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AUTHOR McCall, Robert B.
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ABSTRACT

This discussion examines trends in American society and family life in the context of early education and alternative child care programs of the future. It is suggested that social problems arise when some aspects of society change while other intimately related aspects lag behind, especially when the lagging circumstances are improving but not fast enough. The thesis is that the social equality movements of the last 2 decades produced rapid change that has not been paralleled in other aspects of society, creating task overload, a focus on self, and stress adversely affecting family life and children. It is suggested that, while some people have grabbed at quick fixes, more effective solutions are likely to come when the lagging aspects of society catch up. Four areas or groups needing to catch up are discussed: private industry, government, fathers, and family institutions (including early education and alternative care programs, which should be encouraged to become multidimensional family resource centers). (Author/RH)

Early Education and Alternative Childcare in the Context of the Family and Society

Robert B. McCall
Boys Town Center

Abstract

The trends in American society and family life are examined as the context for the early education and alternative childcare programs of the future. It is suggested that social problems arise when some aspects of society change while other intimately-related aspects lag behind, especially when the lagging circumstances are improving but not fast enough. The thesis is that the social equality movements of the last two decades produced rapid change which has not been paralleled in other aspects of society, creating task overload, a focus on self, and stress that have adversely affected family life and children. While some people have grabbed at quick fixes, more effective solutions are likely to come when the lagging aspects of society catch up. Four areas needing to catch up are discussed--private industry, government, fathers, and family institutions, including early education and alternative care programs, which are encouraged to consider becoming multidimensional family resource centers.

Early Education and Alternative Childcare in The Context of The Family and Society[1]

Robert B. McCall

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I don't look forward to coming home after work anymore. One kid needs a ride to basketball, the other has decided to bake a cake while I'm trying to make dinner, and they both need help with their homework at night. By 10 pm I am totally frazzled, and I haven't done any of my work. My husband asked the other day, "What happened to the good old days when we came home, had a drink, and stared at the four walls for a half hour?"

I don't know what's happened to us. We've got more than enough money, but neither of us are sleeping at night. We barely have time to say hello to each other, we don't often eat together, everybody's doing their own thing. We're running a small boarding house here--there are no relationships. All our energy is devoted to the machinery of living--there is no energy left for living itself.

These are the cries of parents in the 1980s. They are stressed. There is too much to do and not enough time to do it. There is no time for relationships--we have too many of our own things to do. And stress and lack of relationships are problems that feed on each other--stress interferes with relationships, and failed relationships produce stress.

And the children? Sometimes forgotten, the children are stressed too, and in many cases they are falling through the cracks of modern, adult-centered family life.

The signs of stress and failed relationships are expressed in anxiety, abuse, divorce, promiscuity, suicide, and substance abuse. Consider a sampling of statistics:

1. Young adults reported in 1976 more insomnia, nervousness, headaches, loss of appetite, and upset stomach than a similar group 20 years ago. And importantly, four times as many were dissatisfied with their relationships with other people ("Hard times," 1979).
2. Abuse rates are alarming. A national survey of representative families showed that 15% of parents used serious violence (e.g., punching, kicking, assault with a weapon) against their children (Straus, Gelles, & Steinmetz, 1980). And it's estimated that 7% of children are sexually mistreated by family members or relatives (National Center on Child Abuse and Neglect, 1981).
3. While the divorce rate has apparently leveled off and possibly retreated a bit in 1982, it is still 47% of the marriage rate (U.S. National Center for Health Statistics, 1983). It is commonly estimated that approximately 45% of children will experience the divorce of their parents (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1977).

4. Infidelity in marriage is mirrored in rampant sexual activity by America's youth. Half of America's young people have had intercourse by their 16th birthday, more than one out of every ten American teenage girls conceives each year--four in ten before they are 20—one-fifth as a result of their first sexual experience (Alan Guttmacher Institute, 1981).
5. The suicide rate among young people has tripled in the last 20 years (Statistical Abstracts of the United States, 1984), and an estimated 57 children and adolescents attempt it every hour (Giffin & Felsenthal, 1983), most unsuccessfully, fortunately.
6. Almost two out of every three high school seniors gets drunk at least every other week, and one in five has used marijuana or hashish daily for at least a month during their high school careers (Bachman, Johnston, & O'Malley, 1982).

These are the signs of stress, of failed relationships, of no relationships at all. By any standard, we have an epidemic here, and early educators and providers of alternative childcare are on the frontlines.

The Problems

What have we done to ourselves? How did this happen? I can only offer a speculative interpretation.

It is an axiom of social history that problems arise when some aspects of society change while other, intimately related, aspects do not. And maximum discontent, frustration, social unrest, and even revolution occur when the lagging aspects start to catch up but progress is not fast enough.

I believe we are now at this point with respect to family life--the maximum disparity between elements of change occurred a few years ago, now some things are getting better, but not fast enough.

The Changed Aspects

In my view, our current problems stem from worthwhile changes in social equality. The racial equality movement started in 1957 in Little Rock, Arkansas, then spread to women who justly rejected second-class citizenship and began to work outside the home to gain self-fulfillment and income for their families. Finally, the equality movement extended to individuals, and we heard admonitions to "do your own thing" and "look out for number one." The "Me" generation forgot that human relationships--and, I might add, personal fulfillment--are based on giving, not taking.

Of course, the equality movements produced very positive, valued changes in society. At their root, they expressed values almost all of us ardently support. But there is no free lunch, in society or in restaurants, and in some ways we are now paying the bill. What are the items on this bill?

The flight from the home. The first item is that parents are spending less time with their children. Specifically:

In 1982, 55% of all mothers worked, 46% of mothers of children under six were employed outside the home, and almost two of three of these worked fulltime (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1983).

Older children are often home alone, and home is becoming a dangerous place. There are an estimated two million latchkey children in America ("Lifetime of fear," 1984), and children's hotlines are springing up to help them cope. Children increasingly are becoming victims of fires that

are accidentally set while home alone (Ralph Jones, personal communication), and it might be noted, "home" is the most likely place for teenage sex to take place (Zelnick & Kantner, 1977). It is no longer the case that parents should be asked, "Do you know where your children are?" but rather, "Are you home with your children?" It is a good guess that the flight of parents from the home is a major contributor to teenage problem behavior.

Child care is expensive, so it helps economically if one parent is home while the other one works. In a 1980 national sample of families in which both parents worked fulltime and had at least one child under the age of 14, the husband and wife did not work the same shift in one-third of these families (Presser & Cain, 1983). More astonishing, in one in 20 families, both parents worked night shifts or more than 12 hours a day. This may save on child care costs, but it means that the family is rarely together. And these are two-parent families. In my neighborhood--suburban, conservative Nebraska--several single parents work nights. Their adolescent children rarely see them and have no supervision at all after school until midnight. Who is raising these children?

When both parents work fulltime, you have a family that has three fulltime-equivalent jobs but only two workers. Even if childcare is hired out, there are more than two fulltime jobs. And in single-parent families, the work-to-worker ratio is worse. We just have too much to do and not enough time to do it in. Some things do not get done--at first we ignore the housework, but eventually we ignore each other, including the children. In one survey, fewer than half the families in Denver ate dinner together three nights a week (U.S. News & World Report, June 16, 1980).

Adult-centered families. Another cost derives from adult self-centeredness and lack of family relationships. For example, it is not always economic necessity that sends women to work outside the home but self-fulfillment. In a national survey of families in 1980 (Harris, 1981), 87% of working mothers said that the primary reason for working was to gain "a personal sense of accomplishment," and among those who worked, twice as many would choose to work as not work even if there was no financial reason to do so.

In annual surveys since 1970, Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, Inc. have found 1) a decreased willingness on the part of individuals to make sacrifices for the good of the family, 2) an emphasis on individual leisure time at the expense of family togetherness, 3) a focus on the here-and-now and on instant gratification, and 4) increased importance attached to self-expression without necessarily considering the consequences on others (Brown & Clurman, 1979).

In short, we adults are doing our own things; and those things are less likely to involve personal relationships within and outside the family and less likely to involve the children. Take the contemporary craze of jogging. Some of us jog for personal accomplishment--to improve my time, to look and feel better, to improve my health. Others jog because they get pleasure from the activity--"It's the one time I get away from it all and be by myself." In either case, it is primarily self-gratification. It is worthwhile, until it interferes with giving to other people and relationship building.

The family, of course, is relationships, it is giving to other people, it is self-sacrifice. We don't seem to have the time or the inclination to nurture and maintain relationships within the family. One parent lamented,

"I have to spend all my time on the machinery of existance—trucking the kids here and there, getting dinner, doing household chores, working, church activities, and a little time for a jog—there's nothing left for relationships."

The Consequences

Task overload and the lack of family relationships has personal, economic, and social consequences.

Divorce. A survey of 6,000 American couples in 1975 showed that when neither partner perceived their primary role to be one of "taking care of the relationship," the relationship was in trouble (Seligmann & Boren, 1983). Divorce is now so common and accepted that to suggest that it is harmful to children is often labelled prejudicial and unfair. What was once pejoratively called a "broken home" is now an "alternative family pattern."

While most adults and children eventually adjust fairly well, research indicates that divorce 1) is usually a painful transition, 2) the psychological disturbances often last a few years, 3) it is the conflict between individuals that hurts and such conflict does not always end with divorce, 4) children of divorce display a variety of social and academic disturbances over several years, and 5) some consequences can be quite longstanding. Most specialists agree that while people eventually adjust, attachments die hard, and there are no victimless divorces (Hetherington, Cox, & Cox, 1977).

Economically, the rise in the number of single-parent families alone is responsible for the increased number of families below the poverty line and the drop in average family income during the last decade (Chapman, 1982).

Failed relationships have implications for societal problems as well. For example, in my reading of adolescent problem behavior--delinquency, substance abuse, sexual promiscuity--the single common thread woven through these young people is the absence of a solid relationship with their parents.

Rocky adjustments to role changes. Women have felt the consequences of these changes in acute ways. Many working mothers have felt guilty about leaving their children to go to work and resentful that they also are stuck with doing the household chores with little help from their husbands. "Guilt and resentment make a bad tasting stew," one said.

But staying home fulltime with the kids can have its own frustrations (Pizzo, 1984). Many of these women say they miss the self-esteem and prestige that holding a job often conveys, they feel forgotten and sometimes dishonored by society, and they are lonely. Suddenly, in the span of a decade, being a fulltime mother has become a degrading, low-status job.

It's not exactly a picnic for men either (Bralove, 1981). While women's immigration into the work place has gained them independence and integrity, it has also taken away many of men's traditional contributions and stomped, however justly, on their turf. For example, the rise in female employment during the last decade was several times greater than the total number of people unemployed in recent years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 1983). Some men lost their jobs, indirectly if not directly, to women.

Becoming an economically successful two-career family brings some men another set of problems. Those men often contribute to domestic duties, endure increased family stress, and do without certain wifely comforts.

Yet most are still responsible for the family income. But if the wife is successful and earns more money than the husband, he loses his primary role and traditional contribution to the family. In one study of families in which the wife outearns her husband, sex lives suffered, feelings of love diminished, and abuse and divorce rates increased. And if the husband is especially underachieving and the wife is especially overachieving, the husband's risk of premature death from heart disease was 11 times greater than normal (Rubenstein, 1982).

Many men are working harder, but enjoying it less. True, many of these changes were long overdue and men should contribute even more to domestic and family responsibilities; but retrenchment, however just, is a bitter pill.

Stress. Stress hurts, it can even kill. But because it acts indirectly--providing a climate in which other factors produce more deleterious effects--we often do not recognize its important contribution.

Major stressful life events in adults contribute to and even precipitate physical illness (Cohen, 1979), and chronic stress resulting from marital disruptions, difficulties at work, loneliness, and personal rejection can provoke suicide, depressive reactions, and neurotic disorders (Rutter, 1981).

While we often think of major life events--divorce, death of a loved one, loss of a job--as the dangerous stressors, evidence suggests that "daily hassles" are more strongly associated with physical and mental disorders than are the big disasters. Hassles include too many things to do, rising prices of common goods, home maintenance tasks, concern about weight or health, family investments and finances, arguments with teenagers, and so forth (Lazarus, 1981).

No single hassle is detrimental by itself, but they add up. More correctly, they multiple or potentiate. They put people on edge so that a psychological straw breaks their backs. For example, stressed women with children have two-and-a-half times the amount of depression as stressed women who do not have children (Brown & Harris, 1978). Working mothers with children under six have more health problems than other working women (Staff, 1984), and stressed children are more likely to have streptococcal infections than are less stressed children (Meyer & Haggerty, 1962).

The state of the family. Where do these factors leave the contemporary family? In trouble, many have said.

Consider, on the one hand, that for many Americans, family life involves little time to do things together, lack of communication, superficial relationships, and few positive supports for each other, as described above.

Now contrast this state of affairs to what we know are the hallmarks of stable, happy, well-functioning families, according to Dr. Nicholas Stinnett of the University of Nebraska (Staff, 1983):

1. They spend much time together and in family activities.
2. They have good communication patterns. They spend a lot of time talking to each other, and they are good listeners.
3. They have a very high commitment to each other, and they make the family a top priority.
4. They have a high degree of religious orientation.
5. They come together when they have a problem and support each other in dealing with it.
6. They express a lot of appreciation to one another and make each member feel good about themselves.

These characteristics require increasingly rare commodities--time and a commitment to relationships.

Attempts at Coping

We have tried to cope with stress and declining relationships in several ways.

Quick Fixes

Sometimes we have adopted beliefs that love and some of the responsibilities of childrearing can be accomplished instantly--with a quick fix.

Bonding. Take the bonding movement, for example. Some years ago it was apparently discovered that putting parent and infant in close physical contact--especially skin-to-skin contact--immediately after birth produced attachment—love, if you will—between parent and infant (Klaus & Kennell, 1976). In our desperate need to save relationships, these preliminary findings, initially based on 16 Cleveland mothers, were over-interpreted. The proposition became the "epoxy theory" of parental love--you must get parent and infant together while the glue is still wet so that they can be cemented together in a love relationship forever after. Parents began to assume that problems with their children occurred because they had not had this experience. And on the other hand, an unspoken assumption emerged that if you did have this experience, little else needed to be done to nurture a relationship.

These extreme claims are not true. Current research does suggest that early contact is a wonderful beginning, that it should be encouraged, and that it creates fine memories. It may even promote love and attachment for

a few months for a few people (McCall, 1982). But relationships require continuing nurturance, and the type of nurturance changes from age to age. You may snuggle and kiss your infant to express your affection, but your 16-year-old son might view kissing as a "punishment."

Love can not be stamped irrevocably into place with a few hours of close contact shortly after birth. Conversely, if you missed that experience, it is not too late for love to flower. There is no quick fix for love relationships.

Quality time. A less extreme but more common belief states that it is the quality, not the quantity, of time that one spends with a child that is important for relationship building. In a 1980 survey, 84% of parents and 76% of teenagers believed this statement to be true (Harris, 1981).

Research suggests that this principle is true. But there are limits, and it is easy to use this proposition as an excuse for spending too little time with the children. For example, 69% of those same parents who felt that the quality was more important than the quantity of time also believed that even parents who do not work don't give their children the time and attention they need. And 70% felt that when both parents work, children are more likely to get into trouble (Harris, 1981).

Relationships may not take a great deal of time, but they do take some time. Moreover, relationships with young children require on-call time--you need to be able to give time at a moment's notice, when children need it, not only when you schedule it. You need to be able to drop everything and pay attention, listen, sympathize, provide care, teach, and love. It can't be done "in just a minute," after the "teachable moment" has slipped passed. Childrearing requires more than quick dashes of salt and pepper--there must be some beef too.

Superbabies. We have also grasped at quick fixes for certain specific parental responsibilities. Take, for example, the chance to create "superbabies" (Langway, 1983). Parents are buying books that claim parents can teach their babies to read, to do mathematics, and to "multiply" their IQs (a feat which is not only unlikely in practice but mathematically impossible). Parents who have worked at a career for a decade and are now having children seem especially vulnerable to these claims. They know how important it is to get ahead, and on the coasts the competition to enter the "best" preschools is very keen, requiring test scores, references, and the like.

Upon close inspection, these home enrichment programs are not quick fixes—they require considerable time and effort, sometimes up to 15 two-to-four minute episodes spread throughout the day. The total amount of time maybe small, but the commitment is enormous. Further, there is no publicly available evidence that these programs work, and there is good reason to believe that they might not work (McCall, 1983).

For one thing, the flash-card approach completely ignores the child. If there is one thing child psychologists and early educators know about mental development, it is that the young child must be physically active and responsive in the learning situation. In addition, research on a child's ability to perform the perceptual and cognitive tasks required in the proposed math program, for example, suggests that children are not sensitive to addition or subtraction much more complicated than 3-plus-1 at 25-30 months of age, let alone tell the difference between a card with 72 and a card with 74 dots after a two-second glance (McCall, 1983). Adults, I suspect, would have difficulty making such a judgment.

Finally, when seeing their child become disinterested in flash cards or not achieving at the level the book suggests, parents may become depressed, believe their child is slow or retarded, feel guilty that they have been ineffective or not sufficiently committed to the task, and so forth. Life is stressful enough without these unwarranted pressures.

In contrast to these quick-fix special programs, real geniuses had good genes and parents who engaged in good old-fashioned activities with them--no gadgets or programs. They responded to them, they talked to them, they played with them, they let the child lead, they provided materials and situations for the child to create things, and eventually they encouraged their children to establish their own goals and their own means to reach them (Fowler, 1981). Flash cards presented to a passive infant or toddler a few times a day doth not a genius make.

Mainstream Coping Strategies--Daycare and Early Education

The most widespread coping strategy, however, is the use of alternative care and early education for children while both parents work. According to the Federal Register (November 16, 1981), 9 out of 10 households with children under the age of four (42 million children) will use some form of alternative care in the 1980s. It is estimated that 52.4% of preschool children whose mothers work outside the home are cared for by a relative, 27.5% by a non-relative at home or in another person's house, and 14.8% in a daycare center, nursery school, or preschool school (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 1984).

Years ago dire predictions were made about the consequences of early alternative care. It was suggested that it would harm the attachment relationship between parent (especially mother) and child with disasterous

effects on the personality and social development of children. On the other hand, there was great hope that early education programs, for example, might improve the intellectual lot of disadvantaged children, perhaps closing the gap between advantaged and disadvantaged. Neither the extreme fears nor the extreme hopes have emerged, according to a review of research by Alison Clarke-Stuart and Greta Fein (1983). What do these specialists say are the effects of daycare and early education on attachment, social behavior, mental development, and health?

Attachment. With respect to attachment, children in daycare are still primarily attached to their parents, even though they may develop an affectionate relationship with an involved and stable caregiver who is not their parent. They still overwhelmingly prefer their mothers to this other caregiver. For example, they go to mother for help when distressed or bored; they approach her more often, stay close to her, and interact with her more; and they greet her at the end of the day with greater joy than they greet their teacher in the morning. These tendencies are especially likely to show up in mildly stressful situations with unfamiliar people and in unfamiliar places (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983).

For the most part, there are no serious unfavorable consequences to attachment associated with the daycare experience per se, but dayoare children are different from non-daycare children in the nature and extent of their attachment. Children in daycare are more likely than children at home to position themselves further away from mother, to spend less time close to or in physical contact with mother, and to ignore or avoid mother after a brief separation. These traits are especially characteristic of children who began daycare in the first year of life.

Just what this difference reflects is not clear. It is possible, for example, that daycare children are more socially mature. In fact, they are more socially competent and sociable (see below). Perhaps they are also simply more independent, not less attached.

Conversely, attachments indeed may be less secure. For example, the distancing is worse if the family is under stress and if daycare is begun in the first year, a time when attachments to specific individuals are forming. Also, we know that attachment in general depends on parental sensitivity, emotional availability, and the nature and amount of interaction between parent and child (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). It is possible, then, that some parents are less able to handle the stress induced by task overload and this stress accentuates the effects of parental absence and a poor style of interaction with the child, producing less secure attachment.

Social behaviors. With respect to social development, there is good news and bad news (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). The good news is that children who attend early childhood programs are more socially competent and mature. They are more cooperative in shared activities, more aware of social norms and conventions, more appropriately independent, more friendly, more responsive, and more socially confident.

The bad news is that they can also be less polite, less agreeable, less respectful of others' rights, and less compliant with maternal or teacher directives. Further, they can be more assertive, aggressive, rebellious, bossy, belligerent, irritable, and hostile, especially if the family or school contexts allow or support these behaviors. These differences are found regardless of the type and quality of program and for either part-time or full-time attendance.

These effects derive in part from the fact that children in daycare programs have the opportunity to interact with other children, but the evidence also indicates that the amount of direct teaching and encouragement by caregivers for appropriate social skills, independence, and self-direction are also important. We are creating children who are more socially mature and independent, but such maturity and independence waxes both positively and negatively. Perhaps Elkind and others are correct in suggesting that America's children are growing up faster these days than before, partly as a result of daycare.

Mental development. Intellectually, children attending daycare programs are no worse off and sometimes better off than children who receive alternative care in private homes or who stay home with their mothers. For example, children in early childhood programs have been shown to be better at verbal and nonverbal skills, at skills likely to be taught (e.g., drawing figures) and those not likely to be taught (e.g., perspective taking or digit span), and at skills that could be learned from materials (e.g., eye-hand coordination) and learned from other people (e.g., language; Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). These improvements, however, typically are not permanent, and by five years of age the IQs of center- and home-cared children are essentially the same. A few long-term effects have been found, however, at least for disadvantaged children enrolled in high quality group care (Lazar & Darlington, 1982). Such children were less likely to repeat a grade or to be placed in special education classes during their school careers.

Mental gains are made by children from all segments of society, although they tend to be larger when the intellectual environment of the center is substantially better than that of the child's home. Part-time

programs are as effective as full-time attendance. Further, the benefits are greater for programs that 1) stress education--lessons, guided play, and teaching of specific content; 2) emphasize constructive and complex play rather than social interactions with peers or doing nothing during class; and 3) encourage teachers to spend a good deal of time in direct, verbal instruction. Therefore, a systematic educational environment with a variety of equipment and experiences coupled with direct verbal tuition by teachers are associated with the improved mental competence and achievement of children in preschool programs over home care (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983). Such a preschool environment may also stimulate creative interactions between parents and children at home which support the educational experience.

Physical growth and health. Physically, infants and children from poor families who attend daycare of any sort are taller, heavier, and have less pediatric problems. Poor children who attend daycare centers, in contrast to home care, have better motor development. Middleclass children are not aided in this regard. Regardless of socioeconomic status, however, children in daycare centers have more frequent (though not more severe) infectious diseases (flu, colds, runny noses, respiratory ailments, rashes) than children in homes (Clarke-Stewart & Fein, 1983).

Conclusions. The report card on daycare centers and preschools sounds like a B. Too little is known about home care, but it may be slightly less advantageous than good quality center care, but not more damaging.

The results seem to suggest that, if possible, parents should be at home with their children for the first year, and if not, special efforts should be made at relationship building. Then, a part-time job for a few years might help all family members adjust more gradually.

Caretaking programs might concentrate on setting social rules and enforcing discipline that will channel the increased maturity and social assertiveness of children into appropriate behaviors. Educational programs, while relying on teachable moments tied to the child's natural activity, should encourage teachers to verbally inform, guide, instruct, respond to, and stimulate young children rather than to rely totally on self-discovery.

Many children in daycare and early education programs are fortunate. Someone is caring for them--in most cases, someone who indeed cares for them. But some have parents who see them as a burden and who toss them with relief into alternative care. The children know which ones they are. One girl wrote a columnist that she did not mind that her mother was gone all day, but she did mind that her mother wanted to be away from her.

Solutions--Four Aspects of Society that Must Catch Up and Adjust

I began by characterizing the problem for families as one of stress induced by changes in some aspects of society which have not been accompanied by changes in other intimately-related aspects of society. The solution to the problem, then, rests primarily in promoting changes in the aspects of society that have lagged behind. I point to four such areas. In most cases, some progress is being made--but not fast enough.

Industry

Private industry is discovering that family problems interfere with job performance and productivity. A variety of accommodations are being attempted.

The most widely known is flextime--almost 8 million U.S. workers are now on flexible schedules (Sheler, 1981). Job sharing is another strategy. This allows two part-time people to share one full-time job. While it may take more administrative effort to coordinate, the company often gets two different sets of skills that would otherwise cost two full-time positions. Other accommodations include a cafeteria or market basket approach to fringe benefits. A husband and wife may each select the best fringe benefits from their separate jobs, thereby avoiding duplicate coverages, for example, and providing the broadest possible range of benefits. Also, private industry is beginning to provide or support on-site daycare as a fringe benefit or convenience for employees, with the hope that it helps retain workers and brings new mothers back to work sooner.

Progress is being made, but more needs to be done. In a 1980 survey (Harris, 1981), 40% of corporations did not allow an employee to resume work at the same level of pay and seniority after a personal leave of absence, 52% did not provide the right to refuse a relocation or transfer with no career penalty, 66% would not allow a shorter work week with less pay, 80% did not grant employees freedom to set a work schedule as long as they worked at least 70 hours every two weeks, and 88% did not allow job sharing.

On the positive side, from 50-70% of the corporations thought that job sharing, flextime, and shorter work weeks were likely to be adopted in the next five years; one out of three expected to allow employees to refuse a relocation or transfer with no career penalty, and one out of four expected employees will be able to take a personal leave of absence without loss of seniority or pay level.

Progress, but not fast enough. Real accommodation is likely to be made when today's employees struggling in two-career households become managers and executives who set such policies with more sympathetic understanding borne out of personal experience and blended with good business sense.

Government.

The United States Government provides less monetary contribution and fewer policies in support of families than most European nations (Kamerman & Kahn, 1979).

For example, in Hungary, the government provides a cash maternity benefit paid in a lump sum to the mother when a child is born, a maternity leave at full pay for 20 weeks following childbirth, and a flat-rate cash allowance payable to the mother for up to 31 months after the conclusion of the maternity leave if the woman remains at home to care for her own child.

In East Germany, women are entitled to 26 weeks of maternity leave at full net pay, with 6 weeks to be taken before childbirth and 20 afterward. Women are also entitled to remain at home in an unpaid, but job-protected leave until the child is a year old. In addition, the government provides daycare facilities attended by 80% of children one and two years of age and 90% of children three to six years of age.

France gives parents a cash allowance that may be used to provide home care by the mother or out-of-home care by others, a 16-week maternity leave at full net pay for employed women, and a flat-rate cash grant to mothers on the birth of a child. These benefits are supplemented by the most extensive out-of-home childcare services offered in any Western European country. Ninety-five percent of children aged three to six attend free preschool.

The Swedish government provides income replacement for either parent, out-of-home childcare services, and special work-related benefits. In West Germany, women are entitled to a six-month paid maternity leave, and 75% of children three to six years of age attend preschool programs (Kamerman & Kahn, 1979).

Sooner or later, something must be done to deal with the fact that for a large segment of our population, childcare is too much for parents to pay but too little for childcare providers to earn. Further, on a cost-efficiency basis, society probably benefits from sound early care in terms of reduced rates of special education and social services.

Unfortunately, this lagging segment of society is not yet getting better.

Fathers

Fathers must come to the rescue of their families. Fathers have been forgotten people—forgotten for the important role they play in their children's lives and forgotten by a society preoccupied with gaining equal rights for women. They have retained the responsibility for earning income, but have been provided with less support to do so. Of course, fathers have contributed to our problems by being disinterested in childrearing and preoccupied with their own careers. Eventually, men will get over their losses, adjust to their new roles and expectancies, and savor the rewards of rearing children and of family life.

Studies show that men whose wives work do more childcare and domestic duties than men whose wives stay at home. But they hardly contribute their fair share. In a 1980 survey (Staff, 1980), 47% of husbands reported cooking for the family, 32% shopped for food, 29% did the laundry, 28%

cleaned the bathroom, and 80% took care of the children under 12 years of age on occasion. In no area are they contributing 50%, and no one really knows how much time fathers spend in undivided interaction with their children.

The same survey identified four groups of husbands with different attitudes and styles. The Progressives, 13% of the total, felt that the family is stronger if domestic and financial responsibilities are shared by the husband and wife. These men rejected the notion that "a woman's place is in the home," and they were very active in performing household chores (90% did the dishes, 70% cooked entire meals).

At the other extreme were the Traditionalists, 39% of the total. They did believe that a woman's place is in the home, and they did not cook or wash the dishes.

On the other hand, the Ambivalents, 15%, were inconsistent in their attitudes. Eighty-five percent thought the family is better off if the wife does not work, while at the same time 70% agreed that a family is stronger if responsibilities are shared by the husband and wife. Similarly, 60% think a woman's place is in the home, but 53% feel that it's a good thing that more women are now employed outside the home. They are confused.

Finally, one out of three men were All Talk, No Action. They talk like the Progressives, but they act like the Traditionalists.

Clearly, men are contributing more today than they used to, and the trend is shifting toward more egalitarian attitudes, because the men in this study who had liberal attitudes tended to be younger. But once again, things are getting better, but not fast enough. Men need the support from other fathers, from business, and from women, all of whom can show that family contributions are valued, appreciated, and rewarded.

Family Institutions

A final solution resides in family institutions--religion, the public school, and early education institutions.

Religion. Religious institutions need to lead the change of attitudes from self-centered to other-centered, from me to thee, from taking to giving. But preaching will not do it. Clergy must be social activists--creating activities in society as well as within their own religious institutions that promote and reward personal relationships, family relationships, and giving. They need to provide support groups for parents and youth groups that appeal to the problem children, not just those already "saved."

The schools. The public schools are quite atuned to alternative families in some respects, but rather out of phase in others. For example, school starts at 8:30 and ends at 3:15; parents' work starts at 7:00 or 8:00 and ends at 4:00 or 5:30. In many places, children are not allowed into the school building until 8:15, some literally stand outside in the cold or in school vestibules, unattended. They go home in the afternoon to an empty house, unsupervised.

Progressive school systems are attempting to provide services before and after school, typically on a fee-for-service basis (Lublin, 1984). Some systems, however, are hung up with problems of insurance, equal access to public facilities, and other administrative snags. When the public demand is great enough, mountains and laws can be moved.

Early education and alternative care. Early educators and alternative care providers have a unique opportunity to help. They have respect and clout. They could also take on broader responsibilities in support of families and children.

Some are already beginning--but are they going fast enough? Some are moving into infant care and infant stimulation programs. Some are providing more educational programs for parents. We need them. For example, there is a great need for postnatal classes. Many parents are well-schooled and prepared for pregnancy and birth, only to discover that there is life after birth and they have nearly no preparation. Some early education and care programs provide comprehensive classes for parents on development and education. More could do so.

Some provide an even broader range of support for families. Women who stay home with their children report being very lonely, lacking in self-esteem, and denied the status and respect that come with a paying job (Pizzo, 1984). They wonder if they are valued, whether they are doing a good job, and whether they are the only ones that are experiencing one or another problem. They are in desparate need of support groups and education. Their numbers may be dwindling, but their need is great.

Early educators and alternative care providers could make special efforts to embrace these mothers as well as single parents and other alternative family groups. But realize that two good parents can have problems too. It is not simply the neglectful, the hostile, the punitive, the disinterested parent who has problem children these days, if ever. Caring, involved parents have problems too, and they may be all the more bewildering to someone who thought love was enough.

Expand into adolescence. The stress associated with early education or childhood problems is almost trivial when compared with the life threatening issues faced by parents of adolescents. When a parent must decide whether their 16-year old is mature enough not to kill himself or others with an automobile, trustworthy enough not to become a parent, and

secure enough not to wipeout with drugs or alcohol, issues of early reading and tying ones shoes seem almost trivial. You can provide support groups for parents, information on alternative courses of action and strategies, family counseling and therapy, shoulders to cry on, parents and young people who have made it, and friends to rejoice with.

And you could provide fathers with special support. Encourage them to be involved, bring in dedicated fathers to provide models for other dads, and recruit more men to be directors.

In short, what is now a preschool or daycare center could become a multidimensional family resource center. You have, I feel, a major responsibility to provide broad support to families. You are getting better, are you getting better fast enough? Seize the opportunity, for the hour is now. The children of the 80s--and beyond--need you.

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Footnote

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