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Women in the Administrative State:
**The Impact of Motherhood and Family-Friendly Policies on Women's Career Paths in the
Federal Civil Service**

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Abstract

This paper is concerned with the career paths of women in the professional ranks of the federal civil service. It argues that we need to pay more attention to women's family responsibilities as a central variable in their career behavior. Based on interviews with twenty-two upper-level female civil servants, the paper reports three key findings. First, these women's career paths are fundamentally impacted by motherhood. That is, the women in this study have "scaled back" at work in order to fulfill their child-care and second shift responsibilities. Second, the federal government's family-friendly workplace policies enable them to do so. But third, as a result of their desire to avail themselves of these family-friendly workplace policies, we find these well-educated and talented women clustered in what could be labeled a "mommy track" just below the glass ceiling. In other words, the women in this study forgo career advancement in order to retain the work/family balance that they seek. Therefore, the federal government's family-friendly workplace policies reduce work/family conflict and improve child well-being but do little to ameliorate barriers to women's equal representation at the top of the civil service hierarchy.

The field of women and politics has burgeoned since the publication of the seminal works of Jeanne Kirkpatrick (1974) and Virginia Sapiro (1983). Research has focused primarily on women in Congress – both their descriptive and substantive representation. In other words, it has addressed questions regarding the numerical representation of women in Congress and in state legislatures and the “difference they make” (Reingold 2000; Swers 2002)). Most recently, there has developed a rich and growing literature devoted to accounting for why more women don’t run for elected office (see e.g., Elder 2004; Fox and Lawless 2003; Lawless and Fox 2005).

Research on women and politics has not just focused on political elites, however. It has also addressed questions of political participation and political behavior among mass publics (Burns 2002). Here research has focused not only on voter turnout but other forms of political participation as well as the “gender gap” in public opinion and voting behavior (see e.g., Box-Steffensmeier et al. 2004; Burns, Schlozman and Verba 2001; Gilens 1984). And of course, research has addressed issues regarding “women’s” policies (e.g., Mansbridge 1986; Conway et al. 1999; Gelb 2003; Gelb and Palley 1987).

Less attention has been paid to women in the executive branch but the field of public administration has a long tradition of concern with descriptive and substantive representation (Krislov 1974; Mosher 1982; Meier and Nigro 1976; Selden 1997; and see Bayes 1991; Borelli and Martin 1997; McGlen and Reid Sarkees 1993; Stewart 1990; Stivers 2002). This oversight demands our attention for a number of reasons. First, federal agencies make as much if not more policy than Congress does (Kerwin 2003) and it is therefore important to know more about the personnel engaged in such policymaking

activities. Second, scholars have long argued that it is especially important for the federal bureaucracy to be descriptively representative to compensate for its unelected nature. Third, women in the executive branch present an interesting case study because of their large numbers and the skew of their representation. In other words, women are over-represented at the lower echelons of the career civil service but their numbers diminish as they move up the ranks of the General Schedule (GS) and into the Senior Executive Service (SES) (Dolan 2004; Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995; Guy and Neuman 2004; Naff 2001; Riccucci 2002). But most importantly, examining women in the career civil service provides us with a number of insights about the nature of women's career paths and advancement and how those are impacted by both motherhood and public policy. This is because the federal government offers an extensive array of "family-friendly" benefits to its employees, thus providing us with a natural experiment about the consequences of such policies for gender equity.

For these reasons, this paper is concerned with women in the federal civil service. In particular, it is concerned with the role that motherhood plays in the career paths of female civil servants, the role that federal family-friendly workplace policies play in promoting or inhibiting the career advancement of these women and the roles that both these factors play in enabling us to understand the paucity of women at the top of the career civil service. The reasons for these foci are two-fold. First, both the early women and politics literature and much of the vast literature in sociology point to the competing influences of ambition and family responsibilities (Kirkpatrick 1974; Sapiro 1982; Bielby and Bielby 1989; Blair-Loy 2003; Hochschild 1989; Loscocco 1991; Smith 1987; Stone and Lovejoy 2004). In other words, women's participation in the workplace writ large is

shaped to a considerable extent by their childcare and “second shift” responsibilities. Or as former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich put it (Reich 1998:10), “is it possible to play in the major leagues – in the rough and tumble high stakes world of putting ideas into practice – and still be a good father and husband?” It is therefore important to examine what role these responsibilities play in the careers of women in the civil service. And second, family-friendly workplace policies have been promoted as a way of attaining greater gender equity in the workplace (Gornick and Meyer 2003). The federal government has an extensive array of family-friendly workplace policies and, at least in theory, they are available throughout the civil service. Therefore, the federal government provides an excellent laboratory to examine the role that these policies play in advancing gender equity and producing a more descriptively representative bureaucracy.

Previous Research

Research on the Glass Ceiling

Scholars have long noted a discrepancy between men’s and women’s career advancement (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995; Naff 1994; National Society of Professional Engineers 1992; US Merit Systems Protection Board 1992). In other words, men are more likely to receive promotions and advancement than women are. This has come to be known as the “glass ceiling.”

Most of the research on the glass ceiling has focused on the private sector including that conducted by the Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995; see also Kay and Hagan 1995; Morgan 1998; National Society of Professional Engineers 1992; Weeden 2005). But a few scholars have examined the glass ceiling in the context of public sector employees (see e.g., Bullard and Wright 1993; Newman 1993; Powell 1994;

Schneider 1993). Foremost among these is Katherine Naff (Naff 1994, 2001; Naff and Thomas 1994). In her research, Naff has examined a wide range of factors hypothesized to account for the glass ceiling in the context of the federal civil service. These include human capital factors such as education and work experience, work opportunity factors such as mentoring and # of hours worked per week and personal or family-related factors such as marital status and the presence or absence of children. Naff finds that education and work experience are important predictors of grade level and promotion and that women may lag behind men with regards to these factors. She finds little support for the work opportunity hypothesis, writing, “differences in career advancement for men and women appear not to have been related to work opportunity variables” (Naff and Thomas 1994:257). But most importantly, she finds that parental status has a significant and diachronic effect. “That is, men with children have advanced the furthest; women with children have advanced the least, with childless women and men in between” (Naff and Thomas 1994:258; Naff 2001:75). In short, “women with children are paying a career price that men with children are not” (Naff and Thomas 1994:266).

But this research begs the question of why – what is it about child-bearing that handicaps women but not men? Naff suggests that it is an “image” or perception problem – that supervisors assume that women are less committed and therefore they are passed over for promotions. But the sociology literature suggests an alternative explanation: that women are in fact less committed due to their child-care and second shift responsibilities (Becker and Moen 1999; Bielby and Bielby 1989; Hochschild 1989; Lang 2000). As Dorothy Smith (1987, 23) has written, “it is the social organization of women’s labor in the home and outside and the relations between the two which *are*

women's inequality." It is that possibility that I explore in this paper – that women's family obligations impinge on and conflict with their career ambitions and that, at least some, professional women in the civil service have opted for a "mommy track" over the fast-track in order to reduce their work/family conflict. In other words, in this paper, I attempt to "bring sociology back in" in order to draw attention to the broader context within which women work. Doing so helps us to understand why, despite gains in educational attainment and work experience, women continue to be under-represented at the top ranks of the federal civil service.

Research on Federal Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

There is one additional factor that needs to be taken into account. And that is the availability, in the executive branch, of an extensive array of family-friendly workplace policies. These policies, listed in Table 1, include flex-time, telecommuting, part-time work options, on-site child care, and various parental leave policies including the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA) and the Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act (FEFFLA) (Berman et al. 2006; Durst 1999; Newman and Mathews 1999; Riccucci 2002; US OPM 1998). Although these policies were adopted for a variety of reasons including concern with congestion and pollution in the greater Washington Metro area, they are believed to play a role in diminishing work/family conflict and promoting gender equity (Clinton 1994; Gornick and Meyers 2003). They are, therefore, examined in this paper to determine what role, if any, they play in helping to redress the gender imbalances at the upper echelons of the federal civil service.

[Table 1 here]

Research on federal family-friendly workplace policies has proceeded along four tracks. First, a great deal of research is devoted simply to documenting the availability of these policies across agencies (Kemp 1995; Roberts 2000; Suntrop 1989; US GAO 1994; US OPM 1998, 2003). A second track has attempted to explain why some agencies have implemented these policies while others have resisted (Durst 1999; Kemp 1995; McCurdy et al. 2002). A third track has focused on utilization – the extent to which these policies are used and by whom (Lewis 1998; Newman and Mathews 1999; Saltzstein et al. 2001). And finally, a fourth group of scholars have attempted to measure “the difference these policies make” on a variety of dependent variables including reducing work/family conflict and job satisfaction (Bohen and Viveros-Long 1981; Dalton and Mesch 1990; Ezra and Deckman 1996; Lewis 1998; Ralston 1990; Saltzstein et al. 2001).

It is these last two tracks that are relevant to our interest in gender equity and whose findings I will summarize here. First, with respect to utilization, not surprisingly policy usage varies by policy. This is in part due to availability – some policies are more widely available than others. For example, the number of on-site child-care facilities is limited and agencies have been much slower to allow telecommuting than flex-time (interviews; Suntrop 1989; US GAO 1994; US OPM 2003). But there is also a “gender gap” in policy utilization, at least for some policies. Whereas just about everybody – including those without kids – use some form of flex-time, women are much more likely than men to work part-time and to take parental leave (Fried 1998; Lewis 1998; Blair-Loy and Wharton 2002; Saltzstein et al. 2001; Sandberg 1999). In fact, 80% of federal employees working part-time are women (Lewis 1998). These findings make it important to investigate the role that utilization of family-friendly workplace policies –

designed to be gender-neutral and alleged to enhance gender equality – may play in women’s career paths/advancement.

Second, with respect to policy impact, scholars have examined a wide range of dependent variables. A great deal of the focus has been on benefits alleged to accrue to employers such as reductions in absenteeism and increases in productivity (e.g., Dalton and Mesch 1990; Goff et al. 1990; Lambert 2000; Mason 1993). But scholars have also focused on benefits to employees such as reduced work/family conflict and increased job satisfaction. In both these cases, research has documented positive effects of family-friendly workplace policies; in other words, they reduce work-family conflict and increase job satisfaction (see e.g., Ezra and Deckman 1996; Ralston 1990; Saltzman et al. 2001).

However, despite the wide array of dependent variables considered, this literature fails to examine the role these policies may play in hindering or enhancing women’s career paths. In other words, was it the lack of family-friendly workplace policies that has historically kept women from making it to the top of their agencies and do these policies enable them to advance in ways that they were previously (prior to the adoption of these policies) prevented from doing? Again, scholars (e.g., Gornick and Meyers 2003) have hypothesized that these policies play a positive role in reducing gender inequalities, but that hypothesis is, to my knowledge, untested and it is not even addressed in the studies cited above.

These studies are further marred by their quantitative, big N survey-based approach which fails to get at in any concrete way “the difference these policies make.” In other words, how do flex-time, telecommuting, part-time work and on-site child care

reduce work-family conflict and increase job satisfaction? I will argue that they do so by better enabling women to meet their child-care and second-shift responsibilities but that in so doing, they enable these women to spend more time on those tasks and less time at work which has the unintended consequence of limiting their career advancement. Thus, these policies succeed at a number of goals but studying them in this way also reveals their limits with respect to one goal – shattering the glass ceiling. But the only way to get at that is through in-depth interviews with policy users and by adding gender equality (or shattering the glass ceiling) to the list of dependent variables examined.

Research Design

In order to shed light on/begin to answer these questions, I conducted in-depth interviews with twentytwo (22) women working in the professional ranks of the federal career civil service who were also mothers.¹ I asked them about both their career and family histories, their use of federal family-friendly workplace policies, the support they received from supervisors, mentors and spouses and their work and family commitments and aspirations.

My initial interview subjects were selected from a list of Bryn Mawr College alumnae employed in the field of “government.” This list was obtained from the Bryn Mawr College Career Development Office. From that list I was able to identify women employed in federal agencies, the agency in which they were employed, their job title, their year of graduation and their contact information. When I contacted them to set up the interviews, I inquired about whether or not they had children under the age of 18

¹ I defined professional as GS-11 and above.

living at home. In total, the population from which I drew my sample numbered almost 200.²

This population had a number of advantages. First, all were educated at an elite college and, as it turned out, most also held advanced degrees. This was done to ensure that lack of educational attainment was not a factor in their career advancement. Second, all could be assumed to be at least somewhat ambitious and likely to be on the fast track. This is based on the fact that Bryn Mawr is an elite women's college devoted to preparing young women for positions of leadership. In fact, one of their mottos is, "our failures only wed." Third, I could estimate the ages of my interview subjects and draw a sample that would vary by age but fall within the parameters of women young enough to have children at home but old enough to be in positions of authority at work. Fourth, I expected that their GS-rank would be random and so I would get some women at all levels of the professional ranks of the civil service from GS-11 to the Senior Executive Service (SES). And finally, I hypothesized that this group would produce a good response rate since I thought that they would be willing to participate in a study being conducted by a Bryn Mawr professor. In fact, my response rate was 100% with the exceptions of one woman whose e-mail was bounced back to me and three women who did not have children.

To avoid any possible biases that might result from only interviewing Bryn Mawr College alumnae, I then used "snowballing" to expand my list of interview subjects. I asked the women I interviewed to refer me to other women with children in their office. The only problem with this method is that my interview subjects are clustered in a limited number of agencies. Nonetheless, these agencies are random and represent the gamut of

² This research is on-going and I plan to conduct at least eight (8) more interviews this summer.

agencies in terms of both mission and personnel. In the end, I interviewed twelve (12) Bryn Mawr alumnae and ten (10) women identified via snowballing (see Table 2).³ The other characteristics of my sample are presented in tables 3-5.

[Tables 2-5 here]

For the most part, interviews were conducted in the respondents' offices in Washington, DC in July and November 2005 and lasted between one and two hours. A few interviews were conducted in public places such as restaurants or coffeehouses, one was conducted in a regional office in Philadelphia and one was conducted by phone. Almost all of the interviews were taped and have been transcribed.

Findings

The Impact of Motherhood

My first finding is that the women I interviewed cluster just below the "glass ceiling." I had expected these women to be randomly distributed but instead, as Table 5 shows, only three occupy "senior pay levels" and the majority (almost 2/3) are clustered in the GS-13-14 group.⁴ In addition, only four of my interview subjects – two of whom are now "empty-nesters" -- held managerial or supervisory positions.

Some might argue that the same would hold for a comparable sample of men – that the pyramid gets narrower at the top and, therefore, you don't find many people of any gender there. But that does not account for why men hold 83% of the positions above GS-15 (Federal Glass Ceiling Commission 1995). Nor does it account for why so

³ Additional interviews will be conducted this summer.

⁴ The Federal Glass Ceiling Commission (1995: 35) defines "senior pay levels" as including the Senior Executive Service and "employees in other pay systems paid above the salary for a GS-15 Step 10."

many of this highly qualified, highly educated, clearly bright and talented sample are languishing at these lower levels.

Instead, the answer lies not in ability or qualifications or even in opportunities but in motherhood. The women I interviewed, “scaled back” in order to accommodate their family needs and responsibilities. In fact, even one of the “top three” was there only reluctantly and only after two of her three children had started college.

More typical were the following from a Cornell Ph.D., a University of Michigan MPP, an EEOC attorney, a BLS economist and, most tellingly, an IRS policy analyst:

I’m not going to be applying for any big supervisory jobs right now. I value my flexibility and my time at home.

. . . It would have been too much to try and move into a job where I would’ve had to work more hours and learn management while I was a new mother.

My career ambitions have definitely shrunk . . . When I first got out of law school, I had visions of rising up whatever ladder there might be to more and more prominent positions but now[post -motherhood] the tradeoff isn’t worth it to me; I just could care less now about doing those things.

I think that I probably would have applied to different types of positions if I didn’t have the responsibility of going home and taking care of the kids and the home. But it’s not something I regret . . . I really don’t regret any of the decisions not to apply for a certain managerial position or a different position in the office that maybe would have required longer hours. . . .

When she [her daughter] was about six months old I was offered a detail to go work in a higher grade as a manager. But I just couldn’t take it because my baby wasn’t sleeping through the night at that point and I just felt that I couldn’t take a job with more responsibility.

In a nutshell, these women were encouraged by their supervisors to apply for promotions and, in a number of cases, were actually offered promotions that they declined. They preferred a “mommy track” that enabled them to strike the work/family

balance that they desired. In particular, two things kept them in lower level positions and on the “mommy-track” – the desire to limit their hours at work and their desire to continue to use the federal government’s “family-friendly workplace policies.” They all felt, quite strongly, that they could not advance to the next level without forgoing these benefits. They felt that “the next level” required a different kind of job commitment – longer hours and a more “present” presence that could not be done part-time, flex-time or while telecommuting. And so, they languish at GS-13 and 14 in jobs that, by their own admission are not all that challenging and for which they are over-qualified. As the IRS policy analyst put it:

And so, I’ve actually stayed in my last job for four years. I have been a 14 program analyst for the last four years. I’m just kind of treading water for now knowing you can’t move ahead to new challenges without compromising something [on the home front].

Similarly/likewise, the EEOC attorney commented:

Well, I think the ‘succeed at work’ was sort of what I did before I had kids. Now, I’m coasting.

In sum, to a woman, the women in my sample (including the three who hold positions above GS-15) had tempered their ambitions to accommodate motherhood. They had “voluntarily” removed themselves from the fast-track in order to accommodate their family responsibilities. Opportunities for advancement and promotion had been available to them but they had “chosen” not to take advantage of them in order to maintain the work/family balance that they sought. The most telling example is the Justice Department attorney who had been Section Chief for one week when I interviewed her. She had turned down the job of Section Chief three times over a period of eight years before accepting it because she was not willing to make the familial

sacrifices that she felt were necessary to perform at that level. Finally, with two of her three children away at college and the third in high school, she was willing to forgo her part-time position for the full-time position of Section Chief. But even then, one week into her new job, she still had misgivings about the sacrifices to her family that her new job entailed.

In sum, my interviews indicate that talented women are not reaching their full professional potential, not as a result of gender discrimination or lack of qualifications, but due to the demands of motherhood.

The Impact of Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

It is when we examine the federal government's family-friendly workplace policies that we see most clearly both the benefits and the limitations of these policies. These policies help professional female civil servants tremendously in two respects: they enable them to remain in the workforce (as opposed to "opting out") and they reduce their work-family conflict. But where they come up short is in enabling these women to advance above the glass ceiling and in challenging the organization of women's labor in the home. Instead, what these policies do is enable these women to better meet their child-care and second shift responsibilities but only by remaining in lower-level positions that are compatible with the use of these policies. This section will consider the impact of the policies depicted in Table 1 on a variety of dependent variables: recruitment, retention, reduction in work/family conflict, career advancement and gender equity. It will document the positive impacts of these policies on the first three of these variables and the unintended negative consequences on the fourth and fifth.

Recruitment

First, with respect to recruitment, many of the women I interviewed flocked to the federal government after becoming mothers because they perceived it as an incredibly family-friendly place to work. In other words, they left private sector employment following motherhood because they sought a more family-friendly and more accommodating work environment and they felt that the federal government offered such an environment. Others, a smaller number, chose federal employment in the first place because they perceived it to be more family-friendly than other alternative workplace settings such as private-practice law and academia.

Of the ten attorneys in my study, seven started out in private practice. After becoming mothers, they found private sector law to be incompatible with motherhood. By contrast, they found federal employment – with its shorter hours, greater flexibility and family-friendly workplace policies – to be much more compatible with their responsibilities as mothers. They joined agencies such as the Justice Department and the FTC where they find that they are able to strike the work/family balance that they seek. Typical was the following from a GS-18 attorney at the SEC:

I was in private practice. I had just had my second child. And, um, I joined at the time because I had two young kids and I was in private practice and I was on a partnership track – and that was just completely not working. My husband's also a lawyer – and he used to travel a lot. And we just really couldn't manage our family. And my perception was that it was going to be substantially easier to have a career – to maintain a career in the federal government – than it was doing litigation in private practice which is what I was doing.

In a nutshell, the lawyers I interviewed flocked to the federal government because they perceived it to be significantly more family-friendly than corporate law.

This is an important finding within the context of gender equity because it provides professional women – lawyers in particular – a way to remain in the workforce as opposed to “opting out” following child-bearing. These women did not find private practice to be compatible with motherhood. But they found public sector employment – with its family-friendly environment, better hours and family-friendly workplace policies -- to be so. These policies thus have a positive effect on these women’s labor market attachment.

Retention

Similarly, federal family-friendly workplace policies have a positive impact on the retention of women in the federal workforce. Recent research – and recent media hype – has focused on the growing number of professional women who are leaving the workforce following parenthood (Belkin 2003; Stone and Lovejoy 2004). That is not the case in the federal government. Instead, the shorter hours, workplace flexibility and family-friendly workplace policies offered by the federal government keep these women gainfully employed.

I asked all twenty-five of my initial contacts to point me to women they knew who had left federal employment after becoming mothers. I ended up with only one name – an attorney at the Treasury Department who had left federal employment to become a school librarian at her children’s school. All of the others stayed because they found that federal employment enabled them to meet both their work and family needs. As one attorney in the Department of Labor’s Office of the Solicitor General put it, “my take is that women in this office stay here . . . because there’s no place to go that is as family-friendly as this.” Another attorney, this one at the EEOC, said, “it’s [the part-time

work option] just enabled me to keep working. I mean it's much more important than money.”

This offers a useful antidote to talk of an “opt-out revolution” (Belkin 2003); if you provide a family-friendly environment and family-friendly policies, you can stem the tide of professional women’s exodus from the workforce. It also helps work towards gender equity by enabling women to remain in the workforce.

Work/Family Conflict

It is with respect to reducing work/family conflict that federal family-friendly workplace policies have the greatest positive impact. Basically, these policies – flex-time, part-time work options, telecommuting and the combination of FMLA and FEFFLA – significantly reduce the myriad sources of work/family stress faced by 21st century professional women. These policies enable these women to meet their second shift and child-care responsibilities. And they enable them to keep their sanity while so doing.

Research shows that women continue to shoulder the brunt of the “second shift” – all of the work that goes into running a household (Burns et al. 2001; Hochschild 1989; Mason and Goulden 2004; U.S.BLS 2005). And they continue to be the primary care providers for children even when they are also in the workforce full-time. The federal government’s family-friendly workplace policies enable the women in this study to meet these needs by providing them with the time and flexibility that they need. A few examples will suffice.

Telecommuting, for example, enables these women to work from home one day a week. They use this day “to be home for the plumber or the electrician”. The part time

work option allows fourteen of the twenty-two women I interviewed (almost 2/3) to work four, rather than five days, per week. As one BLS economist put it:

And what do I do on my day off? I do mostly household production. . . .I do things like bill-paying and food shopping. Sometimes I'll do [the kid's] doctor's appointments.

They work four days and 32 hours a week instead of five days and 40 hours a week and use that extra day to go to the supermarket and the dry cleaner.

These policies also help mitigate another source of work/family stress – child-care. FEFFLA enables civil servants to use their own sick days to care for a child or other family member. The women in this study use this policy in spades because as any parent knows, kids, especially pre-school age kids in day care, get sick a lot. Basically, FEFFLA means that instead of facing a crisis every time their kid gets the sniffles, they can take a sick day and “just stay home.”

Flex-time also helps on this front. Flex-time allows federal workers to work hours other than the traditional 9-5 so long as they are present during the agency's “core” hours – typically 10 to 3. The women in my study use this policy to minimize the number of hours that their children are in day care or after care. What they do is to “split” the child-care pick-ups and drop-offs with their spouse. Thus, one parent takes the kids to school or to the school-bus in the morning, arrives at work a bit late (say 9:30) but then stays at work late, while the other parent arrives at work very early (say 7:30) but leaves work early (say 4pm) to pick the kids up at school, after-care or day care. This reduces women's worry about their children spending long hours in paid care. As one put it:

I work 7-3:30 so I can pick them up relatively early. My husband does the morning. He gets them up and dressed and out the door. The downside is just that you have like five minutes with your spouse.

Finally, telecommuting (typically working from home one day per week) increases the number of hours that these women are able to spend with their children by cutting out their commute time one day a week. Since commutes in the Washington area can easily run an hour each way, this frees up an extra hour or two to spend with their kids one day per week without cutting down on their working time. As one SEC attorney put it:

Door-to-door it [my commute] basically takes me an hour in the morning and in the evening so on the days that I telecommute, I actually can spend an extra half hour in the morning with my daughter and my son having breakfast with them or watching morning cartoons with them. In the afternoon, I pick them up earlier . . .”

In sum, these policies reduce three significant sources of stress for professional women – their second shift or household responsibilities, spending enough time with their kids and child-care coverage for sick children.

Career Advancement and Gender Equity

As stated at the outset of this paper, Gornick and Meyers (2003) claim that family-friendly workplace policies will help women in their quest for gender equality. They claim that the adoption of such policies will increase women’s workforce participation (and their labor market attachment), help to close the gender wage gap, and increase men’s participation in child-rearing and the second shift. We have seen the positive role that these policies play with respect to women’s workforce participation and labor market attachment. But it is when we turn our attention to women’s career advancement, alteration in men’s roles and women’s responsibility for household production and child-care that these policies appear to come up short.

First, the women in this study seem to have found a happy compromise that works for them – relatively challenging and rewarding work that contributes to the public good but on their own terms in terms of hours and flexibility. What they don't want to give up are those hours and flexibility. And they all feel that it is necessary to do so to advance to the next level – to break through to the other side of the glass ceiling. As a result, what these policies do is to enable women in the professional ranks of the career civil service to strike the balance between work and family that they seek. But what they do not do is enable them to advance to the next level. The reason for that is that they do not believe that they can do the “top jobs” while working part-time, while telecommuting or while using FEFFLA on a regular basis. They believe that the top jobs require more hours and less flexibility and they are not willing to sacrifice their shorter hours and greater flexibility in order to advance. To repeat two of the comments presented earlier:

I'm not going to be applying for any big supervisory jobs right now. I value my flexibility and my time at home.

. . . It would have been too much to try and move into a job where I would've had to work more hours and learn management while I was a new mother.

Thus, the federal government's family-friendly workplace policies have created a “mommy-track” and that mommy track keeps these women happily toiling in the bulging middle of GS-13 and 14 but does nothing to move them up the career ladder into the Senior Executive Service or equivalent.

Second, a number of the women who I interviewed use these policies to support their spouses' career advancement. One SEC attorney telecommutes one day a week so that her husband, who works for the CIA, can work late one night. She added:

So I mean, ideally, I would like to telecommute two days a week because then, you know, my husband can spend more time at work and I can spend more time with the kids in the morning and the afternoon.

Another, a policy analyst at the IRS, extended her maternity leave at the same time that her husband accepted a promotion into the Senior Executive Service. She told me:

Well, I get a little jealous of my husband sometimes. My husband is SES . . . sometimes I feel like, wow, yeah, you know I'm really giving something up, but of course my kids are worth it.

This was not widespread, and there were a few cases where the father was the primary care provider. But it is nonetheless telling with respect to the ability of these policies to break down gender inequities. Instead, women are using these policies to enable their male partners to advance.

Third, previous research combined with my anecdotal evidence suggests that “men don't use FEFFLA.” It suggests a gender gap in policy usage and in what federal employees use these policies to do. So long as it is primarily women who are using these policies and/or who are using them to fulfill their child-care and household responsibilities we will not see a level playing field in terms of either career advancement or gender equity. In other words, responsibilities outside the workplace are inextricably intertwined with workplace commitment and so long as there are gender discrepancies in the former there will be gender discrepancies in the latter. It is only when men start to work part-time in order to food-shop and telecommute in order to spend an extra hour a day with their kids that these policies won't be so detrimental to women's career advancement. In the meantime, this clearly points us to the next step for this research –

to, in fact, determine the extent to which usage of these policies is gendered and the impact that policy usage has on men's career paths.

Finally, it remains the case that "it is the social organization of women's labor in the home and outside and the relations between the two which *are* women's inequality" (Smith 1987:23). And this is why women remain clustered and languishing just below the glass ceiling and why family-friendly workplace policies do not result in that glass ceiling being shattered. Instead, what they do is to facilitate the replication of the current organization of women's labor by giving them more time and more flexibility to perform their home labor but not enough time to labor at the top of the civil service hierarchy.

Strategies to Address Remaining Barriers to Women's Career Advancement

We have seen that although family-friendly workplace policies have a number of positive effects, they do not seem to ameliorate the barriers to women's equal representation at the top of the civil service hierarchy. This raises the question, what can we do to ameliorate those barriers? I see three possible solutions to this problem – three ways to increase the number of women at the top. First, top-level positions need to be re-defined. If someone can be a GS-14 while working part-time and telecommuting one day a week, why can't that same person be a GS-15 manager with the same work schedule? This will require a culture change both among the managers and supervisors who define these positions and among the women I interviewed who self-select out of these positions because it is *their view*, not just their supervisors', that these jobs can't be done part-time or from a distance.

Second, gender inequities at work and home need to be addressed. Here, men need to be more involved in and more responsible for child-care and the second shift.

Moreover, incentives need to be put in place to increase the number of men who use the federal government's family-friendly workplace policies for the purposes of child-care and household production. Research on usage by fathers is limited and is the next stage of this project. But the research that has been done suggests that men are much less likely to work part-time or to take parental leave (beyond a few days) and that when they use other policies such as compressed work weeks or telecommuting, they do not do so to increase their involvement in child-care or household production. If more men used these policies – which are, in theory, equally available to them – that would free up more time for women to be at work. And it might make management more willing to allow people to use these policies at even the highest levels.

Finally, and related to the first, we need to rethink our job requirements. Do we really need the 24/7 economy we have created? Do we really need our government's managers at their desks from 8 in the morning till 8 at night? In a recent *Women and Politics* article, Knight, Galligan and Nic Giolla Choille (2004) suggest some very creative ways of changing the workplace setting itself rather than merely allowing for workplace accommodations for select individuals. Among the changes they suggest (in the context of the Irish parliament) are mandatory ending times for all parliamentary business (i.e, a requirement that *all* business cease at a designated time) and designating one day a week as “family days.” Such changes would be tough sells in the American and bureaucratic contexts where bureaucrats are already perceived as “lazy.” But they suggest a creative way of getting at the problem of gender inequity by making the workplace itself more “family-friendly” for everyone not just for those with special

needs. A shorter workday and shorter workweek for all would level the playing field for women.

Conversely, the more we can do to ease household production and to improve the quality of our day-care and after-care programs, the more we will enable women to dedicate more time to the workplace. On-site child care is a step in this direction but much more needs to be done with regards to providing universally available quality child and after-care programs.

Findings from the early research of Kirkpatrick and Sapiro to the most recent research of Lawless and Fox (2005) and Knight, Galligan and Nic Giolla Chiolle (2004:3) have found that “balancing the amount of time devoted to family and public activities [is] the single most oft cited inhibitor to office-seeking.” Likewise, this study has shown that this balance is a significant barrier to women’s advancement in the federal civil service as well. We therefore have to do better at devising accommodations that might “ameliorate this barrier to women’s equal representation.” Ironically, family-friendly workplace policies do not seem to be the right set of accommodations. We must therefore look harder at our workplaces, our home lives and our men to overcome the remaining hurdles to women’s career advancement and gender equity in the federal civil service.

Conclusions

This paper has found that the federal government’s family-friendly workplace policies play a significant role in the recruitment and retention of talented women to public service.

[Table 6 here]

Unlike professions such as law and investment banking, these women are not “opting out” of the workforce. Instead, the federal government’s family-friendly workplace policies enable them to remain in the workforce by giving them the flexibility they need to meet their child-care and second shift responsibilities. Moreover, these policies serve as magnets for talented women, particularly attorneys, who find the private sector less accommodating.

It has also found that these family-friendly workplace policies reduce work/family stress and are good for child and family well-being. As Gornick and Meyers (2003) point out, gender equity should not be our only concern. They argue that we – scholars, feminists and citizens – should also be concerned with two other issues that have arisen as a result of women’s entrance into the workforce: work/family stress (often referred to as work/family conflict) and child well-being. This paper has shown “the difference these policies make” with respect to these two concerns. These policies enable the women I interviewed to fulfill their child-care and second shift responsibilities. And they are good for kids by providing for parental leave, parental care when children are sick and ways to limit the number of hours that children are in day-care, after-care or other paid, non-parental care.

However, it is when we turn our attention to gender equity and women’s advancement in the federal civil service, that the limitations of these policies become most apparent. The women in this study have made a trade-off; they have traded workplace flexibility and reduced hours for career advancement. As a result, we continue to have a career civil service where women are over-represented at the bottom, clustered in the middle but under-represented at the top. Since most women are mothers, the only

way to increase the number of women at the top is to enable mothers to advance to those positions. The federal government's family-friendly workplace policies do not enable them to do so and, in fact, keep them clustered just below the glass ceiling – working flexible jobs with flexible hours but on the “mommy track.”

At the outset of this paper, I presented a question posed by former Secretary of Labor Robert Reich who asked, ““is it possible to play in the major leagues – in the rough and tumble high stakes world of putting ideas into practice – and still be a good father and husband?” In the context of women in the professional ranks of the civil service, the answer to Reich's question is that it is possible to be a good mother and wife but only by staying in the minors – these women have not yet found a way to play in the majors and still be the kind of mothers and wives that they desire to be. And so they are choosing long-term contracts in the minor leagues over the rough and tumble high stakes of the majors. This has significant consequences for women in politics because it limits the number of women available to advance to the highest reaches of the civil service and to serve as leaders therein. If we think that women bring a “different voice” to politics, or even if we just view women as human capital, then, at present, the federal government is not availing itself of the full range of talent at the top where, crises like hurricane Katrina show, we need it the most.

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Table 1
Federal Family Friendly Workplace Policies

Policy	Year Adopted	Authority
Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA)	1993	Statutory
Federal Employees Family Friendly Leave Act (FEFFLA)	1994	Statutory
Leave Sharing Act	1994	Statutory
Federal Employees Part-time Career Employment Act	1978	Statutory
Job Sharing	1990	OPM
Alternative Work Schedules	1978; 1985	Statutory
Flexiplace/Telecommute	1990	OPM
On-site & Near-Site Child care	1985	Statutory

Table 2
Method for Obtaining Interview Subjects

List of Bryn Mawr College Alumnae	12
Snowballing	10
Total	22

Table 3
Agencies Represented

Department of Agriculture	1
Department of Education	1
Department of Justice	2
Department of Labor	4
Department of State	4
Department of Transportation	1
Department of the Treasury	2
Equal Employment Opportunity Commission	1
Federal Trade Commission	2
FDIC	1
Securities and Exchange Commission	3
Total	22

Table 4
Professions of Interview Subjects

Lawyer	10
Ph.D.	4
MA, MPA, MPP	5
BA or BS; no advanced degree	3
Total	22

Table 5
GS-Rank of Interview Subjects

GS-12	1
GS-13	5
GS-14	9
GS-15	4
>GS15	3
SES	0
Total	22

Table 6
Impact of Family-Friendly Workplace Policies

GOAL	POLICIES
Assist Recruitment	+
Assist Retention	+
Reduce Work/Family Conflict	+
Improve Child Well-being	+
Improve Gender Equity	-