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## Women's Lives, Local Geographies, and the Effects of Maternal Breaks on Women's Employment

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Recent increases in the paid employment of women—especially those with young children—are well documented. In 1992, fifty-eight percent of all United States working-aged women and two-thirds of all married mothers were in the labor force, including more than half of those with children under six. [1] Despite their increased numbers, however, working women continue to earn lower wages than men, a pattern that is in part caused by occupational sex segregation. Female-dominated occupations, which employ the majority of women, tend to pay less than those that are male-dominated. One of the most heated academic debates about women's employment involves the reasons why women remain concentrated in occupations that are lower-paying and female-dominated.

Human capital theorists have argued that women's lower wages and concentration in female-dominated occupations are caused by women taking child-related breaks from paid employment for extended periods for child rearing. [2] They maintain that women receive lower wages than men as a result of their breaks from employment, and that women choose jobs in female-dominated occupations because they are less likely to penalize women for breaks than other types of work. While we agree that women are more likely than men to leave paid employment for extended periods of child rearing, we do not believe that child-related breaks *cause* either job segregation by sex or the depressed wages of women workers.

This article examines both the theoretical and the empirical aspects of the debate over the effects of child-related breaks on women's employment. We break from tradition by theorizing women's time away from the paid labor force as "real time" in which a woman can continue to acquire job-related skills and build networks of social support that may influence her career path when she returns to paid employment. Our analysis is based on data from interviews that we conducted with women and men in 640 households in Worcester, Massachusetts. Viewing maternal breaks as part of a woman's continuous life course rather than as a discontinuity, or as something of a "black hole," suggests that *where* a woman is living while she is out of the labor force can be significant for her career path. We thus seek to ground women's choices and constraints in geographical context and to highlight the importance of geographic scale.

Previous studies of the impacts of interruptions in women's labor force participation have yielded conflicting results. Some show that child-related breaks lead directly to lower wages and status, while others find no statistical evidence that breaks affect women's later careers. One reason for this discrepancy is that studies use different categories of analysis to collect and analyze data. Some use continuous work histories, which include information about all periods of employment and unemployment in a person's

life. Others include only a triplet of events (i.e., a job-break-job sequence) or a single pair of events (a break and a job). In addition, studies of child-related breaks focus on different possible effects. Some measure the impact of breaks on wages and others assess the occupational status or the gender composition of the jobs that women hold. Furthermore, the definitions used to measure sex-segregation in workers' employment vary between studies. [3]

Given these qualifications, how well do existing studies support the hypothesis that women's breaks from employment cause women's lower wages and occupational segregation? Studies that have focused on wages yield no clear message. Some have found that women's child-related breaks have long-term negative effects on their earnings, while others have found that when women return to full-time employment, their wages quickly rebound to their pre-break levels. [4] Findings about the effects of child-related breaks on occupational segregation are also inconsistent. Some studies have found a strong correlation between breaks for full-time mothering and employment in female-dominated careers, while others have found no evidence that women workers with extensive time away from paid employment or frequent interruptions are more likely to concentrate their work experience in female-dominated occupations. [5]

Studies that focus on women's occupational status and mobility also render conflicting results, although most suggest that breaks from paid employment are correlated with constraints on some women's occupational mobility. Several studies have found a statistically significant relationship between leaving work for childbearing and downward occupational mobility upon returning to work. [6] The impact of breaks on occupational status, however, appears to depend on the status of the woman's pre-childbirth job. [7] The relationship is further complicated by whether or not a woman is able to return to the same job; several studies have found that women who continue in their pre-childbirth job have a better chance of upward mobility than those who find jobs with different employers. [8]

The most consistent finding in the literature on the effects of maternal breaks is the tendency of women to shift into part-time employment after a break, a change that is consistently related to a loss of occupational status. [9] Many mothers find part-time employment a necessary or an attractive arrangement because they face primary responsibility for domestic work and because finding adequate child care is difficult. For these reasons, working part-time after a break, rather than the break itself, seems to play an important role in women's lower wages and status, as well as their concentration in female-dominated occupations.

In sum, academic studies of the effect of maternal breaks are inconclusive, in part due to the diversity of strategies used to measure women's employment histories, but also due to biases in the way that the problem is defined. Most studies do not take into consideration that women tend to bear heavier domestic responsibilities after a break than they did beforehand. They also fail to acknowledge that workers' domestic responsibilities influence their employment options and, therefore, their wages and status— independent of workers' gender or whether they take breaks in employment. [10] If we explain women's labor market position largely in terms of the existence of child-related breaks, we ignore the ways that events in women's life courses—such as childbearing—may alter temporal and spatial constraints, career aspirations, and the relative importance of family commitments in their lives. [11]

In our investigation, we focus on one metropolitan area: Worcester, Massachusetts, USA. We draw upon data collected through in-person interviews conducted in late 1987 and early 1988 as part of a larger study of gender and urban labor markets. The study focused on how people decide where to live and where to work, what they value in a job, how they find jobs and housing, and how they decide to take and leave certain jobs and homes. [12] The sample, which is representative of the population resident of the Worcester metropolitan area, includes women and men aged 21 to 64 in 640 households. During the interviews, we collected continuous employment histories, starting with the present and going back at least ten years. [13]

Our data set allows for up to nine different "job events." A job event is defined as the moment when a person leaves a job or returns to work after a period of unemployment. Breaks are periods where the respondent was not employed for any reason, (e.g., layoff, childbearing/rearing, travel, study). A new job event is also triggered by the respondent taking a new job title with the same employer or by initiating work with a new employer. [14] In the data set, we identify each break by the major activity undertaken during that time. Child-related breaks include breaks for childbirth or for "staying home with the kids." A maternity leave from a continuously held job does not constitute a break event in our data, since the employment tenure was not broken.

In addition to employment histories, the survey contained numerous open-ended questions. In response to these questions, many interviewees expanded on and interpreted their actions and decisions. Women's responses to these open-ended questions afford us insights into connections between their experiences on a child-related break and their subsequent employment. We did not set out to study the effects of maternal breaks on women's careers, but as we became more familiar with the data, we realized that we could use it to investigate breaks in a unique manner.

In this paper we use data from the Worcester study to explore three issues. First, we examine the characteristics of women in the data set who have taken child-related breaks. Second, we evaluate the short- and long-term effects of maternal breaks on women's earnings and occupations. Third, we explore how the effects of breaks taken by women in our study have been influenced by local geographical context. Our analysis confirms the finding of earlier studies: breaks are more common among women with less education and lower status jobs. The data do not, however, support the human capital argument that breaks *cause* low wages or occupational segregation. Finally, our findings on this issue suggest new lines of inquiry into women's child-related breaks from employment.

In our sample of 492 women, 352 had children (72 percent), and 267 of the women with children had either taken a child-related break during the time period recorded in the job history, or were doing so at the time of the interview (76 percent). We found that not all women were equally likely to leave the labor force to care for their children (see Table 1). For example, those who were in female-dominated occupations at the time of the interview were significantly more likely to have taken a child-related break than were women in other occupations. [15] Women who had taken a child-related break also tended to have, on average, less education than women with children who did not take such breaks. [16] In addition, we found that women who took breaks tended to have begun their careers with lower-status jobs than mothers who did not take breaks. [17] This suggests one way that the experience of motherhood differs among women: women with less education and lower-status jobs are more likely to take child-related breaks than all other employed women.

In part, these patterns reflect the fact that at the time of our study, maternity leaves—which allow a woman continuous employment—were more readily available to women in higher-status and higher-paying jobs. Before the passage of the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act in the United States, women who left the labor market temporarily for pregnancy or childbirth often lost their jobs. [18] In this context, whether or not a woman took a break was likely to have been influenced by her employer's maternity leave policy. In our study, the benefit of maternity leave, either paid or unpaid, was available to a much higher percentage of women in skilled blue-collar or professional/managerial occupations (about 71 percent of women in these occupations had this benefit) than it was to women in unskilled occupations or skilled white-collar jobs (44 percent and 58 percent of whom, respectively, had access to maternity leave). Personal income was even more closely tied to maternity leave benefits: 93 percent of women who earned \$25,000 or more annually had this benefit, but only 34 percent of women who earned less than \$15,000 did. [19] Without the benefit of a maternity leave, many lower-income women are forced to take a "break." If the act of taking a break has negative long-term repercussions, then the pattern of breaks that we document here suggests the exacerbation of existing class inequalities among women. It implies that women who already have less education and lower potential earnings face greater penalties for having children than those who are already better off.

In addition to the unequal distribution of maternity benefits, women's access to child care contributes to variations in who takes breaks. Women with higher-paying, higher-status jobs are generally able to pay more for child care than women in unskilled, low-paying occupations. Among the employed mothers that we interviewed, those with professional or managerial occupations paid almost five times as much for child care as women in unskilled occupations (\$74.14/week and \$15.22/week per child, respectively). [20] Professional women and women whose partners have high incomes can pay more for child care and, therefore, have a variety of child-care options available to them. In contrast, child-care expenses prevent many unskilled women from returning to work after their children are born. As with maternity leave, the unequal availability of child care reinforces the connection between women's low-wage work and child-related breaks.

Despite the relationship between the occurrence of breaks and occupational status, we did not find evidence that breaks caused a significant movement of women into female-dominated occupations, an increased propensity to earn lower wages, or downward occupational mobility. Women are not more likely to be employed in a female-dominated occupation right after a child-related break than they are just before the break. This is shown in Table 2, which was generated by tabulating all of the jobs held and breaks taken by women in the data set, including those who never had children or took breaks. The first column shows the percentage of all of women's jobs that fall into each occupation type. The second column shows the occupation type of jobs that immediately preceded a break, and the third column shows only those jobs that directly followed a break. As the table shows, the concentration in female-dominated occupations immediately following breaks, when 66.3 percent of all jobs were in female-dominated occupations, is almost identical to the concentration immediately prior to breaks, when 67 percent were in female-dominated occupations. Likewise, women are not necessarily less likely to hold male-dominated or gender-integrated jobs after taking a break. These numbers reflect overall patterns. While some individuals left male-dominated jobs for female-dominated ones, others who worked in female-dominated jobs before their break returned to a male-dominated or gender-integrated occupation. Similarly, while some women experience downward occupational mobility due to a break, others experience significant upward mobility between their pre- and post-break jobs, a pattern that we discuss in greater detail below.

We have noted the strong relationship between being in a female-dominated occupation and having taken a child-related break, and we have reported the absence of any statistically significant relationship

between taking a break and immediately moving into female-dominated work. What explains this apparent anomaly? One answer has already been discussed: women who take breaks are more likely to be employed in low-wage, female-dominated jobs *before* their breaks than are women who do not take maternal breaks. This trend is also illustrated by Table 2, which shows that the percentage of all women's jobs that are in female-dominated occupations (46.2 percent) is much lower than the percentage preceding a break (67 percent). A second answer lies in the substantial proportion of women who choose to work part-time after a child-related break. Although 26.1 percent of employed women worked part-time immediately prior to taking a child-related break, 61.5 percent worked part-time immediately following a break. Two jobs after a break, 52.4 percent of employed women were still working part-time. Less than a quarter (22.1 percent) of all women's jobs that were part-time were held by women who had never taken a maternal break.

It is important to consider the impact of working part-time on women's job histories and to disentangle this from the influence of a break. We have shown that a break *per se* does not drive women into female-dominated occupations. Our data do suggest, however, that the decision to work part-time leads women into gender-segregated jobs (although not all part-time jobs are in female-dominated occupations). This process is difficult to detect because of the strong overarching relationship between working part-time and working in a female-dominated occupation. [21] Nevertheless, we do find a larger shift of workers from male-dominated and gender-integrated occupations into female-dominated ones among women who return to work part-time rather than full-time after a childbearing break. For example, for women employed in male-dominated occupations before a break, only 14.3 percent moved into a female-dominated job if they returned to full-time work, but 33.3 percent of those who returned part-time shifted into female-dominated work. Among those employed in gender-integrated occupations before the break, 42.9 percent of those returning to full-time work entered female-dominated occupations, compared to 63.6 percent of those who moved to part-time hours. The decision to work part-time is therefore associated with a shift into female-dominated work. This shift likely reflects the greater availability of part-time work in female-dominated occupations. In our Worcester study, for example, nearly three-quarters of all the female-dominated occupations represented in our sample offered part-time hours, while only 35 percent of gender-integrated occupations and 10 percent of male-dominated ones offered part-time hours.

For many women, the shift into part-time work means a job in a low-wage, female-dominated occupation. But does the decision to work part-time after a child-related break permanently "damage" the career trajectory of a woman who later returns to full-time employment? Our data show that it does not. Among those women who were working full-time when we interviewed them, we could detect no wage or status effects of having returned to work part-time after a break. [22] Most women, however, did not move into full-time work after an initial post-break stint in a part-time job but stayed working part-time; 67.7 percent of the women who had reentered the labor force into a part-time job were still working part-time when we interviewed them. In sum, a shift into part-time work often characterizes women's return to the labor force after a child-related break. This decision to retain part-time hours dampens women's wages and occupational mobility.

It must be kept in mind, however, that some women—particularly those who take long breaks—may experience upward occupational mobility after a child-related break. We found that women who took a break of one year or less were unlikely to experience either upward or downward mobility between occupational classes. Upon reentering the work force, 74.1 percent of women found jobs in the same occupational class. [23] Women who took longer breaks were more likely to change occupational class categories when they returned to the labor force. The direction of change was mixed, however. Some women experienced upward, and not downward mobility following an extended absence from paid employment. This suggests that they developed skills, contacts, and interests during their child-related breaks that were useful when they returned to work. The erratic nature of women's occupational mobility following long breaks from paid employment led us to investigate further women's geographical and social experiences *during* their child-related breaks.

Data from Worcester showed us that women's career decisions during and after child-related breaks were strongly influenced by the local contexts in which they lived. We have already documented how many women reassess the hours of employment and choose to work part-time after a child-related break. We now turn to an analysis of the relationship between women's residential locations and their career paths. In so doing we break away from traditional approaches to maternal breaks and, instead, consider women's lives in terms of what they are, rather than in terms of what they are not.

Feminist geographers have demonstrated that geographical context has a strong impact on women's employment patterns, raising the question of whether the effects of childbearing/rearing breaks from employment are geographically specific as well. [24] Certainly the experience of motherhood varies among different national contexts, due to variations in regulatory structure, availability of child care, economic structure, and cultural expectations. Geographical context at finer spatial scales than the nation-state is also likely to affect the impact of maternal breaks on women's careers. Women's experiences of combining paid employment with childrearing, as well as their activities during the breaks themselves, are likely to depend in part on where they live—whether it is a rural or an urban area, and the particular neighborhood or community context of residence.

One reason that women's experiences of combining childrearing and employment are likely to vary geographically within metropolitan areas is that women with substantial domestic responsibilities tend to select workplaces that are located close to home. [25] As we have seen, part-time schedules are typically used as a strategy for managing time commitments. But for many women, the return to work after a child-related break also signals new limits on their spatial mobility. The desire to be close to home or to children's schools or daycare, together with the combined time pressures of mothering and waged work, compels many mothers to avoid jobs requiring long commutes. The jobs that many women take after a break are often close to home. Women's one-way daily commutes to work after a child-related break averaged 14.3 minutes, significantly shorter than the average 19-minute commute to the jobs women held before their breaks (Table 3). Nearly half (44 percent) of the women in our sample took a post-break job that reduced their commute by at least 10 minutes. Shortening the journey to work after a break is part of a time-management strategy; it can be combined with a shift into part-time work, but women who work full-time after a break also work closer to home than they did before the break. This spatial strategy has dramatic effects on subsequent occupational mobility: women who shorten their commutes after a maternal break are more likely to experience downward occupational mobility than those who do not. [26]

In addition, different parts of a metropolitan region afford very different employment opportunities, child-care resources, voluntary associations, and local contacts; these factors may shape women's experiences during child-related breaks from the labor force and their later negotiation of mothering and paid work. [27] Furthermore, many people, especially women, search for jobs informally through locally-based networks of friends and relatives. Since many women tend to find employment close to home, the nature of local employment opportunities is extremely important. [28] For example, the relationship between commuting time and occupational mobility is modified by geographical context and is especially relevant for women living in suburban areas. Suburban women typically had especially long pre-break commutes compared to women living in the city, and suburban women most drastically shorten their home-to-workplace commutes after a child-related break, from an average of 21.3 to 15.2 minutes. [29] Given the scarce employment options in many suburban locations, a shortened commute can leave women with dramatically restricted employment possibilities following a break.

The case of one woman living in a high-income suburb illustrates the debilitating effects of low job density on women's employment after childbearing/rearing. Before leaving the work force to care for her newborn son, this woman had been employed for five years as a hospital records clerk. When she began to look for work two years later, she encountered two geographically contingent obstacles: no formal child care and few employers close to home offering part-time, flexible hours. She has since been employed in clerical jobs on two different occasions, but lost both jobs because of absences caused by child-care problems. She now works out of her home, selling Christmas decorations at private parties. The lack of adequate child-care and job options close to home led to this woman's downward occupational mobility.

The availability of local resources affects not only women's access to diverse employment opportunities, but also their access to child care. Indeed, women's access to child care is contingent not only on their incomes, but also on the child-care options available in their communities. Many women we interviewed echoed the sentiments of a 31-year old mother who lived in a small town outside of Worcester: "The fact that there is no day care here in Holden has really had an impact on my life. It led me to stay at home with my son . . . The lack of day care has limited my options." For this woman and others, a lack of local child-care resources restricts their ability to return to work and affects their experiences while they are away from paid employment.

The issue of local context draws attention to how little is known about what actually transpires while women are on employment breaks. As we noted above, investigators of occupational mobility typically treat a break from the labor force as an experiential void with respect to future labor force participation. This approach is based on the assumption that life outside of the labor force or formal educational institutions is irrelevant to the accumulation of job-related skills. But, as Isabel Dyck has shown in the Canadian context, women use their time out of the labor force to construct networks of support (chiefly for child care) that enable their return to the paid labor force. An account of what skills and resources women acquire during "breaks" and how they draw upon them as they reenter the labor force is necessary for understanding how absences from the labor force affect women's employment.

For many women, the unpaid activities that they did while on break helped them reenter the labor force in higher-status occupations than those they had left. Consider the experiences of one woman we interviewed, who lives in a blue-collar suburb of Worcester. Before leaving the work force at the age of 26, she had worked as a machine operator in a local ball-bearing factory. After the birth of her first child, she chose to remain out of the labor force for seven years. Raising her own children increased her involvement with education: she became a volunteer at her child's school. The year her youngest child entered kindergarten, she was hired as a teacher's aide in a special education classroom. Like many women interviewed, this woman's experiences raising her own children while she was away from paid employment led her to a new career: "Both my children are in special education. This got me interested in it. I volunteered for a year before I got the job. It was something I enjoyed and I'm good at it so I stuck with it."

Two aspects of this woman's story are of interest here. First, while she was out of the labor market, she was developing job skills and contacts that led to her later occupational change. Given the tendency of much scholarship to treat child-related breaks as experiential voids, the fact that most women are acquiring new skills and experiences while they are out of paid employment merits emphasis. Second, the volunteer activities she engaged in were gender and neighborhood dependent. Volunteering at public schools is largely considered an extension of mothering, and therefore is primarily undertaken by women. In working-class neighborhoods particularly, teachers and other government workers are often the professionals with whom full-time mothers have the most interaction, so it is not surprising that the contacts this woman developed while on a break from employment led her to work in a school. Our larger point is that the personal contacts that women develop during child-related breaks vary in their ability to connect women to well-paying or professional jobs. Although this woman found her new job to be preferable to the one she left, she nevertheless earned only slightly more than minimum wage, did not receive benefits from her employer, and lacked opportunities for career advancement without returning to school. In the terms that we have been using here, this woman experienced no occupational mobility following her break, since the two jobs were not markedly different in status. Women living in higher-income neighborhoods, on the other hand, often reentered the labor force in much higher-status jobs than the ones they had left, in part owing to the nature of the community contacts they made while away from paid employment.

We explored the relationship between neighborhood of residence and mobility after a break more systematically by mapping patterns of career mobility throughout the metropolitan area for women who had returned to employment from a child-related break. Census tract data on household income helped us to measure neighborhood social class, and we used the median to divide upper-income from lower-income tracts. [30] Although we recognize that this simple division masks a great deal of variability within tracts, it served as a way to test the notion that local geographical context during a break affects women's subsequent career trajectories. In a comparison of women's occupations before and after maternal breaks, we found that the majority of women, regardless of residential location, had no occupational mobility across their child-related breaks. [31] But among those who did, women who lived in higher-income census tracts at the time of their breaks were more likely to experience either upward or downward mobility than were those living in lower-income tracts (Table 4).

The higher incidence of downward mobility in high-income census tracts is not hard to understand. We found that most women who experienced downward mobility were those who had "more to lose," since they had worked in particularly high-status jobs before taking breaks. [32] A second factor that accounts for the downward mobility of women in high-income neighborhoods is the fact that these middle-class women are also more likely to return to long-term, part-time employment, a scheduling strategy that is typically tied to either unchanging occupational status or to downward mobility. While this strategy has clear negative effects on women's careers, it is also more readily available to women who are married to men earning high incomes, since high male incomes render women's full-time earnings less of a financial necessity.

The more puzzling pattern is the occurrence of upward occupational mobility among women in high-income census tracts. We cannot explain this pattern in terms of women's different educational levels; we find no relationship between formal education and occupational mobility over the break. [33] A woman with a college or graduate degree is no more likely than a woman with less formal education to experience upward mobility after a child-related break. Instead, we find a distinctly spatial explanation: women in high-income neighborhoods with upward mobility tended to have a wealth of community contacts and skills that were instrumental in their reentry into higher-status occupations. The importance of community resources is likely to be even greater for women whose educational credentials are limited or dated, but who have developed long-term roots in a prosperous suburban community. A number of women in our sample had translated their residential stability and local knowledge into paid work by pursuing careers in residential real estate or by starting a business after their maternal breaks. One woman who lived in a high-income suburb with her husband, a physician, had been out of the labor force for 28 years when her youngest child went to college. Looking forward to a new challenge, she and a friend decided to open a bookstore in their town, where they both knew many people. She told us: "I like to read. We did a survey and talked to people in town, so we knew the town needed a bookstore, and we decided to open one." With no up-to-date job skills (she had previously worked in an office) but established roots in the community and a reader's knowledge of books, this woman entered the labor force as a store manager and owner.

Our analysis of interviews with women living in Worcester, Massachusetts, provides important information about the connections between women's careers and their child-related breaks from paid employment. Despite arguments to the contrary, we find that women do not immediately shift into female-dominated occupations after child-related breaks. Yet the relationship between child-related breaks and later employment characteristics are not straightforward. Child-related breaks are almost always connected to other dramatic changes in women's time, priorities, and options. While many women do return to jobs of lower status than the ones they left, the change is not necessarily an effect of the break. If a woman's break included adding a child to the household, she has substantially more domestic

responsibilities upon returning to work than when she left, which can influence her job choice. Thus women often choose part-time work, or are limited to jobs close to their homes, for the very same reason that they took breaks to begin with: their increased family responsibilities.

The fact that maternity leaves were less available to women who have the lowest incomes indicates a serious point of inequity among women. Without the benefit of maternity leave, many lower-income women in our sample were no doubt forced to take a break, creating financial hardship in some households. In the same vein, the relative cost of child care is much higher for women who earn lower incomes, which encourages some women with lower earnings to stay at home with their children.

Our key argument, however, is that the effect of a child-related break on a woman's career is influenced by what she does and where she lives while she is away from paid employment. The skills and contacts that a woman acquires while away from the labor force can play a large role in the type of job to which she returns. We have found, however, that it is women living in relatively high-income neighborhoods who are more likely to experience upward mobility after a break, in part because their communities avail them of contacts that are useful resources when they reenter the labor market. This suggests that the negative effects of breaks will be stronger for lower-income women, who are already disadvantaged in terms of availability of income or benefits.

Finally, this paper has tried to show by way of example the importance of rethinking the categories and terms that we use to analyze women's lives. Past researchers have investigated the effects of child-related breaks on women's occupational mobility. But their approaches have been based on the implicit assumption that "normal" workers, understood as men, do not have discontinuous work histories. The traditional approach has also reproduced the conceptual dichotomy between public and private spheres by assuming that time spent caretaking in the private world of the home is irrelevant to paid employment in the public sphere. The outcome of these methodological assumptions has been to erase some aspects of women's lives, such as their added domestic responsibilities after breaks and the relationship between their geographical contexts and employment histories.

Although a single case study is insufficient to answer the myriad questions that arise from challenging the traditional framework, it does raise important research questions for the future. To fully understand the role of breaks in women's employment, more research needs to be done linking women's activities while they are full-time homemakers with their later employment outcomes. What kinds of unpaid activities contribute to occupational mobility? Are certain types of residential environments more conducive to women's careers? What are the connections between the networks that women develop for support when they are at home full-time, and the networks that they use to find different kinds of jobs? Investigating these and related questions will help to put women's everyday lives at the center of analyses of employment and earnings.

Table 1: Women Who Had Ever Taken a Child-Related Break by Occupation Type at the Time of the Interview.

	Child-related break?	
	no	yes
All employed women (n=337)	54.6%	45.4%
Female-dominated occupations (n=182)	47.8%	52.2%
Women in Gender-integrated occupations (n=125)	66.7%	33.3%
Women in Male-dominated occupations (n=30)	61.6%	38.4%

$\chi^2 = 7.63$ ;  $df=2$ ;  $p=0.02$ .

Source: Personal interviews with a sample of Worcester-area households, 1987-88.

Table 2: Women's Occupation Types before and after Child-Related Breaks

	All jobs held by women	Jobs before child-related break	Jobs after child-related break
Female-dominated occupation	770 [34] / 46.2% [35]	189 / 67.0% [36]	161 / 66.3% [37]
Gender-integrated occupation	365 / 21.9%	70 / 24.8%	57 / 23.6%
Male-dominated occupation	101 / 6.1%	20 / 7.1%	18 / 7.4%

Source: Personal interviews with a sample of Worcester-area households, 1987-88.

Table 3: Average Commute Times (in Minutes) to Jobs before and after a Child-Related Break from the Labor Force

	Before break	After	Is the difference of means significant

		break	at p=0.05?
All women	19.00 [38] / n=162 [39]	14.29 / n=164	yes
Job after break full-time	20.35 / n=64	15.70 / n=69	yes
Jobs before and after break part-time	14.50 / n=35	16.66 / n=32	no
Job before break full-time/job after break part-time	19.08 / n=61	12.40 / n=58	yes

Source: Personal interviews with a sample of Worcester-area households, 1987-88.

Table 4: Occupational Mobility over a Child-Related Break from the Labor Force, for Women in Different Residential Settings

Residential location	Occupational Mobility			Total
	Upward / n=17	Downward / n=16	None / n=96	
High-income census tract	11 (17.7%)	11 (17.7%)	40 (64.5%)	62
Low-income census tract	6 (8.7%)	5 (7.5%)	56 (83.5%)	67

Source: Hanson and Pratt 1995.

Note: High-income tracts are those with average median family income above the 1980 MSA median (\$20,180); low-income tracts are those below.  $X^2 = 6.19$ ;  $X^2 = 6.19$ ;  $d.f.=2$ ;  $p<0.05$

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## Notes

1. See for example Hayghe; Hayghe and Bianchi.

2. For example, Mincer and Polachek; Polachek; Mincer and Ofek.

3. In studies that focus on gender-based occupational segregation, the definition of a female (or male)-typed occupation differs. For example, in some studies, a female-typed occupation is one in which more than 50% of the incumbents are women. In others, it is an occupation where at least 70% of the incumbents are women. In this study we use the 70% figure. For a study that uses the 50% figure, see Rosenfeld. Studies using the 70% figure include Jacobs and Hanson and Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space*.

4. For studies that show a long-term negative impact, see Jacobsen and Levin; Joshi. One study that argues that women's wages do not suffer is Corcoran, Duncan, Ponza.
5. For a correlation between breaks and entry into female-dominated occupations, see Polachek. Studies that do not find this correlation include England and Corcoran, Duncan, and Ponza.
6. See Roberts; Robinson; Dex; Perry.
7. The evidence for this is somewhat contradictory, depending on which feature of the pre-childbirth job is highlighted. Perry found that British women with higher employment qualifications and longer work experience before the break were less likely to experience downward mobility, as were women who worked between births. On the other hand, using the same data source, Dex reports that, overall, women in higher-status occupations, with the exception of teachers, were more likely to experience downward occupational mobility following a break for childbearing than were women further down the occupational ladder.
8. Brannen; McRae.
9. For example, Perry found that returning to part-time work had the single largest effect on British women's downward occupational mobility (494). See also studies by Roberts; Dex; Brannen.
10. See Siltanen 97-118.
11. Two exceptions are Christensen; Gerson.
12. See Hanson and Pratt, "Job Search and the Occupational Segregation of Women"; Hanson and Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space*.
13. The average number of years in the work histories was 16.3 for women and 15.7 for men.
14. For each job event in the work history, we collected information on the job's start and end dates (month and year), whether the job was full-time or part-time, occupation (later coded to a three-digit census occupation code), firm type (later coded to a three-digit census industry code), the job's location (street address), mode of travel to work, travel time to work, reasons for taking this job, and reasons for leaving it.
15. To evaluate gender-based occupational segregation, all jobs were placed in one of three categories on the basis of the gender composition of the occupation nationwide. Female-dominated occupations are those in which at least 70% of the workers are female. Male-dominated occupations are at least 70% male, and the remaining occupations are classified as gender-integrated. As in other research on occupational segregation, women employed in female-dominated occupations earned lower average wages (\$8.70/hr) than those in male-dominated (\$11.70/hr) or gender-integrated occupations (\$9.79/hr). A comparison of means test found the difference to be statistically significant at ( $p=0.01$ ). In addition, we found a significant ( $p=0.01$ ) negative correlation between the percent of jobs in a woman's history that were in female-dominated occupations and her 1987 wages.
16. Women with a college education are significantly less likely ( $p=0.001$ ) to have taken a child-related break than are women with less education. Only 57.9% of college-educated mothers in our sample had taken a break, compared to 75.8% of mothers with only a high school diploma. Other analyses with similar findings include Desai and Waite; Jacobsen and Levin.
17. To compare the entry-level employment characteristics of women who did and did not take breaks, we calculated an occupational prestige score (The Total Socio-Economic Index—TSEI) for each woman's first job. TSEI is an interval scale that ranks occupations on a scale from 1 to 100. These scores are based on the income and educational attributes of the total (male and female) labor force and are assigned to each of the three-digit SOCs (Standard Occupational Codes) from the 1980 census. The average first-job TSEI for women who had taken a family-related break was significantly lower ( $p=0.02$ ) than the average first job TSEI score of women who had not taken a family-related break. For a discussion of the TSEI scale see Stevens and Cho.
18. In 1991, 30-40% of U.S. employers with more than fifty workers did not offer job-guaranteed (unpaid) leave policies. In the same year, twenty-three states had no state-level leave policy and only six states guaranteed both family leave and medical leave. See Spalter-Roth and Hartmann 5. Under the 1993 Family and Medical Leave Act, employers with fifty or more workers must provide up to twelve weeks of unpaid leave for medical emergencies, childbirth, or adoption. Only two-thirds of the U.S. work force is covered by this legislation, however, leaving one-third still vulnerable to job loss if they have to leave work temporarily for family or medical reasons.
19. The difference is significant at  $p=0.000$ . To put this into perspective, only 20% of the sample had annual earnings of over \$25,000, whereas roughly half of the sample earned less than \$15,000.

20. These averages include those who do not pay for child care, receiving it free or for barter from friends or relatives.

21. Given that gender typing of occupations intersects with occupational class, we also find that there are many more part-time workers among "lower" occupational grades. Almost half of the women working in nonskilled manual and non-manual occupations (41.9% and 46.1% respectively) work part-time. Roughly one-third (30%) of women working in skilled manual and nonmanual occupations work part-time, and only 26.7% of women working in managerial and professional occupations work part-time.

22. Throughout this study we have used a five-fold classification of occupational status: professional/managerial, skilled non-manual, skilled manual, non-skilled non-manual, and non-skilled manual.

23. There were no differences in wages or in occupational prestige (TSEI) between those women who had worked part-time for a while after a break and then returned to full-time work and those women who had continuously worked full-time since taking a break.

24. For a review see McDowell.

25. See Hanson and Pratt, "Job Search"; Hanson and Pratt, *Gender, Work, and Space*.

26. To measure overall occupational mobility, we subtracted the TSEI score (ranging from 1-100) of a woman's first job from the TSEI score of her current job. We then divided the difference by the number of years the woman was in the labor force to get an annual measure of occupational mobility. We found that one in five women who shortened their commute by at least ten minutes after a break had experienced downward mobility, compared to only one in twenty women who did not shorten their commutes by this amount of time. Likelihood of shortening commute by at least ten minutes was not associated with any of the following variables: current occupational class, occupational class preceding break, occupational class of job immediately following break, current personal income, family income, occupational type (e.g., female-dominated), family circumstances (e.g., divorced, married), woman's educational attainment, or the number of children in the household.

27. Hanson, Pratt, Mattingly, and Gilbert 227-253.

28. Hanson and Pratt, "Geographic Perspectives on the Occupational Segregation of Women"; Hanson and Pratt, "Dynamic Dependencies: A Geographic Investigation of Local Labor Markets."

29. The difference is significant at  $p=0.00$ . For women living in the City of Worcester, there was no statistically significant difference between pre- and post-break commute: 15.1 and 13.4 minutes, respectively.

30. We used separate medians for city tracts and suburban tracts.

31. To measure occupational mobility we compared the status of a woman's pre-break job with that of her post-break job. Only women with an increase (or decrease) of at least ten TSEI points were included as having experienced a "significant" level of occupational mobility.

32. Although the before-break TSEI scores do not differ for women living in high- and low-income census tracts, the sixteen women (across all census tracts) who experienced downward mobility had a significantly higher average pre-break TSEI score (47.9) than did either those who experienced upward mobility (28.8) or those classified as having no occupational mobility over the break (30.9) ( $p<.01$ ).

33. As measured by a 10-point increase or decrease in TSEI score from pre- to post-break job ( $p= 0.56$ ).

34. Number

35. Percent of all jobs held by women in that occupation type

36. Percent of all pre-break jobs in that occupation type

37. Percent of all post-break jobs in that occupation type

38. Average commute time in minutes

39. Number of valid observations in category

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