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1

The New Problem with No Name

NOW, MORE THAN EVER, couples of all stripes are struggling to balance employment and family, their work lives and home lives. As a nation, we are collectively waking up to the importance of caregiving, to its value, for the present and for future generations. We are starting to fully realize its cost in terms of lost income, flattened careers, and trade-offs between couples (heterosexual and same sex), as well as the particularly strenuous demands on single mothers and fathers. These realizations predated the pandemic but have been brought into sharp focus by it.

In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote about college-educated women who were frustrated as stay-at-home moms, noting that their problem “has no name.” Almost sixty years later, female college graduates are largely on career tracks, but their earnings and promotions—relative to those of the men they graduated with—continue to make them look like they’ve been sideswiped. They, too, have a “problem with no name.”

But their problem goes by many names: sex discrimination, gender bias, glass ceiling, mommy track, leaning out—take your pick. And the problem seems to have immediate solutions. We should coach women to be more competitive and train them to negotiate better. We need to expose managers’ implicit bias. The government should impose gender-parity mandates on corporate boards and enforce the equal-pay-for-equal-work doctrine.

Women in the US and elsewhere are clamoring ever more loudly for such an answer. Their concerns are splattered across national headlines (and book jackets). Do they need more drive? Do they need to lean in? Why aren't women able to advance up the corporate ladder at the speed of their male counterparts? Why aren't they compensated at the level their experience and seniority deserve?

More private doubts haunt many women, doubts that are shared in their intimate partnerships or relegated to private discussions with close friends. Should you date someone whose career is just as time consuming as your own? Should you put off having a family, even if you're sure you want one? Should you freeze your eggs if you aren't partnered by thirty-five? Are you willing to walk away from an ambitious career (maybe one you've been building toward ever since you took your SAT) to raise kids? If you aren't, who will pack the lunches, pick up your child from swim practice, and answer the panic-inducing call from the school nurse?

Women continue to feel shortchanged. They fall behind in their careers while earning less than their husbands and male colleagues. They are told that their problems are of their own doing. They don't compete aggressively enough or negotiate sufficiently; they don't claim a seat at the table, and when they do, they don't ask for enough. But women are also told that their problems are *not* their own doing, even as the problems are their undoing. They are taken advantage of, discriminated against, harassed, and excluded from the boys' club.

All these factors are real. But are they the root of the problem? Do they add up to the major difference between men and women in their salaries and careers? If they were all miraculously fixed, would the world of women and men, the world of couples and young parents, look completely different? Are they collectively the "new problem with no name"?

Although lively public and private discourse has brought these important issues to light, we're often guilty of disregarding the enormous scale and long history of gender disparities. A single company slapped on the wrist, one more woman who makes it to the boardroom, a few progressive tech leaders who go on paternity leave—such

solutions are the economic equivalent of tossing a box of Band-Aids to someone with bubonic plague.

These responses haven't worked to erase the differences in the gender pay gap. And they will never provide a complete solution to gender inequality, because they treat only the symptoms. They will never enable women to achieve both career and family to the same degree as men. If we want to eradicate or even narrow the pay gap, we must first plunge deeper toward the root of these setbacks and give the problem a more accurate name: greedy work.

I can only hope that by the time you read this, the pandemic—still raging as I finish this chapter—will have subsided and that we will have benefited from its harsh lessons. The pandemic magnified some issues, accelerated others, and exposed still more that had been festering for a very long time. But the tug between care and work that we are facing preceded this global catastrophe by many decades. Indeed, the journey to attaining, then balancing, career and family has been in motion for more than a century.

For much of the twentieth century, discrimination against women was a major bar to their ability to have a career. Historical documents from the 1930s to the 1950s reveal easily spotted smoking guns—actual evidence of prejudice and discrimination in employment and earnings. In the late 1930s, firm managers told survey agents, “Loan work is not suitable for girls,” “People with these jobs [automobile sales] are in contact with the public . . . women wouldn't be acceptable,” and “Would not put a woman in [brokerage] sales work.” That was at the end of the Great Depression. But even during the tight labor market of the late 1950s, company representatives categorically stated, “Mothers of young children are not hired,” “Married women with . . . infants are not encouraged to return to work,” and “Pregnancy is cause for a voluntary resignation [although] the company is glad to have the women return when the children are, perhaps, in junior high school.”

Marriage bars—laws and company policies that restricted married women's employment—were rampant until the 1940s. They morphed into pregnancy bars and hiring policies that excluded women with

infants and small children. Academic institutions and some government agencies had nepotism bars. Countless jobs were restricted by sex, marital status, and, of course, race.

Today, we don't see such explicit smoking guns. Data now show that true pay and employment discrimination, while they matter, are relatively small. This does not mean that many women don't face discrimination and bias, or that sexual harassment and assault do not exist in the workplace. We have not seen a nationwide #MeToo movement for nothing. In the late 1990s, Lilly Ledbetter filed an EEOC sexual harassment case against Goodyear Tire and won the right to sue. That was a real victory for her, but she dropped the charges when she was reinstated as a supervisor. This occurred years before she brought her now-famous case of pay discrimination. Ledbetter received low performance ratings and almost no pay raises because of discriminatory behavior by the men she supervised and by those who were ultimately in command but who ignored the sexism of those beneath them. In Ledbetter's case, 100 percent of the difference between her pay and that of her peers was due to discrimination.

So why *do* earnings differences persist when gender equality at work seems to finally be within our grasp, and at a time when more professions are open to women than ever before? Are women actually receiving *lower* pay for *equal* work? By and large, not so much anymore. Pay discrimination in terms of unequal earnings for the same work accounts for a small fraction of the total earnings gap. Today, the problem is different.

Some attribute the gender earnings gap to “occupational segregation”—the idea that women and men are self-selecting, or being railroaded into, certain professions that are stereotypically gendered (such as nurse versus doctor, teacher versus professor), and that those chosen professions pay differently. The data tell a somewhat different story. For the nearly five hundred occupations listed in the US census, two-thirds of the gender-based difference in earnings comes from factors *within* each occupation. Even if women's occupations followed the male distribution—if women were the doctors and men were the nurses—it would wipe out only, at most, a third of the difference in earnings between men and women.

Thus, we empirically know that the lion's share of the pay gap comes from something else.

Longitudinal data—information that follows the lives and earnings of individuals—allow us to see that right out of college (or out of graduate school), wages for men and women are strikingly similar. In the first few years of employment, the pay gap is modest for recent college graduates and newly minted MBAs, for example, and is largely explained by differences in male and female fields of study and occupational choices. Men and women start out on an almost equal footing. They have very similar opportunities but make somewhat different choices, producing a slight initial wage gap.

It is only further along in their lives, about ten years after college graduation, that large differences in pay for men and women become apparent. They work in different parts of the marketplace, for different firms. Unsurprisingly, these changes typically begin a year or two after a child is born and almost always negatively impact women's careers. But the gap in their income also starts to widen right after marriage.

The advent of women's careers fundamentally changed the relationship between the American family and the economy. We will never get to the bottom of the gender earnings gap until we understand the trajectory of the far larger problem of which it is a symptom. The gender earnings gap is a result of the career gap; the career gap is at the root of couple inequity. To truly grasp what that means, we need to take a voyage through women's role in the American economy and consider how it has transformed across the course of the last century.

Our focus will be mainly on college-graduate women, as they have had the most opportunities to achieve a career, and their numbers have been expanding for some time. As of 2020, almost 45 percent of twenty-five-year-old women have graduated, or will soon graduate, from a four-year college. The level for men is just 36 percent. Women, of course, didn't always outnumber men as college graduates. For a long time, and for many reasons, women were at a great disadvantage in attending and graduating from college. In 1960, there were 1.6 males for every female graduating from a US four-year college or university. But beginning in the late 1960s and early 1970s, things began to change. By 1980, men's

advantage had evaporated. Since then, more women than men have graduated from four-year institutions each year.

And they aren't just graduating from colleges and universities in record numbers—they are setting their sights higher and higher. More than ever before, these graduates are aiming for premier postbachelor's degrees and subsequent challenging careers. Just prior to the Great Recession, 23 percent of college-graduate women were earning one of the highest professional degrees, including a JD, a PhD, an MD, or an MBA. That reflects more than a fourfold increase across the previous four decades. For men, that fraction remained around 30 percent during the same forty-year period. Women have increasingly been planning to have long-term, highly remunerative, and fulfilling careers—sustained achievement that becomes embedded as part of an individual's identity.

More of them are also having children—more than at any time since the end of the Baby Boom. Almost 80 percent of college-graduate women who are today in their mid- to late forties have given birth to a child (add 1.5 percentage points to include adoptions to those without a birth). Fifteen years ago, just 73 percent of all college-graduate women in their mid-forties had at least one birth. So college-graduate women born around the early 1970s have a considerably higher birth rate than college-graduate women born in the mid-1950s. There are now more women than ever like Keisha Lance Bottoms, Liz Cheney, Tammy Duckworth, Samantha Power, and Lori Trahan—all of whom have had successful careers plus children and are currently around fifty years old.

College-graduate women no longer accept without question having a career but no family. Those who have children are no longer fully content to have a family but no career. By and large, college-graduate women want success in both arenas. But to do so requires negotiating a slew of time conflicts and making a host of difficult choices.

Time is a great equalizer. We all have the same amount and must make difficult choices in its allocation. The fundamental problem for women trying to attain the balance of a successful career and a joyful family are time conflicts. Investing in a career often means considerable time input early on, precisely during the years one “should” be having children. Enjoying one's family also involves considerable time. Those

choices have dynamic consequences, and we have little ability to make amends for bad decisions. Fifty years ago, when advising younger women about career, one female business executive and mother of three said, “It’s hard—but do it.”

We are always making choices, like partying or studying, taking hard courses or taking easy ones. Some, naturally, are more momentous. Marry early; marry late. Go to graduate school; get a job now. Have a child now; take a big chance that you won’t be able to later. Spend time with a client; spend time with a child. Those big, consequential choices regarding time allocation for college-graduate women begin around when they receive their bachelor’s degrees.

Not long ago, marriages among college graduates occurred at astoundingly early ages. Until around 1970, the median age at first marriage for a college-graduate woman was about twenty-three years old. The first child was born soon after. Early marriage often precluded further study for women, at least immediately. Newly married couples moved more often for the husbands’ career and education than for the wives’. Women didn’t always maximize their own future career prospects. Instead, they often sacrificed their careers to optimize the family’s well-being.

For women who graduated college from the 1940s to the late 1960s, early marriages occurred because marriage delay was a challenge. Getting pinned, lavaliered, and—the ultimate—engaged soon after starting a serious (and sexual) relationship was an important insurance policy against having a premarital pregnancy. In a world without female-controlled and highly effective contraception, choice was constrained.

By 1961, the Pill had been invented, FDA approved, and procured by large numbers of married women. But state laws and social convention did not allow the Pill to be disseminated among young, single women. Those restrictions began to break down around 1970 for various reasons, most unrelated to contraception. The Pill gave college-graduate women a newfound ability to plan their lives and to obviate the first of the constraints. They could enroll in time-consuming—actually all-consuming—postbachelor’s education and training. Marriage and children could be delayed, just long enough for a woman to lay the foundations of a sustaining career.

That's when things began to change, radically. After 1970, the age at first marriage started to increase, and it continued to climb year after year—so that the median age of first marriage for college-graduate women is now around twenty-eight years old.

But even as the time-constraint problem was solved, others cropped up. Postgraduate education began to start later in the lives of college graduates and take longer to complete. The time to first promotion in a host of fields from academia to health, law, accounting, and consulting was increasingly delayed. The additional years mounted, resulting in yet another time conflict that had to be negotiated.

About a decade or more ago, a first promotion occurred in one's early thirties. More recently, it occurs in one's mid- to late thirties. The timing no longer comfortably allows for giving birth to one's first child after one's first promotion to partner, tenure, or other advancement. The first birth often occurs before these career milestones. Children often upend careers. And careers often upend the ability of women to have children.

The timing is brutal. For women who want to have a family, waiting to their mid-thirties to have their first child is stacking the deck against succeeding at the family part and having the children. Yet college-graduate women have managed to beat the odds through various means, including the use of assisted-reproductive technologies. The fraction of women with children has startlingly increased for those who recently turned forty-five years old. The increased birth rate doesn't diminish the frustrations, sadness, and physical pain for those who tried and did not succeed. For those who did succeed, it doesn't mean that they can maintain their careers.

Even with all these difficulties, much has changed historically in a positive direction, bringing us closer to more self-efficacy for women and greater gender equality. Women have better control of their fertility. Marriages are entered into later and, in consequence, last longer. Women are now the overwhelming fraction of college graduates. Multitudes of them enter professional- and graduate-degree programs and graduate at the top of their classes. The best firms, organizations, and departments are hiring them. Then what happens?

If a woman's career has a chance to flourish and she manages to have children, the ultimate time conflict emerges. Children take time. Careers take time. Even the wealthiest of couples can't contract out all care. And why bring children into this world if you aren't going to love and nurture them?

The fundamental time constraint is to negotiate who will be on call at home—that is, who will leave the office and be at home in a pinch. Both parents could be. That couple equity would yield the ultimate fifty-fifty sharing. But how much would that cost the family? A lot—a reality couples are more aware of now than ever before.

As aspirations for both career and family have increased, an important part of most careers has become apparent, visible, and central. Work, for many on the career track, is greedy. The individual who puts in overtime, weekend time, or evening time will earn a lot more—so much more that, even on an hourly basis, the person is earning more.

Greedy Work

The greediness of work means that couples with children or other care responsibilities would gain by doing a bit of specialization. This specialization doesn't mean catapulting back to the world of *Leave It to Beaver*. Women will still pursue demanding careers. But one member of the couple will be on call at home, ready to leave the office or workplace at a moment's notice. That person will have a position with considerable flexibility and will ordinarily not be expected to answer an e-mail or a call at ten p.m. That parent will not have to cancel an appearance at soccer practice for an M&A. The other parent, however, will be on call at work and do just the opposite. The potential impact on promotion, advancement, and earnings is obvious.

The work of professionals and managers has always been greedy. Lawyers have always burned the midnight oil. Academics have always been judged for their cerebral output and are expected not to turn their brains off in the evenings. Most doctors and veterinarians were once on call 24/7.

The value of greedy jobs has greatly increased with rising income inequality, which has soared since the early 1980s. Earnings at the very upper end of the income distribution have ballooned. The worker who jumps the highest gets an ever-bigger reward. The jobs with the greatest demands for long hours and the least flexibility have paid disproportionately more, while earnings in other employments have stagnated. Thus, positions that have been more difficult for women to enter in the first place, such as those in finance, are precisely the ones that have seen the greatest increases in income in the last several decades. The private equity associate who sees the deal through from beginning to end, who did the difficult modeling, and who went to every meeting and late-night dinner, will have maximum chance for a big bonus and the sought-after promotion.

Rising inequality in earnings may be one important reason why the gender pay gap among college graduates has remained flat in the last several decades, despite improvements in women's credentials and positions. It may be the reason why the gender earnings gap for college graduates became larger than that between men and women in the entire population in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Women have been swimming upstream, holding their own but going against a strong current of endemic income inequality.

Greedy work also means that couple equity has been, and will continue to be, jettisoned for increased family income. And when couple equity is thrown out the window, gender equality generally goes with it, except among same-sex unions. Gender norms that we have inherited get reinforced in a host of ways to allot more of the childcare responsibility to mothers, and more of the family care to grown daughters.

Consider a married couple, Isabel and Lucas (modeled after a couple I met several years ago). They both graduated from the same liberal arts college and later earned identical advanced degrees in information technology (IT). They were then hired by the same firm, which we'll call InfoServices.

InfoServices gave each of them a choice between two positions. The first job has standard hours and comes with the possibility of flexibility

in start and finish times. The second has unpredictable on-call evening and weekend hours, though the total number of annual hours doesn't necessarily increase by much. The second position pays 20 percent more, to attract talent willing to work with uncertain times and days. It is also the position from which InfoServices selects its managers. It is the "greedy" position, and both Isabel and Lucas initially opted for it. Equally capable and equally free of external obligations, the two spent a few years working at the same level and pay.

In her late twenties, Isabel determined that she needed more flexibility and space in her life, in order to spend more time with her ailing mother. She stayed with InfoServices but opted for the position that, although it required the same number of hours, was more flexible regarding which hours were to be worked. It was less greedy in its demands and less generous in its pay.

We can see their trajectories in figure 1.1. The path on which they both started and where Lucas remained—the greedy, inflexible one—is given by the solid line and has an hourly wage (implicit if the person is salaried, and explicit if the person is paid by the hour) that rises with the number of hours, or perhaps with particular hourly demands. If he works sixty hours a week, he would be paid *more than* one and a half times what he would make if he put in forty hours. Lucas's implicit hourly wage increases with hours worked (or with the inflexibility of hours), which means he could double his weekly earnings even if he didn't work twice the number of hours per week.

Isabel's new role, the more flexible position, is given by the dashed line. Her hourly wage is constant, so it doesn't matter how many hours she works or which hours she works; the wage is the same. If she works sixty hours, she would get one and a half times what she would for working forty hours. A usual week of work puts Lucas, in his greedy position, at the diamond. Equivalently, a usual work week in Isabel's new job places her at the dot.

When the couple decided to have a child, at least one parent needed to be available on call. They could not both work in the position Lucas had, with its inflexible and unpredictable hours. If they did, neither

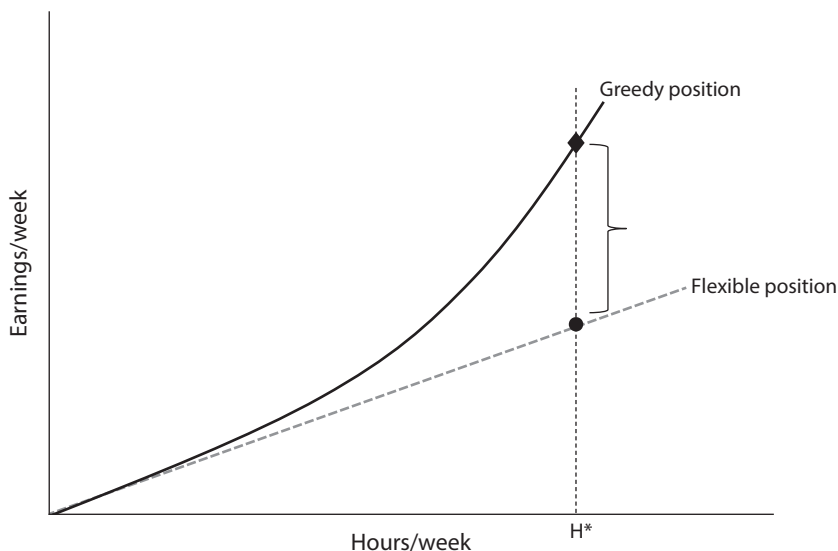


FIGURE 1.1. Gender Inequality and Couple Inequity

Notes: Consider the two positions offered to Isabel and Lucas. One is flexible, and no matter how many hours the employee works per week, the pay per hour is the same. The other position is less flexible (or “greedy”), and the more hours that are worked, the higher the wage per hour. The horizontal axis gives hours worked per week (or a measure indicating that particular hours must be worked). The vertical axis gives the total earnings per week. H^* is a usual weekly hours number, such as 40 or 45. The difference between the diamond (the greedy position) and the dot (the flexible position) illustrates the amount of income that a worker gives up each week by not taking the greedy position.

would be available in case the school nurse called or the child’s daycare center suddenly closed in the middle of the day. If the position required that they be in the office on Thursdays at precisely eleven a.m., they would have to just hope that their child would not fall off the swing around that hour or that an older family member wouldn’t have a doctor’s appointment then.

Both of them *could* have worked at Isabel’s position. But, especially because they were planning a family, they couldn’t afford that decision. Doing so would mean that each would forgo the amount of additional income per week that Lucas brought in. If they wanted to share the childcare fifty-fifty, they needed to weigh that desire against how much that would cost them. It could be a lot—significant enough

that they would have to sacrifice couple equity for a higher family income.

As is the case with most heterosexual couples expecting a child, Isabel remained at the flexible position while Lucas stayed at the greedier one. (That would hold true even if we excluded the initial months after delivery and throughout their child's infancy.)

Lucas continued to earn more than Isabel, and the earnings gap only expanded after they had children. He got the promotions; she did not. For other couples in similar positions, the difference in pay might expand even more before having the children, since couples planning for a family often relocate to optimize employment possibilities, especially that of the husband. This is a big part of why the gender gap in pay is still substantial.

For same-sex couples, there will not be a gender earnings gap, but couple equity will likely be jettisoned for precisely the same reasons that motivated Isabel's and Lucas's decisions. In a world of greedy jobs, couple equity is expensive.

If women weren't on call at home, they could take jobs with disproportionately high pay for long hours, unpredictable schedules, on-call evenings, and occasional weekends—and indeed many women do. Choosing long and demanding hours is fine for women right out of college and for those with fewer household responsibilities. But once a baby arrives, priorities change. Primary caregiving is time consuming, and women are suddenly on call at home. To be more available to their families, they must be less available to their employers and clients. As a result, they tend to cut back hours, or they take jobs in areas of the marketplace that offer more flexibility—and earn far less. These responsibilities are reduced as children get older and become more independent, and women's earnings do rise relative to men's at those times. But other family demands often creep in somewhat later in life, replacing the reduced child demands.

Isabel and Lucas's story is not unusual. As college graduates find life partnerships and begin planning families, in the starkest terms they are faced with a choice between a marriage of equals and a marriage with more money.

A Marriage of Equals

Some time ago, I asked the students in my undergraduate seminar what they wanted out of a marriage. One of my students replied in an instant: “I want a man who wants what I want.” Her answer struck me as a candid statement of a desire for equity. It has since been repeated by many students and friends of mine, but never as succinctly and clearly. The continuing quandary, however, is that even if that match were made, it will be costly in terms of family equity for both to have demanding careers, or costly in terms of family income for both to have less demanding careers. To maximize the family’s potential income, one partner commits to the time-consuming job at the office while the other makes career sacrifices to take on the time-consuming job at home. Regardless of gender, the latter will earn less.

Gender is not a factor that can be ignored, because the person who sacrifices career to be home is—historically and still today—most often a woman. Women aren’t lazy or less talented, and they start out on a fairly equal footing with men. Due in part to the entrenched gender norms we’ll be exploring, even ambitious, talented women have felt the need to slow down their careers for the greater good of their family. *Men are able to have a family and step up because women step back from their careers to provide more time for the family.* Both are deprived: men forgo time with family; women forgo career.

To the modern reader, the idea of women having careers from which to step back or toward which to step up may seem so normalized as to be unnoteworthy. Women go to school, just like men, and pursue higher education and profitable careers, just like men. But it’s worth pausing to reflect on just how new this situation is. In 1900, very few college-graduate women with young children were in the labor force, let alone had anything resembling a career. Those devoted to work generally did not have children and often did not marry. More than a century later, women are not just working; they have meaningful careers that many manage, or intend, to combine with a family in an equitable marriage. In all of world history, this has never happened before.

When more than half the population's economic role changes, it marks a staggering historical shift—one that has had immense ramifications. The lives of college-graduate women have evolved the most radically, but the effects of this profound shift have reverberated throughout American society, affecting the whole social organization of work, schools, and families. When women moved from home to the workplace, they didn't just move from unpaid work to paying work. They moved from domestic responsibilities to positions that required extensive education, that became part of their identities, and that often spanned the course of their lives.

Every generation of women in the twentieth century took another step along this journey, while a host of advances in the home, the firm, the school, and in contraception paved the way for this progress. Each generation expanded its horizons, learning from the successes and failures of the preceding generation and leaving lessons for the next wave of women. Each generation passed a baton from one to the next. The journey has taken us from the stark choice of having a family *or* a career to the possibility of having a career *and* a family. It has also been a journey to greater pay equity and couple equity. It is a complicated and multifaceted progression that is still unfolding.

If this shift across the decades has been overwhelmingly positive, why are we still wrestling with gaping differences between men's and women's earnings, occupations, and positions, and with the yawning disparities between their family responsibilities?

Modern young women, especially during the ongoing COVID crisis, are anxious—and rightly so. Despite their travels along this road that was paved by their great-grandmothers, grandmothers, and mothers (most of whom were anxious, too), they are still caught between devoting themselves to a career and devoting themselves to a family. With technological advances and increases in education, professional degrees, and opportunities, many barriers have been removed and discriminatory roadblocks to women's success have been toppled. As we'll see, throughout the century-long journey, layers of gender differences have been shed, barriers to women's employment have been knocked

down, and a host of time constraints have been removed. Clouds have parted. And with better light, the reasons for the final difference have now become apparent.

Collectively, we have arrived at a moment when we can ask how to alter the system to bring about greater gender equality and couple equity. How can we change the basic diagram, that of Lucas's greedy job and Isabel's flexible job, to achieve both? The answer, as we'll discover, is that we must change how work is structured.

We have to make flexible positions more abundant and more productive. Determining whether and how that can be done is where this journey will take us. It will reveal the need for greater support to allow parents and other caregivers to be more productive members of the economy. It will clarify the relationship between the productivity of the economy and the care of preschool and school-aged children—the subject that has been brought home and made so relevant, suddenly and swiftly.

At the moment when we could more clearly see why achieving career and family is so difficult for women—and thereby envisage a solution—we were engulfed in a pandemic of global proportions. A tsunami swept over us. We moved from BCE (Before the Corona Era) to DC (During Corona); from an “old normal” to circumstances that have upended families, sickened millions, killed hundreds of thousands in the US, and erased years of economic growth from the world's nations. It may also have tossed many young mothers off their precarious career ladders as they tried to write briefs, academic papers, and consulting reports, and to care for clients and patients, all while teaching their children addition and subtraction.

We are now moving into an uncharted AC/DC era—a world that is partially After Corona (AC), in the sense that many schools and business have opened, but with many of the restrictions and remnants of the DC world. The shift to an AC/DC world has revealed another defect in the American society and economy: caregiving, so critical to the career goals of women and to couple equity, is also crucial to the running of the entire economy. Women cannot be essential workers in two places at the same time. Something has to give.

We will return—many pages from here—to examining the AC/DC world, but to fully grasp how we got here and how we can best use this opportunity to overhaul greedy work, we must return to the beginning. The desire among college-graduate women for career and family has been long in the making. That aspiration has been brewing, changing, emerging, and morphing through several key phases of our history.

At the beginning of our travels, when there were enormous differences between men's and women's education and when running a household required much more time and labor, no one could have realized what the last impediments to a level playing field would have been: the structure of work and our caregiving institutions.

Though we've reached an unprecedented era of equality between men and women economically, in some ways we are still living in the dark ages. Our work and care structures are relics of a past when only men had both careers and families. Our entire economy is trapped in an old way of functioning, hampered by primeval methods of dividing responsibilities.

As more women than ever aspire to have careers, families, and couple equity, and as more couples than ever navigate competing time demands, it is imperative that we understand what the economic gender gap actually reveals about our economy and our society—so that we can work toward solutions that close it and make work and life more equitable for everyone. The data in the chapters that follow will demonstrate the progress made in each generation, how gender norms and workplace structures have evolved for decades, and how the journey must continue.

This book is the story of how the aspirations of career, family, and equity emerged over the past century, and how they can be achieved today. There is no one simple fix, but by finally understanding the problem and calling it by the right name, we will be able to pave a better route forward.

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