One fundamental change in the structure of the American family during the past quarter century has been the increase in employment of married women. In the United States today, the modal family is one in which both husband and wife work (Grossman, 1982). In two-parent families with children of any age, the percentage of women who worked in 1960 was 30.5 percent, while in 1980 it was 50.2 percent. For those families with children between the ages of 6 and 17 years, the rate of maternal employment in 1980 was 61.0 percent (U.S. Bureau of Labor, 1982). Clearly, most of today’s children will spend at least part of their lives in a family with a working mother.

One topic which has received much attention by researchers is the social and intellectual development of children with either employed or nonemployed mothers (Etaugh, 1974; Hoffman, 1974, 1979, 1980; Lamb, 1982). Interestingly, most researchers have focused their attention on elementary school-aged children, probably because of the widely held belief that adolescents need less contact with their mothers than do younger children who may be at risk for a variety of psychological problems as a result of repeated separations from their mother (Bowlby, 1973). Consequently, less research exists on the 10-17-year-old age group, since many people undoubtedly believe that once children reach early adolescence, their autonomy and independence from parents insulates them from whatever negative or positive consequences might result from maternal absence due to employment.

This view may not be warranted, however, since adolescents continue to interact with their mothers, and alterations of the family system as a result of maternal employment might have a profound effect on adolescent development. On the positive side, adolescents with working mothers may develop a greater degree of autonomy and adult maturity than those with nonworking mothers. Also, employed mothers may be models of feminine competence for their adolescents, who might develop less stereotyped and traditional sex-role concepts. Finally, employed mothers may have a less stressful relationship with their adolescents because they would not be as fully invested in child-rearing and therefore could more easily relinquish maternal control than could full-time homemakers (Birnbaum, 1975).

On the negative side, the lessened supervision which adolescents with working mothers probably receive could increase the risk of negative peer influences leading to involvement in a variety of illicit and illegal acts such as premarital sex, drug and alcohol use, and delinquency. In addition, parent-adolescent relations may be strained if the adolescent feels rejected by a working mother, or rebels against the increase in home chores and responsibility for the caretaking of younger siblings. All of these intriguing possibilities are feasible, and the purpose of this article is to examine the liter-
ature on working mothers to see if employment has an impact on adolescent development, and if it does, in what areas and in which direction that impact occurs.

This article focuses on more recent studies of adolescents between the ages of 10 and 17 years. The material is organized into the following four sections: academic performance; sex-roles; parent and peer relations; and delinquency and psychological adjustment.

**Academic Performance**

More than any other variable, the sex of the adolescent mediates the effects of maternal employment on adolescent intelligence, academic achievement, grade point average, and attitudes about school. While researchers often report that maternal employment is unrelated to male or female academic performance, when a relationship is found it is usually in a negative direction for boys and a positive direction for girls.

In several studies, researchers did not find differences between sons of employed or nonemployed mothers on various measures of academic performance which included achievement, intelligence, grade point average, liking for school, and educational and vocational aspirations (Brown, 1969; Gold & Andres, 1978a, 1978b, 1980; Nelson, 1969; Query & Kuruvilla, 1975; Rosenthal & Hansen, 1981). These studies were composed of samples of adolescents who ranged in age from 10 to 17 years, and who were in lower and middle-class families in the United States and Canada. Not all researchers reported that the academic characteristics of male adolescents were unrelated to the employment status of their mothers, however. Gold and Andres (1978a) found that 10-year-old sons of employed mothers from middle-class families had lower scores on language and mathematics achievement tests, while 10-year-olds from lower-class families liked school less and reported lower grade point averages if their mothers were employed. Further, boys with working mothers in comparison to those with nonworking mothers were shown to have lower IQ scores at ages 6 and 15 (but not at 12) (Rees & Palmer, 1970). Other researchers found that maternal employment was negatively correlated with IQ scores for seventh graders (Burchinal, 1963), achievement test scores for eighth and ninth grade males (Brown, 1969), and GPA for twelfth graders (Banducci, 1967).

For female adolescents, the relationship between maternal employment status and academic performance is somewhat more straightforward. Most researchers report that maternal employment is unrelated to female academic performance as measured by achievement test scores, school grades, and various attitudes about school (Banducci, 1967; Burchinal, 1963; Gold & Andres, 1978a, 1978b, 1980; Nelson, 1969; Rosenthal & Hansen, 1981). In two studies, however, it was reported that daughters were positively affected by the employment of their mothers. The best evidence for this relationship comes from Rees and Palmer (1970) who found that daughters had higher IQ scores at ages 6 and 15 (but not at 12) when their mothers were employed. In addition, Query and Kuruvilla (1975) reported a trend for girls to score higher on achievement tests when their mothers were employed; however, this difference did not reach statistical significance.

There is a trend in these conflicting findings which raises an important question, Why does maternal employment sometimes affect males negatively, but never has an adverse effect on females? In a recent review, Hoffman (1980) offers an answer to this question. She reports that increases in female independence may be linked to increases in academic success. If maternal employment leads to greater independence in adolescent females, then these girls should do better in school. Hoffman also suggests that for males an increase in independence may have a negative impact on their academic performance. This may be because those males who have a tendency for peer-sponsored misconduct now have the opportunity to take part in those activities. Other aspects of the parent-adolescent relationship that affect adolescent academic performance and which could have a differential impact on males and females are changes in maternal cognitive stimulation and achievement pressure (Jones, Lundsteen, & Michael, 1967), maternal supervision (Woods, 1972), paternal involvement (Gold & Andres, 1978a), and adolescents' perceptions of their mother's interest in them (Gold & Andres, 1978b).

**Sex Roles**

One of the most consistent findings in the maternal employment literature is that working mothers, in contrast to nonworking mothers, have daughters who believe that it is appropriate for women to be employed, even in male dominated occupations. Males with working mothers also appear to have more liberal views on the employment
of women, although these findings are not as consistent. Finally, the relationship between maternal employment and nontraditional sex-role beliefs decreases in strength during early adolescence.

Using a variety of measures, researchers have shown that daughters of working mothers are more androgynous (Gilroy, Tallerico, & Steinbacher, 1981) and have more liberal attitudes about work and their involvement in it than do daughters of nonworking mothers. Girls with employed mothers believe that most occupations should be open to both sexes (Bacon & Lerner, 1975; Chandler, Sawicki, & Stryffeler, 1981; Gold & Andres, 1978a) and also believe that it is appropriate for women with children to work (Dellas, Gaier, & Emihovich, 1979). In regard to their own behaviors, high school age daughters of employed mothers aspire to traditionally masculine occupations (i.e., engineer, doctor, etc.) more than daughters of nonemployed mothers (Banducci, 1967; Douvan & Adelson, 1966). Marantz and Mansfield (1977) reported that this desire for traditionally male occupations only was present when mothers themselves were employed in such careers, while mothers with traditionally feminine occupations (i.e., nurse, secretary, etc.) had daughters who also wanted feminine careers. Finally, adolescent daughters with working mothers were more likely to have part-time jobs themselves than were the daughters of nonemployed mothers (Douvan & Adelson, 1966).

A number of factors may account for the relationship between maternal employment status and daughters’ attitudes about working women. Certainly maternal modeling is not the complete story, since a girl who observes her mother leave for work every day may not necessarily develop a positive attitude about work if her mother is unhappy about her own employment. Gold and Andres (1978a) reported that employed mothers were more satisfied with their maternal role than were nonemployed women, and it was this difference in satisfaction that was largely responsible for differences in daughters’ views about working women. In addition, employed women who are satisfied may encourage independence and autonomy in their daughters and demand less conformity to traditional norms of femininity.

In contrast to girls, boys’ sex-role perceptions are not necessarily more liberal if their mothers are employed. In three studies, it was reported that boys with employed mothers had more liberal sex-role perceptions than those with nonemployed mothers (Chandler, Sawicki, & Stryffeler, 1981; Gold & Andres, 1978a, 1978b), while in three other stud-
the life of her adolescent. Researchers have examined these changes in two specific areas—family interaction and peer relations. In the area of family relations, researchers have shown that adolescents with working mothers were more involved in running the home, and had more disagreements with their parents than those with nonworking mothers (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Propper, 1972). In studies of peer relations, it was found that adolescents with working mothers were less likely to participate in clubs and organizations (Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Propper, 1972). Some girls who do not take part in these high school activities may seek greater excitement elsewhere. Hansson, O'Connor, Jones, and Blocker (1981) found that college females whose mothers worked when their daughters were in high school had the greatest likelihood of unintended pregnancy, since they were more sexually active, more willing to engage in unprotected intercourse, and had less knowledge about birth control.

This portrayal of parent and peer relations is modified to a large extent when maternal employment status is broken down into either full or part-time. Contrary to expectations, the effects of maternal employment on adolescents do not simply increase as a function of the number of hours the mother works. What is found instead is that adolescents with mothers who are employed full or part-time are very different, while adolescents with nonemployed mothers form a middle group. For example, the amount of time spent in household work is greatest for adolescents with full-time employed mothers, followed by those with nonemployed mothers, and finally by adolescents with mothers who work part-time (Cogle, Tasker, & Morton, 1982).

The principal study which examined adolescents with full-time, part-time, or nonemployed mothers was done by Douvan and Adelson (1966), who collected data from a national sample of approximately 1200 female and 700 male adolescents. In general, these researchers reported that maternal employment status had more of an impact on family and peer relations for girls than for boys. A major finding was that daughters of women employed part-time, in comparison to those with mothers employed full-time or not at all, had closer relations with their parents as indicated by the fact that they spent the highest percentage of their leisure time with their family, most often chose their mothers as their adult ideal, and reported the strongest emotional bond with their parents. In addition, these girls were the most independent as shown by their greater involvement in family rule making and more numerous disagreements with parents. Based on these findings, Douvan and Adelson conclude that the daughters of mothers employed part-time have the most mature relationships with their parents. One might expect that further maternal employment would lead to more maturity in parent-daughter relationships, but Douvan and Adelson report just the opposite; girls with fully employed mothers actually had less mature relationships with their parents than did daughters of nonemployed mothers. Douvan and Adelson argue that the reason for the maturity of daughters of women employed part-time is that these mothers can spend more time with their daughters and provide them with a female model who is at once a warm and loving mother, as well as a competent wage earner. As a result of having this type of relationship, daughters feel close to their mothers and identify with them but also possess a high degree of independence and autonomy.

Relations with peers also were very different between girls whose mothers worked part or full-time. The girls with mothers who were employed part-time were involved in many typical adolescent activities such as casual dating and membership in school clubs and organizations. In contrast, girls with mothers who worked full-time had adopted an adult-like life-style which included steady dating, holding a paying job, and lack of participation in extracurricular school activities. Douvan and Adelson argue that the behavior pattern of girls whose mothers work full-time indicates a precocious separation from parents caused by a weak emotional tie to a mother who is often absent from home, encourages her adolescent to assume adult responsibilities, and lacks the time to participate in her adolescent’s activities.

Delinquency and Psychological Adjustment

In a number of studies conducted mainly in the early 1960s, a small but significant relationship was found between maternal employment and juvenile delinquency. The earliest evidence for this association comes from the Gluecks’ study of 500 lower-class adjudicated delinquents and 500 matched nondelinquents. They reported that, although there were no differences between the two groups in the percentages of mothers who were housewives or regularly employed, more delinquents than non- delinquents had mothers who were “occasionally employed,” 26.0 percent versus 14.7 percent.
respectively (Glueck & Glueck, 1957). According to the authors, women who were occasionally employed "drifted from one job to another with unpredictable frequency." The authors suggest that it may have been this instability in the mothers, rather than the pattern of their employment, that contributed to the delinquency of the boys. In another study of lower class males, it was again reported that delinquency was related to maternal employment only when it occurred in the context of family instability (McCord, McCord, & Thurber, 1963). The importance of stability also was implied in a study of urban and rural families where a relationship between maternal employment and juvenile delinquency was found only in urban families, which may have been more unstable than rural ones (Roy, 1963).

Middle-class adolescents with employed mothers also have been shown to be more delinquent as measured by self-reports (Nye, 1963) and police contacts (Gold, 1961). Some idea about the specific types of delinquent acts committed by these adolescents can be obtained from Roy's (1963) study, in which it was reported that most of the acts were of a less serious nature. For urban adolescents with employed mothers, a higher percentage of girls indicated that they had skipped school, driven a car without a driver's license, and disobeyed their parents, while a higher percentage of boys reported that they had drank alcohol, damaged property, and taken part in a gang fight. The results in this area are not entirely consistent, however, and no relationship between delinquency and maternal employment status was reported in one study of middle-class boys (Brown, 1969) and in another investigation of girls (Riege, 1972).

The explanation most often invoked to account for the relationship between maternal employment and juvenile delinquency is that the working mother is unable to adequately supervise her adolescent who is then more likely to get into trouble (Hoffman, 1974). As children get older, they are unlikely to receive substitute care when their mothers work but are expected to care for themselves. In one study, it was reported that even as early as fifth, sixth, and seventh grades, over half of the students with working mothers were not supervised when they got home from school (Trimberger & MacLean, 1982). In addition, schools and public facilities are not equipped to handle adolescents between the end of the school day and the time when mothers return home from work (Medrich, 1982). Without supervision or organized activities, adolescents turn to their peers who, on the one hand, provide emotional support and entertainment, but who also may encourage misconduct (Bixenstine, DeCorte, & Bixenstine, 1976). Thus, it is not maternal employment per se which contributes to juvenile delinquency, but the context in which that employment takes place. Such factors as family instability and association with undesirable peers put some adolescents at risk for anti-social behavior.

We now turn to an examination of the relationship between maternal employment status and adolescent psychological adjustment as measured by questionnaires which assess personal problems, worries, mood states, etc. Maternal employment affects male and female adjustment differently. For males, some researchers found poorer adjustment when the mother works (Brown, 1969; Douvan & Adelson, 1966; Gold & Andres, 1978a), others better adjustment (Gold & Andres, 1978b; Nelson, 1971), and still others no relationship at all (Burchinal, 1963; Schooler, 1972). For females, no detrimental relationship has been reported between adjustment and maternal employment. Maternal employment either is positively related (Gold & Andres, 1978b; Whitmarsh, 1965) or unrelated to female adjustment (Gold & Andres, 1978a; Nelson, 1971).

Since the relationship between maternal employment and adolescent adjustment is only sometimes found, this implies that maternal employment itself does not directly contribute to adolescent adjustment, but is mediated by other factors. One factor that may have an effect on adolescents is the adjustment of their mothers. Those women who have adjusted well to the dual roles of worker and mother may be more likely to provide the emotional support that is necessary for the healthy adjustment of their adolescents.

Conclusion

The relationship between maternal employment and adolescent development is enormously complex and no simple generalizations are possible. The reason for this complexity is that many intervening variables alter the impact that maternal employment has on adolescent development. One variable which might have an important effect is the changing social context of maternal employment (Lamb, 1982). With more and more mothers entering the labor force, maternal employment is becoming increasingly accepted. This gradual disappearance of the social stigma associated with maternal employment may result in fewer negative effects on adolescents.
Besides changes in historical context, a variety of demographic family variables affect the impact that maternal employment has on adolescent development. These include such factors as socioeconomic status and urban-rural living arrangements. Some important adolescent factors are sex of the adolescent, age at the time the mother began working, and attitudes about the mother’s employment. Also, a number of maternal variables are important such as the reason and length of her employment, how satisfied a mother is with her job, and whether she works full or part-time.

Another aspect of the employment of the mother that may mediate its effects on the adolescent is the pattern or history of the employment. Maternal employment that begins while the children are young and continues into their adolescence may have different effects than if it starts during adolescence. Thus far, researchers have focused on mothers who are currently employed and have failed to take into account the history of that employment.

A question posed at the beginning of this article was, Are adolescents affected by the employment of their mothers? Based on the results of the studies examined in this review, the answer to this question is a qualified yes, some adolescents under some conditions are affected. Further, the pattern of these results suggests to us that the impact of maternal employment may be different for males and females, with males somewhat more at risk for negative effects, while females may be more likely to benefit. One reason for this sex difference is that while working mothers may spend less time with both sons and daughters, these mothers are same-sex role models of competency and achievement for their daughters, but not their sons. Without this advantage to compensate for whatever negative reactions sons have to their mothers’ absence, boys are more vulnerable to the effects of maternal employment.

Now that it is the norm for mothers of adolescents to work, there is an urgent need to discover what impact this arrangement has on adolescent development. Specifically, we need to know more about the conditions under which adolescents are affected by the employment of their mothers, especially when those effects are negative. At present, it appears that maternal employment might be more likely to result in problems for adolescents when it takes place in the context of family instability, undesirable peer influences, and lack of maternal supervision. The more that is known about these conditions, the more educators can understand and treat adolescents who experience difficulties. One way in which school officials might prevent some of these problems from developing in the first place is by expanding their after-school programs. Adolescents who are unsupervised because their mothers work would then have an alternative to peer misconduct. Some have already seen the need for after school programs to fill the gap between the end of the school day and the time when mothers return home from work (Medrich, 1982). This is one way educators can put the theory and research on maternal employment into practice.

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Note: Requests for reprints should be sent to Raymond Montemayor, Department of Family and Consumer Studies, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah 84112.