it was more favorable than men’s experience at their jobs. Compared to at home, at work they were less likely to feel unhappy, drowsy, and lonely; not once did any woman report feeling guilty at work. Although their jobs were stressful, they seemed to experience fewer of the negative emotional side effects we saw among men: they were less often irritable, frustrated, and angry.

Why didn’t these women experience the negative emotions that the men did at their jobs? One explanation might be that the women felt less trapped at their jobs than the men. In chapter 2 we proposed that men’s negative experience at work was partly related to their bearing the family role of “primary breadwinner.” Women’s wages are seen as important to families; nonetheless, women typically enjoy somewhat more freedom than their husbands to quit if the job is not going well. By this argument, employment is women’s domain of choice, just as home is men’s domain of choice.

The flaw in this explanation, however, is that women do not experience choice when at work. In fact, women typically have jobs in which they have less autonomy and control over their immediate actions than men do. They are frequently taking orders from others and have limited task flexibility. When beeped at work, the women in our study reported significantly less “freedom” and “choice” over their current activities than they experienced at home and than men reported at their jobs. Clearly, it is not a feeling of personal control that accounts for women’s more favorable emotions at their jobs. Work is not a context of personal liberation.
So why, then, did these women find their jobs less onerous than the men did, and than their experience at home?

Emotional Rewards

Hints of what women find emotionally rewarding at their jobs appear when we look at the social side of their work experience.

To begin with, the women in our study reported a more amicable disposition at their jobs. Whereas the men felt more “competitive” at work than the women, the women felt significantly more “cooperative” than the men (see appendix 3.2). The women also felt friendlier. Rather than working against other people with the kind of “take no prisoners” attitude some men seem to relish, women are oriented toward working with others. When one man reported that a coworker was fired, he commented, “I could give a shit”; a woman in a similar circumstance reported deep concern.

In turn, the happiness of these women at work was strongly related to the amiability they experienced in others. On each beeper sheet participants were asked, “Are the people you are with: friendly . . . versus unfriendly?” We found that many of these women experienced their colleagues at work to be as friendly as family members at home. Furthermore, those women who perceived their coworkers to be most friendly were happiest at their jobs. In contrast, the friendliness of others was not related to the happiness of the men at their jobs.

These findings suggest that the social experience is what makes work emotionally valuable to women. One woman described feeling happy and relaxed at work because “the people I like best are here.” A nurse cited a comradely lunch with her coworkers as the best time of her week. She said things were chaotic at the hospital, but they shared a positive feeling of togetherness and “punchiness.” Anne described the social interaction with her special education students as a source of positive experience. “I like the children and all of their little quirks. They’re so cute.”

For many of these women, work provided social rewards they did not get at home. Their labor was not taken for granted; they got appreciation from others; many of them also received social support. Other research confirms that social aspects of work contribute heavily to women’s well-being at their jobs. By adopting a more congenial disposition, women have less negative experience at work than men do and gain emotional buoyancy.

But women do not fully escape the frustration and grief of the rat race. It catches up with them when they get home.
The 6 O’Clock Crash

For fathers, the period after work is a time when they are able to take off their shoes and claim “fatigue.” Employed mothers also feel fatigued, but they get no such break. Many would love the opportunity to relax, unwind, and regroup. But they face the second shift. Supper has to be cooked; children’s needs from the day must be addressed. “Everybody wants me,” Anne said. Yet husbands of the employed women in our study were no more likely to help deal with these pressing demands than the men married to housewives were.

The result of this end-of-the-day crunch for women is an emotional scenario opposite the one that occurs for dads. If you will recall, the emotional state of the men in our study rose substantially around 6:00 P.M. when they came home to the family. In contrast, the employed women’s emotional state tumbled. Figure 3.2 charts the average emotion experienced by the full-time employed mothers across the weekday and contrasts

**Figure 3.2**

EMPLOYED MOTHERS’ AND FATHERS’ EMOTION ACROSS THE DAY

![Graph showing emotional state of employed mothers and fathers across the day](image)

Based on weekdays only. Shows only mothers and fathers who were employed full-time.
it to the fathers'. The employed mothers' emotional state, you can see, is above average from 8 in the morning until mid-afternoon, during the time they are at work. But then we see the "6 o'clock crash." Their mood plummets to the lowest point of the day.

"I'm tired, I have a headache, I wish the day were over and I could go to bed," wrote one woman who was busily cleaning up the kitchen at 5:48 P.M. Another woman, whose husband had called to say he would be working until 10 P.M., was furious at him and wrote, "This is a rough time of day when I have to play both mom and dad."

We saw that fathers' good moods at work carried over to home, but this is not evident for women. Regardless of whether a woman's last mood at work was extremely positive or extremely negative, the outcome when she got home was identical: a deluge of demands on her time and an unhappy mood (see appendix 3.3). Positive emotion at work provided no buffer against what happened when she got home.

The only time worse than the 6 o'clock period on weekdays for employed mothers was Saturday afternoon, when their mood plunged to the lowest point of the whole week. This was another time when performance of housework reached a peak. During the weekend, when she may have been hoping for some time off to relax, the full-time-employed mother played catch-up with housework.

Work as an Antidote to Work: Paradox #2

The divergence between fathers' and mothers' reality is nowhere more apparent. The home functions as fathers' place of respite, it provides emotional compensation for the stress they experience at their jobs. But for women there is no comparable place of respite from their labor. This leads us to the second fundamental paradox that structures women's lives.

Women's primary alternative to the stress and exertion they experience in their traditional home sphere is more stress and exertion at a paid job. Their primary option for escape from drudgery at home is to take a job—where they do more work. "Instead of liberation," the sociologist Myra Ferree has written, "the double day of housewife and paid work appears to be creating a new form of exploitation." Nowhere do employed women get the opportunity for the long expanses of relaxation and replenishment that men claim in the home sphere. The hurriedness at work is their primary antidote to the hurriedness of home.

As a result, the employed women in our study reported the feeling of being stretched, torn, pulled in two or three directions. In response to the
question "What’s the worst thing about working and raising a family at the same time?" they almost all responded with frustration about their lack of time and resources. One owner of a small business said: "I have a great job and I love making money, but it’s difficult. You spread yourself thin. I get a feeling of satisfaction, independence from the job, being able to provide for my family, but my schedule is hectic. I never have time just for me, to do what I want. I feel pulled apart sometimes."

A kindergarten teacher said: "(There’s) not enough time to do all the things I want to do. I don’t have enough time to do everything one hundred percent. I feel very stretched a lot of the time. It’s draining and difficult. I often make choices, give up one thing for another."

Not surprisingly, researchers find that the work-family juggling act is currently more stressful for women than for men. Paradox #2, then, is that the positive experiences women enjoy at their jobs have a price. There are clear gains to be had from a job. In addition to a paycheck, it provides social and emotional benefits, as we have seen, and in many cases it offers valuable intellectual stimulation. But the costs, given the current lack of support for employed women, include the constant feeling that there is not enough time to get everything done and the 6 o'clock crash at the end of each day.

**Role Strain or Role Gain?**

This uncertain balance of benefits and costs has led researchers (and many women, no doubt) to ask whether a job is worth it: do the emotional rewards of employment for mothers outweigh the stress it brings under current circumstances? Does employment have a net positive or negative effect on women’s well-being? When we add together all the moments in each woman’s life, we find that the overall frequency of anger and joy, excitement and boredom, even energy and exhaustion do not differ greatly between employed women and homemakers.

The net daily emotional experience of employed women in our sample was as positive as, if not slightly more positive than, that of the full-time homemakers. The low moods of the 6 o’clock crash and Saturday afternoons was more than compensated for by better moods at work and on Sundays. Employed women felt "accepted" more often than homemakers (68 percent versus 47 percent), because women feel accepted more frequently at work than at home. And they felt "weak" less often (1 percent versus 6 percent), partly because they spent less time in enervating housework.

This slight emotional advantage that employed women hold is not very great. Although the housewives in our study spent more time in the less-
Mothers: Interweaving Work and Relationships

happy home sphere and in emotionally deadening housework, this was partly compensated for by more time talking with friends and in other leisure activities.

Much research with larger samples has come to similar conclusions about the relationship of employment to women's physical and mental health. Some, but not all, studies find employed women to have slightly better mental health, a greater sense of mastery, and higher self-esteem. Even when one adjusts for the fact that healthier women are more likely to seek employment, the conclusion is still that the net emotional effect of work on women's well being is neutral, or perhaps slightly positive.

Conclusions about effects of women's employment, however, need to be qualified by all the contingency factors we have already discussed. If their jobs put lots of pressure on women's time, they may harm their well-being. We found that the women who were often "hurried" at work were less happy. Because of their non-negotiable household obligations, mothers are more vulnerable to time demands at work; indeed, other researchers have found that the frequency of overtime work, evening shifts, and longer hours are associated with greater physical and mental strain on mothers than fathers. Work is a positive experience for mothers as long as it does not become too frantic.

Likewise, if housework puts a lot of pressure on a woman's time, it may also adversely affect her well-being. If she has a larger family and a husband who is unhelpful and highly involved in his career, the demands on her time increase and her well-being may be compromised. Conversely, if she has a husband who is supportive, contributing to child care and housework, the balance may tilt in the "gains" direction.

Anne had a husband who was anything but supportive; nonetheless, we can see that her job played an important role in buffering her against the difficult events that occurred in her family life during the week of the study.

Anne's Employment as an Emotional Refuge

Arriving home from a trip on Friday night, Anne's husband announced that he wanted to take a new job in Cleveland. This would be the seventh move in eighteen years of marriage and Anne was extremely upset at the prospect. She was especially concerned about the disruptive effects of a move on their children.

This situation made Anne's time at home much more difficult than it would otherwise have been. The effects on her are evident in the graph of her emotional states over the week, presented in figure 3.3. "The day is
### Figure 3.3
### ANNE'S WEEK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Emotional State</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Wednesday</strong>&lt;br&gt;9:16 P.M.</td>
<td>Separating math workbooks</td>
<td>Negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Thursday</strong>&lt;br&gt;8:54 A.M.</td>
<td>At work, &quot;an overwhelming amount of things to do&quot;</td>
<td>Positive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10:54</td>
<td>At work, teaching synonyms and antonyms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:12 P.M.</td>
<td>At work, discussing geometric shapes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1:48</td>
<td>At work, getting math assignments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:10</td>
<td>Getting ready to cook dinner</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:42</td>
<td>&quot;Ordering dinner, I'm tired.&quot; watching VCR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:12</td>
<td>At work, looking at ‘mediocre’ science exhibits</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:52</td>
<td>In kitchen, writing a note for daughter, &quot;tired and crabby&quot;</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Friday</strong>&lt;br&gt;8:22 A.M.</td>
<td>At work, grading math tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:42</td>
<td>At work, giving spelling test</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:20 P.M.</td>
<td>At work, talking with a fellow teacher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3:52</td>
<td>At work, doing lesson plans</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:04</td>
<td>Talking to a friend on the phone</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6:32</td>
<td>Talking with daughter about an overnight party</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7:05</td>
<td>Driving back to school (work)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9:26</td>
<td>At work, getting coursework forms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ANNE'S WEEK (continued)

Saturday

8:34 A.M.
10:18
12:06 P.M.
5:46
8:00
8:54
9:20

Walking around new housing area with friend
Watching videotape of soap opera
Visiting a petting zoo
Cooking dinner
Finding a shirt to wear
Driving car
Visiting, talking with neighbor

Sunday

9:32 A.M.
12:06 P.M.
2:08
4:18
6:04
9:26

Cleaning up kitchen
Reading travel section of newspaper
Walking in shopping mall
Discussing travel plans with children
Driving car, talking with children's friends
Watching movie at theater

○ In family sphere
● In public sphere
ANNE'S WEEK (continued)

**Emotional State**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Monday</td>
<td>9:06 A.M. Talking with husband about moving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11:10 Doing laundry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:15 P.M. On phone, making appointment with counselor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:45 Talking with friend on the phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2:46 Getting dressed after shower</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:46 At home, grading language books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:58 Doing dishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tuesday</td>
<td>8:24 A.M. Bringing &quot;a load of work&quot; into work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10:54 Talking with students and listening to weather report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:02 P.M. At work, trying to get money back from vending machine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1:40 At work, teaching math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7:50 In kitchen, grading papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wednesday</td>
<td>7:36 A.M. Returning from store, trying to get to work on time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>12:16 P.M. At work, judging children's stories</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3:08 At work, thinking about the &quot;fun of being a kid&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4:42 In kitchen, trying to find check stubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5:54 In bedroom, looking for check stubs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9:16 Balancing checkbook and talking with daughter about religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8:54 A.M. At work, beginning the school day</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

○ In family sphere
lost,” Anne wrote Saturday. She brooded much of the morning and afternoon, and got nothing done. Saturday evening her mood came up when she and her husband went to a party, and Sunday she was cheered when a friend and her children came and stayed with them. But at other times her mood at home was despondent.

The unpleasantness of her homelife was prolonged because Monday was a holiday. Early that morning Anne confronted her husband about the move, but she found him rigid and unwilling to compromise. She argued, cried, and experienced heart palpitations. She wrote, “I feel like I’m being smashed to pieces.” A depression set in that lasted until the next day, as can be seen in the graph.

But Anne’s enjoyment of teaching rescued her from this constant brooding over the situation. Although her mood was still low Tuesday morning, she reported that it was “good to be back to work.” And on Wednesday, absorption in teaching pulled her mood back up again, even though the conflict with her husband was not resolved. She wrote that her class was fun to be with, though the satisfaction she gained, of course, did not prevent her from experiencing the 6 o’clock crash when she returned home.

Anne’s job provided her with an important separate emotional base—she described it as an “escape from the problems of home.” Asked how she felt about holding a job and being a mother at the same time, Anne was fully aware of the costs. She complained about “not having enough time to fix proper meals, not enough time for my kids in the evening, and an untidy house.” But she felt the gains were worth it. “It’s a challenge, but I couldn’t stay home all the time; I’m not the type. I would get dissatisfied if I weren’t working; the kids would see it and it would rub off. The job makes me more interesting and makes me appreciate them more.” Anne wanted to be working, and, whether employed or not, women have been found to be happiest when they are doing what they want to be doing. During this week, her job gave her the strength to hold her own in the battle with her husband.

**Freedom and Friendship**

A segment of time that is a particularly important part of women’s lives is time in the public domain away from work, when women step outside the roles of both mother and employee. It includes time in transit, taking classes, and meeting with friends. All the women in our study provided at least one report in this domain, and those who spent the most time in it, like Sara, reported the least depression.
Lorraine, a reflective and spiritual full-time homemaker, said, "By stopping routines, whether by getting together with friends or just meditating, I don't feel weighted down or victimized." Another woman attributed the positive emotion of public time to "feeling completely removed from the aggravations of home: from children's schedules and husband's schedules."

Nearly all activities the women in our study engaged in away from the home sphere elicited more positive emotion for them than for the men. Figure 3.4 shows these comparisons. We already know that the women were happier than the men at their jobs. We see here that they were also happier in other public activities. Driving to work, for example, was associated with negative average emotion for the men, yet for the women there was no such negative taint. The women also felt happier than the men during other nonfamily driving.

Several mothers in the study were going to school and reported rewarding experiences during these times. Two identified the satisfaction of getting a good grade as the best time of their week. It was a heady experience for these housewives in school after many years at home to discover that they could excel in this foreign territory. Several also identified studying as

Figure 3.4
MOTHERS' AND FATHERS' EMOTION DURING ACTIVITIES IN THE PUBLIC SPHERE

![Bar chart showing differences in emotion for mothers and fathers during various activities.]

† p < .10; * p < .05; *** p < .001
their occasion of deep absorption and described particular relish in the quiet and freedom from interruption that came with digging into their coursework. Participation in clubs or organizations also seemed to be a chore for the men, but the women reported much more positive states.

The women's most frequent activity in the public domain was meeting with friends, and these occasions were most often described as the best times of the week. Lorraine, for example, took a whole day away from home to spend with friends, and this gave her a feeling of being tremendously "connected." She had lunch with a companion who was in a lot of pain from a personal crisis. Lorraine felt it important to "stand with her and give her some hope"; they had a deep exchange of feelings that both found very meaningful. In the evening Lorraine then had dinner with another friend and had a similar deep conversation about the ups and downs in their lives. Later she reflected that these interactions made her aware of all "the gifts that are around me"; they gave her a feeling that "life is rich."

Other women described similar uplifting moments from the experience of emotional communion with friends. One woman had the pleasant experience of feeling "competitive, excited and relaxed at the same time" while playing on a women's volleyball team with close friends. Sara described joy in "helping a friend through some things" over breakfast. Asked why it was a happy time, she said: "Because I was feeling her need and my response to it." Anne also described feeling happy and strengthened when she got away from home to talk with a friend about her marital situation.

Although their conversations with friends were often about personal crises, the emotion reported was the most positive of any regular situation in these women's lives. When we isolate times the women were in public with friends, we find a set of the most happy moments in their week. The linguist Deborah Tannen concludes that women's talk often embodies their concern for connectedness, their orientation that "life is a community, a struggle to preserve intimacy and avoid isolation." The feeling of connecting with someone else transforms pain and distress into an exhilarating experience of community.38

The specialness of this time with friends for the women in our study is suggested by its rarity among the men. The mothers felt significantly more calm, interested, and kindly during times with friends than the fathers did, and the content of interaction dealt with current, deeply meaningful events in their lives. Men's time with friends was more often devoted to sports than to talk, and the content of conversation, when it occurred, was
more likely to be "motorcycles," "snipe hunting," or high school events that happened twenty years ago. As figure 3.4 shows, the average emotion that mothers experienced during times with friends was exceptionally high and dramatically above what their husbands typically experienced in this context. Regular sharing with friends was a special and emotionally rewarding part of women's lives that Lorraine cogently called "sacred ground."

THE EMOTIONAL PITFALLS OF MOTHERS' REALITY

What we have seen is that beneath the diversity in these women's external lives is an underlying similarity, a basic emotional structure that shapes their inner lives. Whereas we described the order of the men's daily experience in terms of a "rhythm" of work and recuperation, we find ourselves describing the structure of women's experience in terms of two paradoxes shaped by the historical evolution of their role. The fundamental constant with mothers is their commitment to caring for their families, yet the day-to-day activity of caring is depleting and often emotionally unsatisfying. Furthermore, the primary escape women have from the demands of this role is taking a job, where they face more demands.

Given these paradoxes, we find it remarkable that the women in our study reported daily levels of happiness that were comparable to the men's. The average woman reported no lesser rate of feeling happy or cheerful (see appendix 2.1). Writer Mary Catherine Bateson argues that one of women's greatest assets is their flexibility, "the ability to shift from one preoccupation to another, to divide one's attention, to improvise in new circumstances." Thus Sara achieves buoyancy in her life by juggling care of her children and husband with vital involvements in civic activities. Anne survives the difficulties of her homelife by finding enjoyment with a classroom of special education students.

But the paradoxes of women's situation do take their toll. Anne endured distress during the week of the study and eventually caved in to her husband's demand, allowing the family to move yet another time for his career. The average mother in our study reported feeling tired and weak more often than her husband did (see appendix 2.1). Full-time homemakers are particularly susceptible, yet even the global well-being of employed women remains below that of men. Thus the balance of pleasure and suffering in mothers' and fathers' lives appears to be tilted in favor of fathers.

Ultimately, we shall see that the imbalances between mother and father can create strains in the marriage that affect the rest of the family.
Mothers' daily experience, like fathers' daily experience, affects their relationships with other family members and the family system as a whole.

Before we discuss these interpersonal dynamics, however, we must examine the third emotional reality of the families we studied: that of the young adolescent. Although we have stressed the differences between the mother's and father's experience, in many ways their realities are similar: work dominates both their lives and both have achieved some degree of control over their daily emotions. When we contrast their daily lives with that of the young adolescent, we see a larger and more fundamental divergence. Anne's and Sara's children live in an emotional world much different from their parents'.