A MOTHER’S ROLE DEFINED: EMPLOYMENT MESSAGES COMMUNICATED TO MOTHERS IN THE SOUTHERN BAPTIST CONVENTION

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ABSTRACT

An in depth look at the messages communicated to Southern Baptist mothers about their roles in the labor market and within the family. Provides a general overview of the development of women’s labor history, including recent trends regarding demands women are making for greater flexibility and work-life balance. The past twenty years have witnessed changes in the opinions mothers have regarding work and family, and such changes are further investigated within the Southern Baptist population. The messages communicated through formal and informal channels of the Southern Baptist Convention are presented and analyzed to determine the values being sent to church members. Denominational doctrinal statements, speeches and statements made by key leaders as well as Southern Baptist magazines are looked at in order to determine what guidance and direction the church gives mothers regarding employment. Public policy options geared toward American families are discussed and a recommendation is made for policies best suited for the Southern Baptist population.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

From the enormous entry of women, and more specifically mothers, into the workforce during World War II, there has been much debate regarding the roles women should play in the home and at work. Over the past sixty years, women have achieved great success in virtually all areas of the workforce and have broken down many barriers that formerly inhibited their advancement. Despite this progress, conflicts regarding child care, work-life balance, and workplace flexibility have arisen as mothers try to navigate their responsibilities at home and at work.

Debates regarding the behavior of mothers in the workplace have received significant media attention in recent years. National surveys and news articles such as Lisa Belkin’s, “The Opt-Out Revolution,” have created speculation that more so than in years past, women are prioritizing family life over their careers and are increasingly choosing to leave the workforce. This alleged phenomenon has put pressure on employers to create more flexible, family-friendly workplaces to keep working mothers employed. There has also been much discussion amongst policymakers regarding the best types of tax and workplace legislation targeted at today’s mothers.

Several studies have been conducted nationwide to determine the values women are drawing upon to make employment decisions, yet little research has been done to determine the messages religious groups are communicating about working mothers. This study seeks to determine the messages America’s evangelical Christian churches are
communicating with regard to the roles mothers should play at home and at work.

Messages emanating from the largest evangelical denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, will be analyzed to determine how this organization is contributing to public opinion about working mothers. Gaining a better understanding of the beliefs and values of this denomination will add additional insight into the current debates regarding working mothers being played out in this country.

Hypothesis

This thesis will set out to determine what messages about motherhood and employment are being communicated to women in the Southern Baptist Convention. Comprised of over sixteen million Americans, this denomination reaches its audience through its large-scale news service, publishing division, research department and weekly sermons. Determining the messages the church is communicating to women, and in turn, how the women respond will add new insight into the debate regarding the values women place on work and family today. Additionally, this research will add to the dialogue regarding the role religious values play in the employment decisions of women. Finally, after determining the types of messages communicated to Southern Baptist women, public policy options that support such messages will be explored.

The primary hypothesis of this thesis argues that Southern Baptist mothers receive clear directive from the denomination regarding their suggested roles in the home and in the workplace. In adherence to the predominantly conservative ideology of this Christian denomination, it is assumed that such directive encourages these mothers to prioritize
child rearing over career building. Furthermore, Southern Baptist mothers that either by choice or due to financial need are employed, are more prone to adopt non-traditional employment patterns, such as flexible schedules and delayed re-entry into the workforce while rearing young children. A secondary hypothesis argues that the values and employment behaviors of Southern Baptist mothers strongly support public policy measures that offer tax incentives enabling mothers to stay home with children rather than developing large-scale, government-funded child care programs.

**Methodology**

Determining the messages communicated regarding motherhood and employment within the Southern Baptist Convention requires analyzing a variety of primary and secondary sources. In order to give the topic context within the larger debate surrounding working mothers, the evolution and current status of women’s labor will be established. Next, the position of women and mothers within the Southern Baptist Convention will be determined. After these facts are set forth, the focus of the research will be on analyzing the messages found in formal and informal channels of Southern Baptist communication. This review will include a look at church doctrinal statements, denomination magazines and published statements by church leaders. Finally, the current and proposed public policy legislation geared at women and families will be reviewed. Based on the current status of policy initiatives in conjunction with the research collected about Southern Baptist messages, a policy that supports the behavior of Southern Baptist mothers will be recommended.
Review of Chapters

Chapter 2, “Review of Women’s Labor Participation: World War II to Present,” provides a framework for this research by reviewing the development of women’s labor history in the United States. This chapter looks at the significant effect World War II had on women’s entry into the workplace and traces women’s labor participation to present day. Important changes in the lives and employment of women created by technological innovations and the women’s rights movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s are reviewed. Additionally, recent shifts in women’s preferences for paid work are presented along with society’s perception of working mothers today. The participation of women and mothers in paid employment has undergone significant change since the 1940’s and the current behavior and perception of working mothers is calling for more change to accommodate these valuable members of the workforce.

Chapter 3, “Examination of the Evangelical response to Working Mothers,” includes the bulk of the research findings pertaining to the messages and values communicated by the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the employment of mothers. This chapter begins with a review of the current behavior and attitudes of mothers within America’s evangelical population at large. As a whole, this group incorporates some very specific ideologies regarding marriage and child rearing into their teaching that have a direct impact on the employment decisions of mothers. After establishing a general understanding of evangelical Christian beliefs regarding mother’s roles, the distinct characteristics and scope of the Southern Baptist Convention is presented. Understanding
the makeup and history of this denomination aids an understanding of the role women and values play out within the church. Next, messages emanating from a variety of Southern Baptist doctrines, publications and messages are analyzed. By taking a close look at the values communicated by such sources it is possible to develop an accurate understanding of the messages women in this denomination receive about work and family.

Chapter 4, “Southern Baptist Public Policy Recommendation,” utilizes the research developed in Chapter 3 in combination with legislative research to make a public policy recommendation that accommodates Southern Baptist women and families. At the onset of this chapter the issues and complexities inherent in developing family-oriented public policy are presented. This discussion is followed by a review of the major policies in place in the United States that support working mothers and families. These policies range from child care programs to tax benefits aimed at assisting American families, regardless of whether the mother works or not. Due to the variety of ideological beliefs regarding the role of government in child care and family programs in the U.S. many new ideas and programs have been proposed to better serve American families. These ideas are discussed and the best of course of action for legislation that supports Southern Baptist families is presented.

The final chapter offers the conclusion to this research and summarizes the key findings and opportunities for further research. This research focuses on analyzing the values contained in a variety of formal and informal channels of Southern Baptist
communication. Analyzed within the context of current trends amongst American women regarding work, these findings suggest some interesting realties within the Southern Baptist population. The Southern Baptist Convention has very conservative and traditional views regarding women’s roles in society and this research forms some interesting, and perhaps surprising, conclusions regarding the values actually communicated through this group’s multi-level communication structure.
CHAPTER 2
REVIEW OF WOMEN’S LABOR PARTICIPATION: WORLD WAR II TO PRESENT

The participation of women in the paid labor force has dramatically changed over the course of the last century. Much of the change started and is a result of the entry of women into the workforce during World War II. Additional social, cultural and legal changes since the war have made working outside the home an even more common, and arguably more complicated, occurrence for women. The following section outlines the important changes in women’s employment brought about by World War II and reviews the progress women have made in the workplace since. The public’s perception of the involvement of mothers in work outside the home is also discussed.

Due to the many opportunities achieved through the wartime work of women and their participation in the women’s movements of the 1960’s, women today have very few barriers inhibiting their advancement in the workforce. Despite such opportunity, recent debates and controversy over the employment status of mothers have begun to revolutionize the workplace. More attention is being paid to work situations that accommodate both work and family as women speak out regarding the challenges inherent in combining motherhood with their careers. Before delving into the working behavior of America’s evangelical population, it is important to understand the history and current debates surrounding working mothers in today’s society.
The Effect of World War II on Women’s Labor Participation

Occurring right on the heels of the Great Depression, World War II had a profound effect on economic and labor patterns in the United States. Viewed specifically through the lens of women’s labor history, the war introduced some significant changes into the patterns and norms of work in this country. From the U.S. entry into the war in December of 1941 through the end of the war in September, 1945, labor shortages due to male deployment abroad and increased military production needs created new opportunities for women of all races to work. With over eight million women entering the paid workforce during the wartime years, the war has been hailed by some historians as a “milestone” or “watershed” moment in U.S. history (Yesil 2004, 104). Although history shows that many of the wartime achievements for women’s labor were reversed after the war’s end, World War II created significant changes for women that undoubtedly have affected the course of women’s labor history since.

Prior to the U.S. entry into the war in 1941, society did not have a favorable opinion regarding women working outside of the home, especially those who were married (Gluck 1987, 4). High unemployment rates due to the Great Depression added additional weight to the view that a woman’s place was in the home and that females should certainly not take jobs from men (Gluck 1987, 8). In 1936, 82 percent of the population felt that wives should not work if their husbands had jobs, and a majority believed there should be legislation prohibiting married women from working (Gluck 1987, 8).
With the onset of the war, there came an immediate need for additional workers in wartime production and to fill job vacancies left by men deployed to fight. The government and defense industry realized that women were essential to the production of ammunition and equipment for the war and stepped in to initiate social and legislative change across the nation. In his 1942 Columbus Day Speech, President Roosevelt made it very clear that society’s view towards working women must change saying, “In some communities employers dislike to hire women. We can no longer afford to indulge such prejudice” (Gluck 1987, 10). In addition to this public decry, the government took added measures to increase the number of women employed in essential war industries. In 1941, the Fair Employment Practices Commission issued an executive order outlawing discrimination in the defense sector (Yesil 2004, 106). Whether based solely on desperate need or on the government’s encouragement, employers began to change their perception of women workers as women began to enter industries and job roles that were previously unavailable to them.

Through proactive measures taken on the part of the federal government and advertisers, society’s view toward working women also began to change. Women were suddenly able to secure jobs working on assembly lines and other positions previously forbidden to the “weaker sex” (Miller 1980, 61). The access women gained to jobs formerly unavailable to them indicates that social norms were changing in the United States. For the first time in our nation’s history, women operated cranes, assembled ammunition, tested machine guns and other weaponry, operated hydraulic presses,
worked as miners and even became security guards at industrial plants (Gluck 1987, 129). Even in the civilian employment market, women were able to attain many new jobs in fields previously dominated by men or in positions that had been restricted to them due to their race or age (Gluck 1987, 141). These new opportunities undoubtedly had a big impact on the way women viewed their own abilities and on the view society had of women’s potential to impact the workforce.

In addition to the new roles that became available to female workers, policies and services offered in the workplace began to change as well. Safety conditions at factories and industrial plants improved, training programs were developed and offered, and childcare as well as other social services began to gain attention as companies worked to recruit and maintain female employees (Weatherford 1990, 118). With more women in the workforce, companies began to take an interest in providing for their needs outside of the workplace. Many defense companies employed women counselors that helped women adjust to full-time work. The counselors assisted mothers in identifying childcare, housing, and transportation options. To serve the needs of working mothers, childcare centers funded under the Lanham Act were created across the nation (Gluck 1987, 241).

Lastly, in order to equip women with the skills necessary for their new industrial jobs, the government encouraged the development of vocational schools to give women necessary job training (Weatherford 1990, 118). While such schools were in place before the war, only three percent of students were female. During the war, the female
participation rate increased to 30 percent (Weatherford 1990, 118). Thousands of women enrolled in classes that taught welding, drafting, sheet-metal work and other industrial techniques (Weatherford 1990, 118). Vocational schools, on-the-job counselors and attention to safety were all new concepts introduced into the workforce as a result of increased female participation.

Statistical evidence confirms the significant changes in women’s employment created by the war. From 1941-1945, women’s participation in the workforce increased in every sector. Women made substantial gains in employment in industries previously inaccessible to them, creating a 140 percent increase of employment in manufacturing jobs and a 462 percent increase in defense positions (Yesil 2004, 105). Married women also created major changes in the makeup of the female workforce by their entrance into the labor force in greater proportions than ever previously documented. By 1944 one in three women defense workers was a former homemaker and for the first time in U.S. history married women outnumbered single women in the workforce as a whole (Gluck 1987, 13).

As evidenced above, World War II created significant change for women’s employment. The attention that working women received from the government, advertisers, industry and their individual employers led to major transformations in the attitudes and systems regarding female participation in the labor force. While the long-term effects of these changes are arguable, it is clear that during the war America embraced female employment in a new and very innovative way.
As the war drew to a close, there was an about-face in the attitudes towards the female labor force. Some changes were subtle, others much more overt, but the nation slowly began to return to the pre-war attitudes regarding working women. From June to September 1945, one out of every four women in U.S. factories was laid off (Miller 1980, 58). In the manufacturing sector, one hundred and seventy-five out of every thousand women were laid off, a rate twice that of men (Miller 1980, 58). With the servicemen returning home from the war it is logical that some layoffs would be inevitable, however women lost their jobs at a much higher rate than men (Dresser and Kossoudji 1992, 434). In many instances, if women did not lose their jobs, they were demoted to traditional female roles performing clerical work or to undesirable positions such as janitorial work (Dresser and Kossoudji 1992, 441). It was also not uncommon for employers to reduce the number of breaks women received or give them late night shifts. All of these circumstances led many women to “voluntarily” leave the labor market (Yesil 2004, 114).

In stark contrast to opportunities women had during World War II, the war’s end reversed several key components of the progress women achieved in the paid workforce. Advertisements and other public statements brought back pre-war attitudes suggesting women were best suited in the home rather than in plants and factories. Women were also pushed out of jobs previously regarded as “men’s work” and in many cases were forced back into their pre-war traditional roles. Despite all of the change realized during the war, the United States showed that it wasn’t quite ready to revolutionize the roles women
played in the marketplace. The employment of women during World War II may be viewed as an isolated incident, but the war experience likely played a larger role in women’s liberation movements throughout the rest of the century. Women felt “freed of limitation- both official and cultural” during the war years, and feelings like this certainly influenced the long-term development of female employment throughout the 20th century (Miller 1980, 57).

Post-War Changes in Women’s Employment

In the decades following the war, the nation continued to experience change regarding the employment of female workers. Although the initial post-war years saw some reversion to the pre-war treatment of women in the workforce, cultural, political and technological changes took hold of the United States and ushered in much change during the 50’s, 60’s and 70’s. As will be seen in the discussion below, the roles of married women in the home and the paid work force continued to transform as society’s expectations evolved.

The post-war decline in job opportunities for women was immediately followed by an economic expansion creating many new jobs in the 1950’s and 1960’s. In the two decades following World War II, married women filled over half of the two million newly created jobs (Thistle 2006, 52). Historians and sociologists have identified several factors that explain this phenomenon. Previously held gender roles for married women began to break down as their level of education increased, they began using birth control and had fewer children, they began to utilize time-saving technologies for the home, and
they experienced a decrease in gender discrimination and male-female wage gaps in the workforce (Jalilvand 2000, 27). These changes gave women greater access and approval from society to enter into paid work resulting in significant changes in the dynamic of women balancing their lives at work and at home.

Evident in a variety of forms, one of the most prominent changes to post-World War II culture in the United States was the beginning of the breakdown of gender divisions and roles. Technology related to women’s household tasks and to their health changed their lives dramatically. In the 1960’s over 90 percent of homes in the United States had refrigerators and gas or electric stoves, and over 50 percent had automatic washing machines (Thistle 2006, 38). These modern day appliances dramatically reduced the amount of time mothers had to devote to domestic labor. For mothers of young children, the introduction of bottle-feeding allowed them more freedom to be away from their children (Thistle 2006, 39). The time women previously spent cooking and cleaning by hand was significantly reduced, giving them more time to devote to other activities.

In addition to the introduction of household conveniences, women’s fertility rates began to decline as forms of birth-control became more readily accessible (Thistle 2006, 39). By 1970, the rate of births had declined below the replacement rate and low fertility rates continued into the 1980’s (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006, 125). Not only were fewer women having children, or as many children, as in year’s past, but the 1960’s witnessed an increase in the number of mothers of preschool-aged children working outside the home (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006, 44). As the number of children
women had to care for decreased and the amount of time women had to devote to home maintenance declined, their participation in the paid work force significantly rose.

Another dimension of society that aided the increase of married women’s employment was the women’s rights movements and changing views of marriage. Beginning immediately after World War II, women’s organizations began working to improve the positions and conditions for women in paid work (Thistle 2006, 45). One of the leading organizations, The National Organization for Women, believed that “equality between the sexes would come with women’s access to good jobs” (Thistle 2006, 45). It is important to note that these initial movements did not directly challenge the traditional roles of women in the home, but sought to increase job opportunities for those women interested in having a “second career” once their children had grown. Other women’s group sought changes through unions to secure better benefits, such as maternity leave, for working mothers (Thistle 2006, 45).

In contrast to the initial women’s movement, the late 1960’s witnessed the development of radical feminism that fought hard for women’s equality and freedom. These more progressive groups sought to free women of the “old restrictions that confined them primarily to marriage and motherhood” (Thistle 2006, 46). They challenged the gender roles previously held by society and campaigned for abortion rights, equal pay, and equal work opportunities for all women. As the messages of the radical feminists strengthened across the country, the view of marriage changed and inadvertently affected women’s employment in a major way.
Prior to the 1970’s, marriage was viewed as a lifelong partnership in which the husband served as the primary breadwinner outside of the home and the wife fulfilled all domestic responsibilities within the home. In the 1960’s, views toward marriage changed so that engaging in a committed relationship revolving around “love” became the new characterization of marriage (Thistle 2006, 47). As predicted by sociologists, these unions characterized by “emotional gratification” were more fragile than marriages of the past grounded in a more traditional structure. Accordingly, divorce rates began to increase in the 1960’s and doubled between 1964 and 1975 (Thistle 2006, 47).

At first glance, an increase in divorce rates does not seem to bear much influence on labor participation rates; however, divorce related legislation that followed the shift in divorce occurrences proved to impact women’s employment greatly. In 1970, California became the first state to adopt no-fault divorce legislation. Shortly thereafter, the majority of other states enacted similar laws (Thistle 2006, 48). This legislation freed the husband from having to financially support his wife once the divorce was finalized. Divorced wives who did not previously work outside the home were suddenly ushered into the paid labor force out of economic necessity. Not only were divorced women directly impacted by this legislation, but researchers believe married women in general became more likely to engage in paid work in the event that their marriages dissolved in the future due to divorce (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006, 121).

The last significant change affecting married women’s employment in the years following World War II were the significant pieces of legislation that provided equal
opportunities for women’s employment. In 1963, Congress passed the Equal Pay Act entitling women to the same pay as their male counterparts for equivalent positions (Thistle 2006, 52). Women’s wages immediately increased, thus making the wife’s financial contribution to the family’s income even more valuable. It suddenly became more expensive to keep women in the home and thus many of them chose to work.

Another significant piece of legislation is the Title VII amendment, passed in 1964. This amendment improved working conditions for women by prohibiting discrimination based on sex (Thistle 2006, 52). Finally, the 1974 Cleveland Board of Education v. La Fleur Supreme Court decision protected expectant mothers from discrimination due to their pregnancy (Thistle 2006, 53). Not only was society becoming more accepting of working women, and mothers, but the government was confirming this shift in ideology by making women’s access to employment fair and equitable.

The post-war decades ushered in much change for women and their capacity to work outside the home. As technology eased their domestic burdens within the home and employment conditions regarding pay and discrimination were improved by legislation, married women began to enter the workforce in droves. For some of them, the economic necessity following divorce forced them into the workplace, while others, unhindered by a large number of children to care for, found time to work while still caring for one or two children at home. Society began to relax expectations for the traditional gender roles held by the pre-World War II society, with many of these trends continuing into the 1990’s.
Present Day: Workforce Participation of Married Mothers

The era of World War II and the following decades exhibit a large shift in the employment patterns of women in America. The war opened up new opportunities for women that helped them realize their potential in the paid work force. Followed by years of more prevalent divorce, declining birth rates, and strong legislation that gave women more power in the labor market, it became much more acceptable for women, and more specifically mothers, to engage in full-time or part-time paid work outside of the home. Given the developments of the past, the current status of women in the workplace offers some interesting observations about society’s current view of working mothers.

In light of the growing rate of women in the workforce observed over the past sixty years, the current behavior of women and mothers in the workforce reveals some interesting trends occurring in America. Just prior to the turn of the century, the year 1999 represents the peak of women’s employment in the United States. In that year, 77 percent of women were employed, a number that has not been reached since (Leonhardt 2009). The number of women engaged in paid labor had grown in every decade since 1940, yet has failed to surpass 76 percent since 2001 (Leonhardt 2009).

For the population of women that have children, the statistics are especially interesting. The U.S. Census Bureau states that more mothers are staying at home with their children now than in 1990 (Leonhardt 2009). The demands of balancing work and family appear to be influencing more mothers to opt-out of work and stay home, especially those with small children. This phenomenon is evidenced by the 13 percent
increase in the number of stay-at-home mothers over the course of the past ten years (Belkin 2003). The propensity for mothers of young children to leave the workforce is significant. In 2008, only 59.6 percent of women with children under age six worked compared with 73.6 percent of mothers with children between the ages of six and seventeen (Bureau of Labor Statistics 2009, 2). Although the majority of women still work, mothers included, statistics indicate a marked change in the extent and manner in which they participate.

For women with children, three major trends have emerged in their attitudes and participation in the workforce. First and foremost, there has been a noticeable departure of highly-educated women from the full-time labor market. Secondly, across all dimensions, mothers today prefer part-time work, and finally, women are demanding more flexibility in their working arrangements. The current preferences of mothers have astounded feminists who believe women should be leaders in the paid workforce just like their male counterparts. To the dismay of the groups that fought to elevate the status of women in the workforce decades ago, women have recently begun to consider work and family life together and have been making decisions that allow them to better accommodate both spheres of their lives.

Perhaps the most significant change that has occurred in women’s attitudes toward work is their preference for part-time work, self-employment opportunities, and not working at all. In a 2008 study conducted by PEW Research, these trends were underscored by the women surveyed. Of the mothers surveyed that currently work and
have children under the age of eighteen, 60 percent stated that they would prefer to work part-time (Pew Research 2007, 1). Nineteen percent of the women indicated their ideal situation would be to not work at all, and the remaining 21 percent listed full-time work as their ideal (Pew Research 2007, 1). Looking specifically at stay-at-home mothers, 48 percent of them reinforced their decision to not work, remarking that staying at home is their ideal situation. In 1997, only 37 percent of stay-at-home moms felt this way (Pew Research 2007, 1). Mothers who do not work further solidified their opposition to full-time work, with only 16 percent indicating that they would like to work full-time, down from 24 percent holding this opinion in 1997. The last group surveyed was mothers currently engaged in part-time work. This group highly affirmed their preference for this arrangement with 80 percent of them indicating part-time work as their ideal employment situation (Pew Research 2007, 3).

The results from Pew Research emphasize the shift in working preferences for women with children. In 1997, 31 percent of women with children under the age of four preferred full-time work. That statistic has since dropped to 16 percent. Considering all mothers of young children, those currently working full-time, part-time and not working at all, 48 percent say that they prefer part-time work and 36 percent would rather be at home with their children (Pew Research 2007, 3). Important to note is that these preferences apply across the board for women, regardless of education level (Pew Research 2007, 3). Based on this research, it is clear that mothers today value part-time work over full-time schedules much more than women did in years past.
Over the past decade, full-time work has certainly become less appealing for mothers. This trend has made headlines across the country as high-level professional women have made some surprising decisions to stay home or cut back on their professional responsibilities. Karen Hughes, a top advisor for the George W. Bush administration, made headlines in 2007 when she resigned from her position at the White House (Belkin 2003). Citing her desire “to spend more time with her family” as the reason behind her decision, her departure was described by the media as “a painful truth about the difficulties women face in balancing family and work” (Bumiller 2002). In her popular New York Times article, “The Opt-Out Revolution”, Lisa Belkin found that 26 percent of women offered senior management positions turn them down (Belkin 2003). Additionally, *Fortune* magazine reports that nearly 20 percent of women on their “Top 50 Most Powerful Women” list over the years have quit their jobs for more family-friendly opportunities (Belkin 2003). First-hand experiences from well-educated women in senior level positions show the struggles mothers have today balancing work and family life.

With the rate of female college graduates outpacing that of men, the propensity for professional women to choose a “mommy track” is particularly alarming to many members of society. Fifty-eight percent of college graduates are women and the number of women completing professional degrees is on the rise (Kay and Shipman 2008). One of the nation’s top law schools, Berkeley Law, recently graduated a class comprised of 63 percent women (Belkin 2003). Additionally, close to 47 percent of medical students are women and women represent 50 percent of undergraduate business majors. The rising
educational levels of women combined with the pressure working mothers feel in today’s society present important questions regarding the future of women’s employment.

The educational attainment and training of women is positioning them well for successful careers, however, these women are increasingly unwilling to sacrifice their families for their jobs. Professional women leave their careers at a rate triple that of their male counterparts (Lovejoy and Stone 2004, 63). Recent statistics show that close to 30 percent of them are out of the work force and new moms are increasingly less likely to return to work (Belkin 2003). Many professional women surveyed claim that their employment decisions are not black and white; they cite their decision to leave work as temporary and when their family responsibilities are reduced they plan to return to the work force (Belkin 2003). Regardless of when or to what capacity professional women say they will go back to work, their propensity to quit high-paying and high-power jobs certainly signifies a shift in women’s priorities.

Statistics and accounts of real women’s decisions show that women prefer part-time schedules as well as positions that allow them to devote sufficient time to their families. These decisions have been manifested in different ways in today’s workplace. For some women, self-employment has become a means in order to accomplish such a schedule while still making a financial contribution to their families. Since 1997 the number of small businesses owned by women have increased by 11 percent (Belkin 2003). Mothers cite the ability to set their own hours as a major incentive in choosing this
route that allows them to more easily combine work with their family responsibilities (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006, 279).

Other women have been able to successfully combine motherhood and work by maintaining positions in traditionally female occupations. Though much is seemingly changing in the decisions women are making regarding work, their propensity to work in the nursing, teaching and administrative professions has continued. Ninety-seven percent of full-time secretaries are women, as are 92 percent of receptionists. Additionally, 92 percent of nurses and 81 percent of school teachers are women (New Strategist 2006, 158). Women who originally started in male-dominated careers have even shown a preference to switch to more traditionally female fields as they assume them to offer more flexibility (Lovejoy and Stone 2004, 79). As they have in years past, these positions offer women flexibility, reliability and other benefits that allow them to balance demands in and out of the home successfully.

Finally, regardless of their likelihood to work full-time, part-time or to temporarily take time off, mothers are pushing for flexible work schedules. According to the Family and Work Institute, four out of five mothers want more flexibility at work (Kay and Shipman 2008). In recent years, women have “worked under the radar” to avoid promotions, turned down new responsibilities and downgraded to part-time work in order to maintain a more flexible work schedule (Hewlett 2007, 32). Although employers have begun to offer more flexible work arrangements, many women claim that they are
“stigmatized” if they partake in them, thus, making these options essentially off-limits (Hewlett 2007, 32).

As the above discussion shows, women’s preferences regarding employment are much different today than they were in years past. Now that women have overcome many of the gender and societal barriers that previously hampered their employment prospects, work-life balance and family priorities embody the major employment challenges for working mothers. Many researchers believe that the messages women are communicating through their employment decisions are redefining how companies structure employment (Belkin 2003). Regardless of what changes are currently being made by employers to accommodate women, there certainly has been a shift in the ideology surrounding work and family.

*The Public’s Perception of Working Mothers*

Accompanying the changes and new developments for mothers and their attitudes toward work, the public perception of working moms has undergone some interesting changes in light of the radical feminist movements of the 20\textsuperscript{th} century. Regardless of the capacity to which mothers are actually employed, the general public, and mothers themselves, generally lean towards a more traditional view regarding the importance of mothers staying home with young children. The statistics below offer an interesting view into the public perception of motherhood today and of society’s preferences regarding women’s roles at home and at work.
Before delving into the public’s opinions regarding the employment status of mothers, it is important to note how the general public views motherhood today. As reported by Pew Research, Americans are rather critical of the performance of today’s mothers, while simultaneously acknowledging the challenges they face. Seventy percent of the public believes it is more difficult to be a mother today than it was in the 1970’s and 1980’s (Pew Research 2007). Although the public acknowledges the increased challenges mothers face today, women give themselves no excuses with 54 percent of them citing mothers as doing a worse job than those who came before them twenty years ago (Pew Research 2007). Interestingly, the segment of the population that is hardest on the job performance of mothers is white evangelical Christian women. More than two-thirds of this population believes that mothers are not performing up to par (Pew Research 2007). These numbers certainly paint a very telling picture for the view of mothers in America. Though society recognizes the challenges inherent in raising children in today’s culture, the majority of Americans believe mothers are not performing as well as the mothers of decades past.

Given the general public’s views regarding the performance of mothers, the opinion regarding the employment of women may not come as much of a surprise. Twenty-two percent of Americans believe that the trend of mothers of young children working full-time is a good thing, while almost double that, 41 percent believe it is bad for society (Taylor 2007, 4). When asked for their opinion regarding the ideal situation for children, only nine percent of adults surveyed viewed a mother working full-time as
ideal. Forty-two percent believe a stay-at-home mother to be ideal while the remaining 41 percent cite part-time work as the best situation for moms and children (Taylor 2007, 8). Perhaps not surprising is the fact that the respondents who had a stay-at-home mom when they were young as well as republicans, political conservatives, and white evangelical Protestants are the segments of the population most likely to believe stay-at-home motherhood is the ideal situation for children (Taylor 2007, 8).

Viewed within the subgroup of working mothers, this segment of the population is a bit more divided regarding their view of what is best for society. There is an almost even split amongst working moms as to whether they believe working moms are good, 34 percent, bad, 34 percent, or neutral, 31 percent, for society (Taylor 2007, 4). With that said, however, 52 percent of working moms believe part-time work is best (Taylor 2007, 5). Although working mothers are a bit more supportive of their choices than society overall, it is important to note the difference in what they say the ideal situation is versus how they are actually employed. Although a majority of working mothers state part-time work as the ideal only twenty-four percent of them currently have such a schedule (Taylor 2007, 4).

When asked about their beliefs regarding what is best for society, mothers that currently stay at home with their children overwhelmingly affirm their choice as the ideal. Within this population, 44 percent believe working mothers are a threat to society while only 22 percent view an increase in working mothers to be good (Taylor 2007, 4). Although they have chosen to work full-time in the home, this group is not as opposed to
part-time work as one might believe. Forty-one percent of stay-at-home moms think that part-time is ideal while 44 percent believe their choice to stay home is best for children (Taylor 2007, 5).

As these statistics indicate, the general public’s perception of working mothers in America is not as progressive as one might think. Many Americans claim part-time work or stay-at-home mothers to be ideal while a smaller percentage support an increase in full-time working mothers. An overwhelming majority is critical of the performance mothers are doing today and believe mothers two and three decades ago were more successful. Lastly, it is significant to note that political conservatives and evangelical Christians are the most likely to support stay-at-home moms and to criticize the job performance of this generation’s mothers.

Women have made a significant amount of progress in the workforce since their enormous entry during World War II. They have surpassed barriers based on gender, race and education and now occupy positions in virtually every field and segment of the contemporary labor force. Through the moderate and radical feminist vehicles of the 1960’s and 1970’s women exerted their power in forceful ways, proving that they had the right to equality and fair treatment in the workplace. In contrast to the enthusiastic workforce participation of women in the mid to late 20th century, recent decades have noticed a shift in women’s preferences toward paid work. Women today, especially mothers, are more concerned with work-life balance and seek employment opportunities that allow them the flexibility and autonomy to devote a substantial amount of time to
their families. Mothers and the U.S. general public view full-time employment of mothers as harmful for society, and support part-time employment or stay-at-home options for mothers of young children. The participation and perception of women and mothers in paid employment has developed significantly in the 20th century and continues to change as the expectations and desires of women evolve in current society.
CHAPTER 3

EXAMINATION OF THE EVANGELICAL RESPONSE TO WORKING MOTHERS

Introduction

As the previous chapter illustrates, the expectations and desires of mothers in paid employment have greatly changed over the past sixty years. Looking at society as a whole, recent polls and statistics indicate that mothers today are cognizant of the demands that work places on their families. These mothers desire situations that allow them to exit and then re-enter the paid workforce or they prefer to have very flexible arrangements within their positions. While a majority of mothers work outside the home, studies indicate that they would prefer to devote more time to their responsibilities in the home.

Many studies on the behavior of mothers in the workforce look at socioeconomics, education, and ideas formed in childhood to explain the employment decisions mothers make. However, few studies analyze how religion and values regarding work intersect (Scott 2002, 10). In recent years, a small number of researchers have looked at the evangelical population and have made some interesting observations regarding the employment behavior of this group’s mothers. Because America’s evangelicals are frequently referred to as a general cohort, it is important to review the findings of the group as a whole before looking more intensely into the way religious messages inform the behavior of Southern Baptist mothers.
This chapter seeks to determine how debates regarding motherhood and work are being played out in America’s evangelical Christian population, specifically the Southern Baptist Convention. Some research has been done on the employment beliefs and practices of evangelical women, but this chapter will go beyond that research to determine the current pulse inside the Southern Baptist denomination. Looking at both the formal and informal messages communicated by the Southern Baptist church, it will be possible to determine if this denomination communicates traditional ideas regarding gender roles and supports mothers exiting the workforce to be home with their children.

In order to give sufficient attention to each aspect of the research, this chapter will be organized as follows. First, the recorded behavior and attitudes of America’s evangelical population will be presented along with an in-depth look at the Southern Baptist Convention. The composition and organization of the denomination will be discussed followed by a review of the messages communicated regarding work and motherhood. The formal messages set forth by church doctrine and position statements will be discussed. Next, the informal messages communicated by church leaders and denomination-wide publications will be presented. Evangelicals in the United States are generally referred to as a homogenous group seeking conservative social reform. By investigating messages within the Southern Baptist subset of this population, it will be possible to determine exactly what messages are communicated by the Southern Baptists. It will also be interesting to see how these messages fit in to the broader views that evangelicals hold today regarding working mothers.
The Employment Behavior of Evangelical Mothers

Based on the findings of recent studies, there are several key ideologies of evangelicalism that inform the decisions mothers within this population make regarding work outside the home. Perhaps the most significant characteristic of this faith that effects employment decisions is the emphasis on gender roles. Another significant factor is the concept of “calling” and the propensity for women to legitimize their decisions by citing a “calling” from God toward a specific behavior. Finally, as within secular America, evangelical mothers struggle with mixed messages emanating from within their churches and from secular society. The reality of economic need within families combined with the traditional messages communicated by the evangelical population make decisions and feelings toward paid work outside the home complicated for mothers.

The strong adherence evangelicals have to very traditional gender roles is one of the most significant factors affecting the decisions mothers make regarding work. In her 2002 study of Protestant women, Tracy Scott found that the two most consistently mentioned views held by conservative evangelicals are: (1) that there are specific roles for the genders set forth by God and (2) that God ordained the man as the “head” of the family and the wife to be under “submission” to the husband (Scott 2002, 18). This traditionalist mindset became exceedingly popular within evangelical groups in the late 19th century and the concept of women being submissive to their husbands holds true in evangelical ideology today (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 212). Based on the concept of submission, evangelicals believe that men and women have different roles within the
family (Scott 2002, 11). Men are tasked with being the “headship” of the family while women are responsible for the upkeep of the home and care of the children (Scott 2002, 19). Conservative Christians believe that these roles were created by God and that each sex is uniquely gifted and talented to carry out their roles. This sexual division of labor is prominent in evangelical teaching and due to the high value it places on women’s work in the home, is said to be a significant dissuader of women’s pursuits outside of the home. Tracy Scott found that if evangelical women work due to economic need, the role they play in the home is still valued higher than their role in the workplace (Scott 2002, 11). These themes are very prevalent within the conservative Christian church and researchers have found this theology attracts prospective members that agree with such traditionalist views (Scott 2002, 11).

The gender role ideology is a significant aspect of the evangelical faith, but it has become noticeably combined with more progressive beliefs over the past few decades as mothers have become more inclined to work outside the home. Referred to as a “crisis of the gendered order”, only a minority of surveyed evangelicals agree that women should not work outside the home in any capacity (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 227). Many evangelicals today approve of working mothers, but simultaneously hold on to the concept of gendered roles within the family. Researchers have found that many evangelical women are essentially working two full-time jobs as they bear the burden of working outside the home and tend to all of the domestic responsibilities within the home (Bartkowski 1999, 58). Researchers Wilcox and Jelen propose that, “evangelical women
may be the most heavily cross-pressured women in American society and seem to have internalized the heaviest obligations of both family and workplace” (Bartkowski 1999, 58). Though evangelical mothers, like the majority of secular mothers, are likely to be working outside of the home, strong ideas regarding gender roles keep the domestic burden on them as well. Unlike many secular families, evangelical mothers continue to define themselves by their domestic rather than professional responsibilities. In many instances their husbands are free from the egalitarian division of labor that is more likely to be practiced by secular families (Bartkowski 1999, 44). So, while the evangelical population has adopted more contemporary views allowing women to work outside of the home, mothers are still expected to fulfill their role inside the home, undoubtedly creating tremendous pressure for these mothers trying to “do it all” (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 227).

Although it has become more acceptable for evangelical women to work outside the home, it is interesting to see how the women themselves view their roles as mothers and as paid employees. Regardless of whether evangelical mothers stay at home with their children or combine work and motherhood, their views about the importance of motherhood are unanimous. Conservative evangelical mothers agree that motherhood is “work” and it is “the most important work that a woman can do and the absolute priority” (Scott 2002, 15). Many feel that it is important to stay home with their children and value that role higher than any formal employment outside of the home (Scott 2002, 14). In addition to valuing their role as mothers, some evangelical women simultaneously desire
paid employment. These women claim that working provides value for them that they can not find at home (Scott 2002, 15). While conservative evangelicals agree that being a mother is the most important priority in their lives, many also desire the challenges and opportunities available in paid employment and seek to combine both responsibilities.

Another significant aspect of evangelical faith that affects the decisions mothers are making regarding work is the concept of “calling”. The term “calling” is used by these women to explain the direction they feel God is leading them in, as determined through prayer and reflection. By obeying God’s calling, they believe they are being obedient to God’s will for them and purpose for their lives (Scott 2002, 20). The concept of calling is important and has been described by these women as the primary factor influencing the decisions they make regarding work. In her 2002 study, Tracy Scott found that evangelical women say that many factors influence their work decisions including their church, their husbands, and their economic situation; however the most important factor is their sense as to what God is “calling” them to do (Scott 2002, 20). These women explain that some of them have been “called” to stay at home while others have been “called” to paid work (Scott 2002, 1). Regardless of their employment status, the concept of “calling” has a large influence on their decisions and is certainly an aspect absent from the decision-making process of secular women. Scott goes so far as to say that calling has become a way for these women to justify their decisions, whether their church would approve of them or not. She claims that the concept of calling has given
evangelical women a way to spiritually defend their decisions and expand their roles outside of the home (Scott 2002, 28).

Evangelical women use the concept of calling to justify and legitimize their employment decisions, however many remain conflicted over the mixed messages communicated by their churches and society regarding women’s employment. Some women claim that their churches speak about gender roles and the responsibilities men and women have within the home, but are then silent on the participation of mothers in the paid workforce (Scott 2002, 19). Psychologists Tina Sellers and Kris Thomas have found that churches often send mixed messages to mothers regarding employment, thus creating confusion and isolation for both women who work and for those who do not (Sellers and Thomas 2005, 199).

Evangelical mothers also cite the clash of societal messages with religious messages as a source of tension and conflict regarding their employment decisions. Women growing up in conservative Christian homes reportedly have a very hard time separating messages emanating from society from those communicated by the church regarding the employment of mothers (Sellers and Thomas 2005, 205). Perhaps this conflict is inevitable given the stark contrast between the gendered roles of evangelical Christianity set against the progressive ideals of radical feminism. Another aspect of evangelicalism that likely contributes to this conflict is the mandate to be “in, but not of, the world” (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 228). Unlike, fundamentalist Christians and other ultra-conservative groups, conservative evangelicals are encouraged to participate in
society, sharing God’s love with the world, rather than living solely amongst themselves in exclusive communities. This position is challenging in the sense that evangelicals are exposed to more progressive feminist thought regarding women in the workplace, but are taught the conservative ideals regarding women’s roles in the home as mothers. Given these circumstances, evangelical mothers are challenged with defining and living out their beliefs amongst a sea of cultural differences and potentially unclear church directives.

Finally, another challenge for evangelical women negotiating their place in the home and in the workforce is the increasing need for them to contribute to their family’s financial well being. Evangelicals are historically members of the middle-class and upper-middle class strata of society (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 214). During the second half of the twentieth century, families began to become more reliant on the financial contribution of wives as the cost of living in America rose. This trend continues today, with many families within this religious tradition relying on income from both husband and wife (Gallagher and Smith 1999, 227). Financial realities of today have challenged the gender norms of evangelicalism and create conflict for mothers viewing their highest calling as that of “mother”.

Due to a variety of religious and cultural norms, evangelical mothers struggle with many of the same dilemmas secular women do regarding paid employment outside the home. Biblical teaching and gendered roles within evangelical theology strongly encourage women to view their roles in the home as their highest priority. Virtually all
evangelical women agree that being a mother is their most important role, but many strive to work outside the home as well. Some of these women simply value the professional experiences and opportunities that cannot be found at home, while others must work to financially provide for their families. Regardless of why they are working, evangelical women report feeling confused and conflicted due to mixed messages sent by their churches in combination with the views that society communicates regarding motherhood and work. As will be seen in the next section, a deeper look inside the largest evangelical denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, will give more insight into the messages communicated by the church and the struggles faced by this specific subset of women.

_A Look at the Southern Baptist Convention_

The Southern Baptist Convention is an interesting population to study due to its prominence within the American religious landscape and its dynamic and controversial history. Established in 1845, this denomination currently has over sixteen million members across the United States organized into forty-two thousand member churches (Southern Baptist Convention, About Us). The Southern Baptist Convention is not only the largest Baptist denomination, but also the largest Protestant denomination in the United States (Pew Research). Twenty-six percent of evangelical Protestants are Southern Baptist, representing seven percent of the total U.S. adult population (Pew Research). With such a large following, forty-one state conventions oversee the twelve hundred local associations to which the member churches belong (Southern Baptist
Convention, About Us). Interestingly, each individual church governs itself and can teach the Southern Baptist beliefs as it sees fit. The underlying belief that joins all of the member churches is the adherence to Biblical principles and a “commitment to proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ to the entire world” (Southern Baptist Convention, About Us). The qualifications for membership include acceptance of Jesus Christ as one’s savior and participation in a baptism by immersion (Southern Baptist Convention, About Us).

Though this denomination has remained strong since its inception in the 1800’s, it has seen its fair share of controversy and debate over the past thirty years. Ironically, the major disagreements have been over the role of women in the church and in the home.
Cited by Barry Hankins as one of the most “contentious and significant battles in American religious history,” in 1979 the Southern Baptist Convention, led by religious moderates, came under attack by the denomination’s conservatives (Hankins 2002, 3). The denomination underwent a complete overhaul of church leadership and in the early 1980’s the conservatives took control of the entire denomination and its six seminary schools (Hankins 2002, 3). Such a turnover, understandably, brought theological changes that persist even today.

The role of women in the Church was the primary focus of debate that waged into the late 1990’s. Conservative Southern Baptists fought to have women barred from becoming ordained pastors and from holding senior leadership positions in the church’s teaching ministry. Based on passages from the Bible, the leadership of the Southern Baptist Convention believed that while women make a vital contribution to the church
body, they should not be ordained pastors (Hankins 2002, 201). Researcher Barry Hankins believes the church’s position on women pastors is symbolic of its overall beliefs regarding gender equality. He argues that the leadership’s stance toward women pastors reinforces the traditional gendered roles that are encouraged throughout the organization (Hankins 2002, 201). The debate over the role of women in the church officially ended in 1998 when the Southern Baptist Convention added a “submission” statement to its doctrinal faith statement (Hankins 2002, 213).

The addition of the “submission” statement to the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement” is significant for a variety of reasons. Most importantly, this statement made the church’s position on the role of women very clear. After years of debate, the church added a statement to its doctrinal beliefs instructing wives to submit to their husbands and prohibiting women from becoming ordained pastors. Much of the controversy within the church over this statement stemmed from the use of the word “submission”. Moderate Southern Baptists voted for a more egalitarian statement that called for mutual submission between husband and wife, while the conservatives demanded a more direct interpretation from the Bible instructing husbands to love their wives and wives to submit to their husbands (Hankins 2002, 220). The “submission” statement garnered a fair share of secular media attention upon its inclusion in the church doctrine, with many news outlets criticizing the Southern Baptists for such antiquated beliefs. Interestingly, the church included language in the statement warning against “selling out to culture” and emphasized that doctrine should not be determined, “according to modern culture,
sociological and ecclesiastical trends or according to personal emotional whims” (Hankins 2002, 217). The church emphasized that Biblical scripture must be the sole source of guidance for Southern Baptist beliefs and behavior (Hankins 2002, 217).

Despite strong support from the denomination’s leadership and backing from Biblical scripture, the addition of the “submission” statement came under attack from within the evangelical community at large. In response to the “submission” statement, the evangelical group, Christians for Biblical Equality, issued a statement entitled “Men, Women, and Biblical Equality” that argued for a more egalitarian view of women within the church. This statement was supported by over one hundred and sixty evangelical pastors and leaders that agreed with a more progressive view of women in the evangelical community (Hankins 202, 228). As stated earlier, a unique and significant aspect of the Southern Baptist Convention is the independence given to individual congregations allowing them the freedom to choose what they teach and enforce. Although the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement” is unanimously endorsed by the highest level of church leadership, individual congregations have the option of complying with the “submission” statement. Given the nature of its opposition, presumably not all churches choose to teach their congregations the denomination’s views on submission as intended by denominational leadership (Hankins 2002, 226).

Due to its size and adherence to conservative Biblical teachings, the Southern Baptist Convention offers a unique glimpse into the inner-workings of evangelical culture in the United States. Representing the largest percent of adult evangelicals, this
denomination exerts a large amount of influence within the country’s Christian population. Additionally, though wrought with debate and controversy, the denomination has made its views toward the role of women in families and in the church very clear. What is not entirely clear is how these controversial messages are communicated through lower levels of church leadership and manifested in more informal communication channels. Additionally, the nature to which mothers and wives within the denomination subscribe to such beliefs is not known. The following section takes a look into the communication channels with the Southern Baptist Convention in order to determine how messages regarding the role of women in the church are communicated and followed.

**Southern Baptist Formal and Informal Communication Regarding Women’s Employment**

From its highest level, the Southern Baptist Convention makes it very clear how it views the role of women within the church. But how does this message manifest itself within church congregations and published materials? How do mothers respond to these messages and use them to inform the decisions they make regarding employment? This section seeks to investigate the communication channels within the Southern Baptist Convention in order to determine just how messages regarding women, mothers and employment trickle down to the congregation level.

**Formal Messages Communicated through Church Doctrine and Resolutions**

The first aspect of Southern Baptist communication to look at is the formal messages the denomination has created addressing the roles of women and the employment of mothers. There are four major statements that the church has published
that address such themes. These statements include the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement,” the “Resolution on Honor for Full-Time Homemakers,” the “Resolution on Institutional Childcare” and the “Resolution on Women in Combat”. All four statements make it very clear that the Southern Baptist Convention believes in the importance and God ordained role of women to be the primary caregivers for children in the home.

The “Baptist Faith and Message Statement,” the denominations primary doctrinal document, sets out some very clear principles regarding the role of women within the church and family. In reference to the dynamic between husband and wife, it states that “a wife is to submit herself graciously to the servant leadership of her husband” (Baptist Faith and Message Statement). The document goes on to further describe the role of a wife within the family stating that she is to, “serve as his helper in managing the household and nurturing the next generation” (Baptist Faith and Message Statement). While the statement does not go so far as to mandate that women opt out of the workforce, it emphasizes the importance of respecting the husband’s leadership position within the family, presumes that married couples have children, and tasks the wife with much of the responsibility for maintaining the home and attending to the children. As was discovered in the general evangelical research presented earlier, the role of wife and mother is clearly a high priority within the Southern Baptist theological teaching.

In addition to the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement,” three church statements provide added insight into the messages sent to women regarding their roles within the church and home. Referred to within the church as “resolutions,” these statements
express an opinion or concern of the Southern Baptist Convention (Southern Baptist Convention). Resolutions are submitted, voted upon and discussed at the annual denomination convention. If passed, they are added to the long list of resolutions that have been documented since 1845 and serve as official church opinion. The resolutions to be discussed in this context reflect the denomination’s opinion regarding full-time homemakers, institutional childcare, and women in combat. Though they were written over the course of the past twenty years, the resolutions mirror the sentiments communicated in the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement,” emphasizing the important role women play as mothers and wives.

The “Resolution on Honor for Full-Time Homemakers” was passed by the Southern Baptist Convention in 1987 and reflects the convention’s view regarding the importance of stay-at-home mothers. While the resolution acknowledges that some mothers simultaneously juggle outside employment with mothering responsibilities, it seeks to honor full-time mothers and underscore the importance of the sacrifices they make for their families. The resolution states:

We honor the rich and valuable contributions of full-time wives and mothers who through their service and self-sacrifice have strengthened their families, enriched our nation, and pleased our God by honoring His purposes in their lives each day. (Resolution on Honor for Full-Time Homemakers)

This resolution is significant for a variety of reasons. First of all, while it points out that some mothers work outside the home, it expressively honors those mothers who choose to stay at home. The resolution acknowledges the sacrifices stay-at-home mothers make
and points out the lack of respect these mothers get from society as a whole. Finally, the resolution cites full-time mothers as fulfilling God’s purpose for their lives, making a clear reference to the belief that God ordained women to have the role of raising children and caring for the home.

Another resolution that reflects the church’s view towards mothers is the “Resolution on Institutional Childcare.” Passed in 1988, this resolution reflects the Southern Baptist dislike of institutional childcare, especially that which is regulated by the federal government (Resolution on Institutional Childcare). The resolution states clearly that the convention believes that, “the principal responsibility of childcare is a family responsibility” (Resolution on Institutional Childcare). In the resolution, the convention shows concern for low-income or single parent families that cannot provide care for children at home. In these situations, the opinion of the church is that families utilize local or state-run childcare rather than federally subsidized or operated options. Like the previous resolution, this resolution underscores the responsibility the church places on the family to care for children throughout the workday. It also reflects the churches opposition to the federal government playing a role in the care of children.

The final resolution that addresses the Southern Baptist view of women and family is the “Resolution on Women in Combat.” Passed in 1998, this resolution includes some bold opinions held by the Southern Baptist Convention regarding the role of women in the military and in society. The resolution instructs against women’s participation in the United States military. The reasons behind this opinion reflect back
on the very traditionalist views that the denomination holds in regard to gender-based roles as defined by God. The resolution states that the participation of women in the military, “rejects gender-based distinctions established by God…and undermines male headship in the family by failing to recognize the unique gender-based responsibility of men to protect women and children” (Resolution on Women in Combat). The resolution also addresses the churches abhorrence to feminist ideals in American society stating that women serving in the military, “subordinates the combat readiness of American troops to the unbiblical social agenda of ideological feminism” (Resolution on Women in Combat). This resolution reflects the same themes apparent in the previous two, underscoring the importance of women’s role in the family and emphasizing the existence of gender-based roles created by God.

The “Baptist Faith and Message Statement” in conjunction with the three resolutions discussed above, represent the Southern Baptist Convention’s formal doctrine and opinion regarding the roles of women and mothers in the church. Combined, these statements reflect the churches preference for stay-at-home mothers and for women to adhere to their gendered roles created by God. Although the resolutions span a twenty year period, they show that the church has not wavered in its commitment to Biblical ideals regarding mothers and family. These documents make clear and bold statements, but they do not address the financial, social and cultural dilemmas that families must face navigating employment and childcare in today’s society.
Informal Messages Communicated by Church Leaders

Apart from formal church statements, leaders within the Southern Baptist Convention have added their own contribution to this topic through written commentaries and public statements. Three leaders that have made particularly significant contributions include Penna Dexter, Albert Mohler, and Paul Brewster. Their opinions about working mothers have been broadcast to members of the Southern Baptist Convention nationwide through the Baptist Press and personal websites. By identifying the nature and themes of their messages, it is possible to get a more comprehensive view of the messages regarding working mothers communicated within this community.

Penna Dexter, an active leader and writer within the denomination, has made several public statements regarding work and motherhood in a variety of Southern Baptist communication vehicles. Ms. Dexter has held several leadership positions within the Convention and writes a monthly column for the Baptist Press. Perhaps most significant is her status as member of the Board of Trustees for the Southern Baptist Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission (Baptist Press 2005). This committee serves to advise Southern Baptists on public policy issues and address, “social, moral, and ethical concerns, with particular attention to their impact on American families and their faith” (Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission). Ms. Dexter also served on the Southern Baptist Convention’s Resolution committee in 2003, 2004 and 2005 (Baptist Press 2005). On multiple occasions, she has commented on the roles of mothers in her monthly Baptist Press columns. The message that she communicates complies with the formal messages
set forth by the Southern Baptist Convention. She acknowledges the important role mothers play in raising children and admonishes society’s negative views towards stay-at-home mothers.

In her 2007 article, “Common Sense in ‘Mommy Wars’,” Ms. Dexter uses statistics to illustrate the increase of full-time mothering in society and repudiates the opinions of three leading feminists regarding the importance of a mother’s participation in the workforce. Drawing from the survey results of the 2007 Pew Research study, Ms. Dexter establishes the preference of mothers to engage in part-time work or to give up work completely. She specifically disagrees with the opinions of feminists Betty Friedan, Leslie Bennets, and Linda Hirshman. In 1963, Betty Friedan wrote the ground breaking feminist book *The Feminine Mystique* in which she highly criticizes stay-at-home mothers and encourages all women to exert their power and use their intelligence in the paid workforce (Dexter 2007). Leslie Bennets, a more contemporary feminist, is a writer for *Vanity Fair* and author of *The Feminine Mistake*. In her book she urges women to take advantage of the employment rights their predecessors fought for and warns women about the financial implications of their decision to stay at home in light of high divorce rates in America (Dexter 2007). Finally, Linda Hirshman is the author of the highly publicized book, *Get to Work*, in which she too encourages women to get out of the house and exercise their minds and influence in American society (Dexter 2007).

Penna Dexter disagrees with the messages communicated by all three authors and argues that American mothers do as well. She believes that mothers today do not want to
“have it all” and are giving up trying to balance work and family. Ms. Dexter contends that feminists strive to gain government-run day care and more paid family leave, but asserts that these programs are not in the best interest of families or taxpayers (Dexter 2007). Using sound statistical support, Penna Dexter challenges the views of feminists and shows the preference and trend of American mothers to choose part-time work or to not work at all. She underscores the traditional Southern Baptist views, embracing the mother’s role in the home and discouraging federal government intervention in child care.

Another outspoken leader within the Southern Baptist Convention is Paul Brewster. Like Penna Dexter, Mr. Brewster is a columnist for the Baptist Press and writes commentary on a variety of social issues. He is a graduate of one of the Southern Baptist Convention’s seminary schools, the Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, and is the pastor of a Baptist church in Indiana (Brewster 2006). His views not only affect his particular congregation but are also broadcast to over one million Baptists that receive news via Baptist Press.

In his 2006 Baptist Press article, “Is Mothering a Threat to Civilization,” Mr. Brewster emphasizes how important it is for mothers to stay home with their children through young adulthood. Like Penna Dexter, he disagrees with Linda Hirshman’s views in her book Get to Work, and also disagrees with Sylvia Hewlett’s article “The New Have-It All Myth” (Brewster 2006). Sylvia Hewlett has done extensive research on the career tracks of mothers and is one of the leading proponents of corporate initiatives to
get mothers back into the work force once their young children have grown. In his commentary, Mr. Brewster makes it clear that he believes strongly in the value of stay-at-home mothers and does not believe mothers should go back to work period (Brewster 2006). He states that, “stay-at-home moms are the hope of civilization and represent the finest and most noble use of human intellect known to humanity” (Brewster 2006). He also believes that the Christian community must, “communicate to Christian women that devoting themselves to domestic life is not wasting their lives, instead, it is a high calling that our society ought to be exalting, not demeaning” (Brewster 2006). In his article, Mr. Brewster states very clearly his beliefs regarding the role of mothers in the home and makes no exceptions for mothers to work part-time. Like Penna Dexter, he directly opposes views held by current secular authors writing on work and motherhood and encourages fellow Christians to oppose such ideas as well.

The third Southern Baptist leader to review is Albert Mohler. Mr. Mohler is the current President of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary based in Louisville, Kentucky. He has been recognized by several sources, including Time magazine and Christianity Today, as a leader in the evangelical community. He serves as a particularly interesting leader because he strives to “address contemporary issues from a consistent and explicit Christian worldview” in all of his communications (Albert Mohler’s bio). Mr. Mohler has several vehicles of communication including his sermons, speeches given to the Southern Baptist Convention and individual congregations, his weekday radio
show, and his personal blog. His messages reach a large audience and are well respected due to his position within the church.

Similar to Penna Dexter and Paul Brewster, Albert Mohler holds very conservative and traditional views toward the employment of mothers. Four of his commentaries published within the past six years exhibit his conservative position and show the extent to which he addresses his concerns to the Southern Baptist denomination and public at large. In 2004 he posted a commentary on his blog responding to a *Time* magazine article by Claudia Wallis entitled “The Case for Staying Home: Why More Young Moms are Opting Out of the Rat Race.” In the article, Ms. Wallis reports on the increasing percentage of women that are leaving professional jobs to stay at home with their children. Albert Mohler praises the attention this secular publication gives to this issue and reiterates the challenge mothers face in trying to work and care for children. He states that, “Christians surely understand that God gave us something invaluable in granting women the opportunity to be mothers” and warns that any disrespect toward motherhood, “is an assault on the dignity of life itself” (Albert Mohler blog, posted on March 24, 2004). In this response, Albert Mohler emphasizes the Southern Baptist view regarding the importance of motherhood and God-given responsibility the role entails.

In 2005, Mr. Mohler further emphasizes his views toward motherhood on his blog in his response to Judith Warner’s book *Perfect Madness: Motherhood in the Age of Anxiety*. In her book, Ms. Warner writes about the stress involved in mothering today and claims that women feel pressured by the myth to be the “perfect mom” (Albert Mohler
blog, posted on February 22, 2005). She proposes that the government offer high-quality childcare that will help ease mother’s feelings of guilt and advocates for part-time day care so that stay-at-home mothers can get a break during the day. Mr. Mohler responds to these ideas with sharp disdain. He criticizes the self-centered view that Warner uses to characterize the imposition motherhood places on women’s lives. He believes the sacrificial aspects of motherhood should be affirmed by society rather than marginalized. Mr. Mohler also warns strongly against the government getting involved in childcare and serving as a “surrogate” parent either full-time or part-time (Albert Mohler blog, posted on February 22, 2005).

Finally, on two separate occasions in 2006 Albert Mohler reacted to statements feminist Linda Hirshman made in the news media about stay-at-home mothers. Hirshman made some very strong statements about women that leave the workforce to be at home with their children that received equally strong responses from Albert Mohler. On, Good Morning America, Hirshman stated that “an educated, competent adult’s place is in the office” (Albert Mohler blog, posted on February 24, 2006). She said that the decision of mothers to stay at home with their children is a “threat to civilization” and a waste of a woman’s education (Robinson 2006). Mr. Mohler responded that contrary to Hirshman’s opinion, women are not “letting down the team,” but rather, “they are holding civilization together where civilization begins—in the home” (Albert Mohler blog, posted on February 24, 2006). In his response, Albert Mohler emphasized the Biblical calling Christian women have toward motherhood and remarked on the role that God plays in the
daily lives of mothers. Mr. Mohler’s comments in 2006 further emphasize the highly
Biblical and important role he believes mothers have to raise their children in the home.
He makes his opposition toward secular views of working mothers very clear and
encourages fellow Christians to join him in affirming the work that stay-at-home mothers
accomplish.

All three of the Southern Baptist leaders researched share similar traditional views
regarding women and employment. Penna Dexter, Paul Brewster and Albert Mohler
affirm the church’s teachings encouraging women to care for their children full-time in
the home rather than engaging in paid work. The traditional roles for women described in
Southern Baptist theology are underscored in all three of their opinions, as is the Biblical
calling of motherhood. The messages communicated to Southern Baptists by these
leaders stress the values taught by the Southern Baptist leadership and show no deviation
from formal church doctrine.

_Informal Messages Communicated through Church News and Publications_

In addition to messages communicated through church doctrine and Southern
Baptist leaders, many messages regarding working mothers are communicated informally
through Southern Baptists news sources. The Southern Baptist Convention has devoted
extensive resources to the creation of books, magazines and news outlets for its members
to access. The _Baptist Press_ news service, _Lifeway Christian Resources, ParentLife_
magazine and _HomeLife_ magazine are products of the Southern Baptist Convention that
reveal a wealth of information regarding the informal messages communicated to
Southern Baptist mothers and families regarding work and motherhood. A look into these informal communication channels reveals that they offer support and encouragement to both working and stay-at-home mothers. The Baptist Press publication is the only source that exclusively communicates the traditional Southern Baptist view affirming stay-at-home mothers.

The Baptist Press is the most formal of the Southern Baptist news agents. It has been in operation since 1946 and reports on weekdays to an audience of over one million Baptists (Baptist Press, About Us). Baptist Press news is available through the organization’s website, through forty state Baptist newspapers, and through other Christian and secular media outlets (Baptist Press, About Us). An analysis of Baptist Press articles referencing mothers and employment shows that this news outlet is rather conservative and communicates messages in-line with official church teaching.

Upon reviewing Baptist Press articles related to working mothers published within the last fifteen years, it is apparent that the Baptist Press only reports stories that support the official church teaching regarding the traditional roles of mothers. Commentaries by Penna Dexter and Paul Brewster already discussed were run exclusively by the Baptist Press news service. These commentaries in addition to other stories support and defend the role of mothers in the home. In 2000, Baptist Press reported on legislation passed by the U.S. House of Representatives giving tax relief to married couples. The article explicitly mentions the importance of helping stay-at-home moms by enacting tax refunds and credits for families with one parent at home (Baptist
Press 2000). In 1997, Baptist Press covered the story of an Arkansas Baptist church that made the decision to shutdown its day care center. Because the church believes that mother should not work outside the home, it ruled that “operating a day care was sending a mixed signal of home and family values” (Henderson 1997). Interestingly, the Baptist Press news archives did not contain any articles referencing mothers juggling demands of work and family or any other such indication of working moms. This Southern Baptist news source communicates the same values as does the denomination’s leadership, affirming the important role mothers play in the home.

Another news and information organization established by the Southern Baptist Convention is LifeWay Christian Resources. Established in 1891, LifeWay is one of the largest providers of Christian literature and media in the world (Hankins 2002, 3). Fully owned and operated by the Southern Baptist Convention, LifeWay runs a website in which a variety of articles and Bible studies geared towards Christian living are posted. Additionally, LifeWay publishes eleven magazines targeted at different segments of the Southern Baptist population. Relevant to this study are HomeLife and ParentLife magazines. Published monthly, the mission of ParentLife magazine is to, “bring a Christian worldview to today’s top parenting and cultural issues” (ParentLife). HomeLife magazine is a bit broader in scope, covering all issues of family life, not just parenting. The goal of this publication is to, “nurture Godly families by providing practical Biblical solutions for everyday living” (HomeLife). Messages communicated in articles and stories published by LifeWay and in both ParentLife and HomeLife magazines, provide a
very interesting glimpse into the informal messages about motherhood emanating from these sources.

Unlike all of the messages previously discussed these publications directly address the struggles mothers face negotiating employment, day care, and time in today’s society. Articles in all three sources represent mothers who choose to work as well as those who do not. A closer look at each source shows the nature of the messages conveyed.

A handful of articles posted by LifeWay exhibit the variety of messages represented regarding work and motherhood. Within these articles, three major themes are apparent. LifeWay articles simultaneously support and advise working mothers, mothers that choose to stay home, and show explicit support for families who homeschool their children.

The first theme evident in several articles addresses the struggles mothers encounter trying to manage professional responsibilities and family obligations. An article posted in June of 2003 entitled “Bonding with Working Moms,” advises mothers to seek support and guidance from other working mothers in their organizations. A similar article posted in 2004, “Managing a Flexible Work Schedule,” gives moms tips for staying visible within their company if they telecommute or have other flexible work arrangements. Rather than dissuading mothers from working, as many of the formal church messages do, these articles give mothers practical tips for balancing employment and family.
The second theme evident in *LifeWay* articles represents the traditional Southern Baptist view encouraging mothers to stay at home with their children. The 2003 article “Experts Say Company Policies Driving Parents from Home,” reports on government and corporate policies that allegedly force both parents to work outside of the home. The article quotes popular pro-family advocate and Christian, Dr. James Dobson, as saying that “anti-family policies combined with the view that one’s career is the chief source of personal fulfillment are robbing Americans of a stable family life” (Robertson 2003). Though articles supporting stay-at-home mothers are mixed in with *LifeWay* articles geared towards working mothers, the traditional Southern Baptist views affirming the important work women do at home are represented in this news source.

Finally, the third theme evident in *LifeWay* articles is the organization’s support for homeschooling. In 2003, an article by Chris Klicka cited a marked increase in the number of families who homeschool their children and attributed the growth to parents’ desire to impart Christian values on their children. Similarly, in 2004, Bill Fancher reported that experts on American families are claiming homeschooling to be the best tool to help restore the traditional family in the United States. While these articles do not explicitly reference the role of mothers in the homeschooling movement, stay-at-home moms are indirectly supported due to the full-time duties homeschooling requires.

A similar combination of messages appear throughout the pages of *ParentLife* magazine. Articles in this publication give support and advice to both working and non-working mothers. “Career Success for Working Moms” and “Time Management for the
Wonder Working Mom,” published in 2007 and 2006 respectively, both give suggestions for mothers feeling stressed by life’s demands. The articles suggest that mothers think outside the box in their approach to work and mothering, look or ask for flexible work opportunities, and learn how to say ‘no’ to additional responsibilities. A recent article published in October of 2009 entitled “Child-Care Dilemmas”, addresses day care debacles mothers encounter when their children are home from school due to sickness or holidays. An important feature of this article to note is the emphasis the author places on children being a mother’s number one priority, regardless of the inconveniences they may cause in day to day living. While many of the ParentLife articles focus on situations affecting working mothers, the value of stay-at-home mothers is addressed in the 2004 article, “What Works for Your Family?” This article emphasizes the unique calling God has on each woman’s life which may or may not include paid employment outside of the home. Like the LifeWay articles, ParentLife shows support and affirmation for mothers working either inside or outside of the home. Many of the articles suggest that women seek flexible working arrangements and underscore the priority of children regardless of one’s employment status.

HomeLife magazine includes a variety of articles that, like ParentLife and LifeWay, show support for both working and non-working mothers. Articles like, “How to Find Balance as a Working Mom,” advise moms on strategies to manage their time at work and at home (Armenia 2004). Interestingly, HomeLife has published several articles encouraging mothers to start their own businesses from home. Nancy Jackson’s article
“From Pastime to Profit” and Francine Huff’s story “9 Tips for Starting a home-based business” walk women through some of the technical aspects of starting a business and encourage them to turn hobbies into profitable enterprises. Finally, true to traditional Southern Baptist ideology, the article “Two Income to One” helps families determine whether they can afford for the wife to stay home and encourages families to re-assess their material spending in order to make life on one income a more feasible reality (Huff 2005).

A review of the articles published by the informal media outlets of the Southern Baptist Convention shows quite a departure from the denomination’s formal messages encouraging women to shy away from paid employment and focus exclusively on caring for their children at home. Though the Baptist Press tends to report only stories in-line with denominational views, the articles published by LifeWay, HomeLife and ParentLife encourage and support women regardless of their employment status. The articles in these sources affirm the priority that children should have over paid employment, but do not criticize women who choose to work. Unlike many of the more formal messages communicated by church leaders and doctrine, the articles produced by LifeWay address the financial implications that may be forcing mothers to work and give practical solutions for managing work and family should that be the only option for some families. With Baptist Press stories being the only exception, informal messages communicated by Southern Baptist organizations reflect the same struggles and concerns that secular
women have regarding work and motherhood, with an added reflection on Christian values and principles.

Conclusion

Debates regarding the roles of women in the church and in the home have played a prominent role in Southern Baptist discourse over the past quarter century. The conservative take over of the denomination in the 1980’s ushered in some significant changes regarding the church’s views towards women. The inclusion of the “submission” statement into the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement” solidified the church’s stand that women should submit to the headship and authority of their husbands and fulfill the gendered roles that God has ordained for them in the home (Baptist Faith and Message Statement). Additionally, a collection of Southern Baptist Resolutions further emphasize the importance the church places on women’s work in the home.

Aside from the formal doctrinal statements, views towards the employment of mothers vary across channels of Southern Baptist communication. Commentaries written by three popular Southern Baptist leaders exhibit their alignment with doctrinal views. News from the Baptist Press also reflects an allegiance to traditional views emphasizing the importance of stay-at-home mothers in today’s families. Communication in more informal publications including LifeWay, ParentLife, and HomeLife reveal a combination of messages being communicated to Southern Baptist women. These publications run articles that encourage and support stay-at-home mothers as well as their employed
counterparts. The articles do not criticize or condemn the decisions made by either party, but reinforce the importance of family and children regardless of employment status.

The difference in messages communicated by varying church outlets suggests some interesting realities regarding the mothers within the Southern Baptist Convention. As articulated by church doctrine and the messages of popular leaders, this denomination aligns with the general evangelical adherence to traditional gender roles within the family and highly values the work mothers do in the home. Articles published by LifeWay, ParentLife and HomeLife magazines show that personal desire or financial motivation push some Southern Baptist mothers to work outside the home. Although not addressed in any formal church statements, many Southern Baptist women work outside the home and struggle with the same time management issues as do evangelical mothers overall. The number of articles that reference or encourage flexible work schedules shows the propensity for Southern Baptist mothers, like American mothers in general, to seek more flexible work arrangements allowing them to devote more time to their families. Finally, as consistent with general evangelical discourse, a reoccurring theme in all levels of Southern Baptist communication is the importance of the family and the priority that children have over work outside the home. The Southern Baptist Convention stands out as a denomination that does not formulate doctrine based on secular trends, but whose members encounter the same financial and employment pressures as the rest of the evangelical population and nation overall.
CHAPTER 4
SOUTHERN BAPTIST PUBLIC POLICY RECOMMENDATION

Introduction

As set forth by the preceding chapter, mothers in the Southern Baptist Convention are subjected to mixed messages regarding their roles in the workforce and in the home. While formal messages from the church leadership emphasize the importance of gendered roles within marriage, more informal messages in denomination news sources offer strategies to help Southern Baptist women balance career and motherhood. All dimensions of the Southern Baptist population unanimously support families and prioritize the care of children, yet many Southern Baptist mothers juggle work and mothering responsibilities. Like many women in America’s broader evangelical and secular populations, these women seek more flexibility in the workplace and tools to help them manage the multitude of their responsibilities.

The disparities amongst the messages communicated to Southern Baptist mothers create some interesting implications regarding public policy options that would support this group. How and in what manner does current U.S. public policy influence the employment decisions of Southern Baptist women? Would a higher proportion of these mothers align with formal church doctrine and stay home with their children if tax or child care policies in the United States made such an option more feasible? Alternatively, do Southern Baptist women prefer policies making it easier for them to combine work and family? A look into current and proposed legislation targeted at families with
children will shed some light on policies that would work well for the Southern Baptist population.

As applied to broader society as a whole, questions regarding public policy for families have elicited controversial responses in the media and political circles over the past decade. With women’s labor participation at a standstill and mothers of young children increasingly preferring to work part-time or not at all, the future of public policy programs targeted at families is at a precarious point in our nation’s history. Additionally, promises made by the Obama Administration coupled with the recent multi-billion dollar stimulus package have the opportunity to alter the direction the country takes regarding support for working and stay-at-home mothers.

This chapter seeks to explore public policy options for families and recommend a solution that would best accommodate families in the Southern Baptist Convention. Before delving into the multitude of policy options, the nature and inherent difficulties of developing family policies will be discussed. Next, the current social policies affecting families in the United States will be presented followed by the major policy recommendations that have been made by political and family-law experts. Finally, based on Southern Baptist trends and opinions a policy recommendation for this population will be made.

*Inherent Problems with Family Policy*

Developing public policy to address the challenges encountered by American families is a complicated and contentious endeavor. Due to the variety of employment
situations in today’s families, recent trends in women’s employment, global comparisons, and the public’s perception of government involvement in family matters, policymakers have struggled to identify options that are deemed fair and appropriate by the American public. Over the years, several key pieces of legislation such as the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act have given women the opportunity to enter and thrive in the paid workforce. Now that women have overcome many barriers formerly inhibiting their advancement in paid employment, legislators and private sector employers are being challenged to create policies that accommodate the demands of both working and non-working mothers.

The first impediment to crafting simple and straightforward public policy for families is the sheer multitude of factors and opinions surrounding the decisions mothers make regarding work (Gerson 1985, 224). During World War II and the post-war years, many women were happy to take advantage of the new employment opportunities offered to them. Women today, however, are very judicious in their decision-making and take a variety of routes when navigating the balance of paid employment and family obligations. For U.S. women in general, there has been no recent change in their workforce participation rate which had steadily grown from 1945-1999 (Leonhardt 2009). The number of women who choose to stay home with their young children has grown thirteen percent in the past decade and there has been a marked increase in the number of women pursuing self-employment options (Belkin 2003). Working mothers are increasingly looking for employment opportunities that offer more flexibility, which
women continue to find in traditionally female-dominated occupations. Not only are mothers showing a greater sensitivity to balancing family values with work, but the public overall believes it is important for mothers of young children to either work part-time or to step out of the workforce (Taylor 2007, 8). In sum, mothers today are seeking out and creating work opportunities that allow them to successfully manage home and work. For some mothers, this means taking time out of the workforce for a period of time. Other mothers are looking to part-time or self-employment options to find a good balance, while others are particularly challenged by being employed in professions and occupations that lack flexibility. Being sensitive to the array of employment situations mothers occupy today, crafting public policy that balances these differences has proven to be a difficult task.

Due to recent changes in women’s employment patterns, the second challenge in developing public policy is crafting solutions that will create positive social change rather than an environment that continues to submit women and families to difficult choices. Women play a valuable role in the U.S. workforce and the country is reliant on their participation to ensure global competitiveness in the future. Although the workforce participation of women has stalled over the past twenty years, women comprise fifty-eight percent of college graduates and have a similarly large participation rate in graduate programs (Kay and Shipman 2008). American women are highly educated and situated well to succeed in the workforce; however, many women with professional degrees have found the workforce to be too incompatible with their values. These women withdraw
from the workforce at a rate three times that of their male counterparts due to family responsibilities (Belkin 2003). Women are demanding flexibility in the workforce to accommodate their careers and families, and when this need is not met many withdraw from paid employment (Lovejoy and Stone 2004, 81). The recently reported tendency of valuable and highly-educated women to leave the workforce due to inflexible environments indicates a critical problem in the American workplace. Women play an important role in stimulating the U.S. economy through their participation in the country’s labor market. In order to ensure the long-term health of the U.S. economy and labor market, it is important that public policy respond to the unmet needs of working mothers in a manner that is fair and equitable to all U.S. families.

The vitality of the U.S. economy leads directly into the next public policy challenge, which is competing with countries that have more progressive policies geared towards women and families. Many countries are experiencing the same decline in birthrates as the U.S. and have funneled substantial funds into day care and tax incentives in hopes of encouraging women to have children and to work. A lack of affordable and quality day care has been attributed to low birth rates in France and Japan, prompting the governments of each country to enact new policies that ease the day care burden on families. Japan recently allocated $225 million to create more day care facilities, and the French government has decided to subsidize a portion of day care expenses, as well as, give tax money back to the parents of infants and toddlers (Shellenbarger 2010). In order
to remain competitive in the global marketplace, the United States may need to consider similar policies to boost the participation rates of mothers in the paid workforce.

The final challenge inherent in creating policy geared towards women and families is the mixed opinion in the U.S. regarding the government’s involvement in child care. Many Democrats and special-interest groups in the U.S. want to see an increase in government programs offering high-quality child care. On the other hand, their conservative counterparts believe child care arrangements are best handled by families and communities (Shellenbarger 2010). As will be seen in the subsequent discussion about current child care and family policies in the U.S., this ideological difference creates a significant amount of controversy and debate.

Formulating public policy aimed at helping families in America manage the burdens of employment and child care is a complicated matter. Recent trends in women’s employment coupled with increased attention given to balancing work and family have led mothers to adopt a variety of employment paths. A recent increase in the propensity of mothers to stay home with their young children in addition to an overall demand for more flexible work options is placing pressure on employers and the federal government to react. With other countries, such as France and Japan, enacting more aggressive policies aimed at keeping mothers in the workforce, the U.S. is challenged with developing policies that not only work for American families, but that keep the country competitive in the global marketplace. Finally, mixed sentiments in the U.S. regarding the role the government should play in early childhood education and child care adds a
decisive element to the debate. Together these trends and public opinion create some significant complexities in determining the best course for family-related legislation in the U.S.

**Current Status of U.S. Policy**

The United States currently has a variety of policies in place to support families with children. The most significant policies focus on providing tax relief for families paying for child care and creating government-run programs to care for children from low-income backgrounds. There are also policies and innovative programs being implemented by employers to ease the financial and time-management burdens being felt by American families. One of the more predominant criticisms about current family policies in the United States is that the government does not give enough support to child care and benefits, such as paternity leave for families (Gerson 1985, 226). Due to the high percentage of mothers that participate in paid employment, there has been pressure for the government to be more involved in creating and funding child care services, however, this demand is met with its fair share of opponents that believe the government should play no part in caring for children (National Association of Evangelicals). The second criticism is that the current tax code discriminates against married couples by imposing a high marginal tax rate on secondary earners, which in many cases are women (Blau, Ferber, and Winkler 2006, 341). Regardless of the public’s current perception of government and employer support, a variety of policies have been enacted over the course of the past decades to support America’s families.
Federal Programs for Families with Children

Perhaps the most contentious set of family-related policies are those applying to the Federal Government’s investment in child care. Since the 1960’s, the federal government has provided funding and support for early childhood education programs and child care (Lips 2009). The most significant early childhood and child care programs funded by the government include the Head Start program and the Child Care Development Block Grant. In 2009, funding for such programs totaled over $25 billion in federal spending (Lips 2009). Although these programs have been criticized as having marginal positive impact on children, families, and communities, Congress is currently reviewing several bills that would further expand the government’s involvement (Lips 2009).

Established in 1964, Head Start is the largest of the sixty-nine federally funded early childhood education programs (Lips 2009). This program was originally developed to provide developmental and early education services to children from low-income families (Lips 2009). In 1995, the program was expanded to incorporate an “Early Head Start” program that seeks to develop cognitive and developmental skills in children three years and younger (Office of Head Start). In 2008, the federal government spent $6.8 billion on this program and President Obama has supported a $122 million increase in 2010 (Lips 2009). Head Start reaches over nine hundred thousand children per year, but there has been recent debate regarding the benefits of the program following a study that found marginal benefits in participants (Lips 2009). Regardless of mixed results
regarding its efficacy, Head Start represents a significant investment in government spending and involvement in early childhood education.

Another significant program funded by the federal government is the Child Care and Development Block Grant. Initiated in 1990, this program covers a portion of child care expenses for families that fall below eighty-five percent of their state’s median income level (Lips 2009). The grant benefits families using child care outside of the home and gives individual states the liberty of determining which child care providers are eligible to accept the program’s vouchers (Lips 2009). This program is a bit different from Head Start in the sense that it gives individual states the authority to use funds to improve child care options while also disbursing funds in the form of vouchers to qualifying families. Together the Head Start program and the Child Care and Development Block Grant are two of the largest federally funded programs targeted at improving the quality of child care for children in low income families. They are the primary sources of government involvement in child care assistance and early childhood education programs, however, questions about the benefits outweighing the costs of these efforts threaten to challenge further expansion.

In addition to creating and funding child care programs, the federal government offers several tax credits for families to help offset rising costs of child care and related expenses. As a result of the federal stimulus package created in 2009, there are upwards of twenty-four tax credits or benefits available for families. Although the government has built-in some great opportunities for American families to retain part of their taxed
incomes, many of the tax credits are criticized for offering savings for only low-income families and disappearing as income grows to middle-class levels (Fitch and Novack 2009). There is also debate surrounding tax penalties imposed on married couples (Fitch and Novack 2009). The three most prevalent family tax credits include the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and the Child and Dependent Care Tax Credit.

The Earned Income Tax Credit (EITC) was originally implemented in 1975 to incentivize work and offer tax relief for families with children (Internal Revenue Service). Targeted at assisting families with low-to-moderate levels of income, the credit is the largest federally funded assistance program in the country (Hagert 2005). Depending on the number of children in a family, the EITC gives families a refundable tax credit provided their income is below the allowable amount. In 2009, a married couple with one child qualifies for the credit if their taxable income does not exceed $40,463 or $48,279 for three children or more (Internal Revenue Service). Recent enhancements to the credit made by President Obama include the addition of a category for families with three or more children and an increased credit for married versus single parents (Dubay 2009). With very few strings attached, this credit gives families with low-to-moderate income levels instant savings on their income taxes.

Similar to the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit is another opportunity for families to decrease their federal income tax bill. The goal of this credit is to improve the economic status of families by giving them a credit of $1,000 for every qualifying child (Hagert 2005). Married couples who make under $110,000 are eligible
for this credit as are single parents who make under $75,000 (Hagert 2005). One of the major benefits of this credit is that there is no child maximum, parents can claim $1,000 for each of their children. A major criticism of the credit is that it has little to no benefit for very low-income families who typically do not owe any income tax (Moses 2008). This credit impacts a large cross-section of Americans as close to ninety-five percent of the recipients of the Child Tax Credit have incomes between $20,000 and $100,000 (Moses 2008).

The last of the major tax credits available to American families is the Child and Dependent Care Credit. This credit is different than the previous ones discussed in that it offers a credit based on a family’s decision to use paid child care. Families who pay for child care outside of the home can receive a credit for twenty to thirty-five percent of their child care expenses up to $3,000 on their income taxes (Tax Policy Center). Recently, President Obama has proposed increasing the amount of the credit for families earning below $85,000 a year (Donovan and Dubay 2010). This proposal has invoked much criticism amongst conservative policy makers who believe increasing the credit further discriminates against families who rely on family members to care for their children (Donovan and Dubay 2010). Another controversial feature of this credit is that it is non-refundable, meaning that should the amount of the credit exceed a families owed income tax, they receive no refund for the balance. Like the Child Tax Credit, critics are unhappy with the non-refundable feature of the credit that gives little benefit to low-income families. Although none of the current tax credits appear to offer a solution that
silences all critics, the Child and Dependent Care Credit, Child Tax Credit and Earned Income Tax Credit offer a large number of families some sort of income tax relief. They give low and middle-class families the opportunity to reduce the amount of income tax they owe the government and help cushion the rising costs of child care.

The last significant policy currently in place to benefit families with children is the dependent care account available through many U.S. employers. This account gives employees the opportunity to set aside up to $5,000 of their pre-tax salary to cover child care expenses (Shellenbarger 2009). Like the Child and Dependent Care Credit, this option only benefits families that pay a child care provider. The dependent care account is one of the most popular policies that employers use to retain working mothers and is offered by close to ninety percent of U.S. employers (Bradford 2010). The major criticism of the account is that the $5,000 cap does not meet today’s increasingly expensive day care costs (Shellenbarger 2009). Currently there is a proposal in Congress to increase the cap to $7,500 for one child and $10,000 for two or more in order to make this benefit even more attractive for American families (Shellenbarger 2009).

Between a combination of federally subsidized child care programs, income tax credits, and employer-sponsored child care benefits, the United States has a sound set of policies targeted at American children and families. These policies affect a large majority of low and middle class families, but are wrought with criticism regarding their effectiveness and relevance in today’s economy. Much of the criticism surrounding these policies calls for increases in the allowable amounts of credits to reflect the rising costs of
raising children in today’s society. Other criticisms demand equal benefits for families regardless of their propensity to pay for child care. Concerns about the quality of federally funded child care and demands for more flexible work options have aroused a slew of policy recommendations to replace the current policies. Although the U.S. has a history of implementing programs and tax strategies to assist American families, several improvements and additions to current policies have been suggested to meet the demands of today’s families.

Public Policy Proposals

As a result of the countless debates surrounding the challenges families face regarding employment and child care, policymakers have proposed several pieces of legislation to benefit today’s mothers and families. Running the gamut from very conservative to exceedingly liberal, many of the suggestions target child care and flexible work arrangements. Upon reviewing the most feasible and significant of these ideas, the policies best suited for the Southern Baptist population will be presented.

Creating more family friendly workplaces has become a recurring theme of proposed legislation and policy ideas. Ideas such as creating more part-time opportunities for women and changing private sectors laws to enable more flexibility are frequently discussed and debated topics. The Family-Friendly Workplace Act, as well as, several ideas proposed by leading women’s studies and family experts underscore the importance placed on flexibility in the creation of new policies in the U.S.
In an effort to increase workplace flexibility in the private sector, in 2009, the *Family-Friendly Workplace Act* was introduced in Congress. Calling for an amendment of the *Fair Labor Standards Act*, the act sought to make flexible work arrangements more easily obtained in private sector employment (Marrero 2009). One of the provisions of the *Fair Labor Standards Act* prohibits private employers from giving employees the option of paid time off in lieu of overtime pay (Marrero 2009). Politicians believe that having such an option would help make the private sector much more flexible and attractive for American families. Though the *Family-Friendly Workplace Act* did not make it out of the House subcommittee in 2009, many legislators are hopeful that a similar act will be passed in the future.

In addition to politically motivated policy recommendations, many other ideas to create flexible workplaces have been proposed by family experts and commentators. Kathleen Gerson, an expert on women’s labor, suggests creating parental leave policies that can be used by either parent after the birth of a child or for any other time they need to take time off to care for children (Gerson 1985, 226). Sociologists Pamela Stone and Meg Lovejoy suggest “synchronizing school and work schedules” as well as creating more federally funded after-school programs to assist dual-earner families in balancing work and home (Lovejoy and Stone 2004, 82). Lovejoy and Stone also believe that more substantial part-time opportunities need to be created for women, allowing them to participate in meaningful employment while still having the flexibility of a part-time schedule (Lovejoy and Stone 2004, 82). Finally, sociologist Susan Thistle recommends
setting boundaries on work hours while simultaneously increasing wages in order to give employees adequate work-life balance (Thistle 2006, 162). Though none of these ideas have been formally integrated into employment law or practice, it is clear that family experts believe U.S. employers and legislators must think outside the box and make some substantive changes to accommodate women and families in the workforce.

The second set of policy suggestions focus on changing the structure and funding of child care in the United States. Advocates for such policies are clearly divided between those that believe the government should play a larger role in the creation and funding of child care services and those who do not. In general, advocates for more government involvement believe that the government should play a key role in creating opportunities to make dual-employment easier for families. Kathleen Gerson suggests that more child care programs and facilities be developed and supports funding for private sector, neighborhood or workplace child care in addition to government options (Gerson 1985, 226). Along the same lines as Gerson, Susan Thistle suggests creating a universal child support fund capable of financing child care and parental leave for American families (Thistle 2006, 162). These family experts believe that the power and the influence of the federal government can be used for the social betterment of American families.

On the other side of the issue, many conservatives in the U.S. support a decrease in the amount of intervention the government has in child care programs. Dan Lips, a scholar at the Heritage foundation, argues that the $25 billion that the government spends on child care programs is sufficient, and rather than creating new programs, the
government should increase the quality and efficiency of the established programs (Lips 2009). The National Association of Evangelicals feels strongly that the government should not play a part in creating curriculum or guidelines for child care programs and should let parents decide what type of care is appropriate for their children (National Association of Evangelicals). These critics of government intervention believe that communities and families are the best agents to provide child care and prefer policies that do not discriminate against mothers that decide to stay home with their children (National Association of Evangelicals).

As is evident by this review of policies, there is much disagreement concerning the direction the country should take regarding child care policies, tax benefits, and workplace practices targeted at families with children. To date, the only changes that have been made include slight increases in the amount of tax refunds families claiming the Child Tax Credit and the Earned Income Tax Credit receive (Dubay 2009). As families continue to demand more flexibility and work-life balance, it will be interesting to see how legislators in the United States react. Change is certainly inevitable.

*Southern Baptist Recommendation*

From a political and doctrinal standpoint, the Southern Baptist Convention is an extremely conservative organization. Since the conservative takeover of the denomination in the late 1980’s, the church’s stance on the role of women in the church and on traditional gender roles within the family has been clearly communicated. The denomination has published resolution statements that give praise to the work of stay-at-
home mothers and that advise against federal government intervention in child care. Additionally, as presented in Chapter 3, influential leaders like Albert Mohler, Penna Dexter, and Paul Brewster repeatedly affirm the importance of full-time, stay-at-home mothers in their speeches and published articles. Despite such strong directives, messages communicated at lower, more informal levels of the church indicate that many Southern Baptist mothers are employed and deal with the same child care strains as other Americans. Many articles published by *LifeWay*, *HomeLife* and *ParentLife* publications offer support and guidance to working mothers. Such articles offer tips on navigating balance at home and at work and suggest seeking flexible arrangements or telecommuting options to ease the burden of employment on mothers. Due to the dichotomy in messages communicated throughout the levels of the denomination, a more moderate public policy initiative would best serve this population.

Based on the findings regarding Southern Baptist families, policies that offer family tax credits, create more workplace flexibility, and promote state or locally organized child care would be in the best interest of Southern Baptist families. An important commonality between the Southern Baptist leadership and member families is the importance both place on the value of family and the care of children. Whether Southern Baptist mothers work or stay-at-home, they unanimously value their roles as mothers above any activities outside of the home. That said, policies that give them tax relief regardless of their employment status would be welcome by this community. As stated earlier, Southern Baptist families tend to occupy the middle-class, therefore, many
of the mothers that choose to stay at home with their children are making a substantial financial sacrifice for their families. Allowing stay-at-home mothers to be considered as qualified caregivers under the Child and Dependent Care Credit would greatly benefit the Southern Baptist families that, in accordance with doctrinal beliefs, live solely off of the husband’s income. Such a change, in addition to the proposed increases in this credit, would be equally benefit Southern Baptist families that pay for child care and those that care for children in the home.

In addition to changes in tax regulations, Southern Baptist families desire policies that create more family-friendly workplaces. Although family is a top priority for all Southern Baptists, either by calling or financial necessity many Southern Baptist mothers are members of the paid workforce. The multitude of articles in denomination publications offering advice and solutions for these mothers underscores the extent to which they value flexibility at work. Policies, such as the *Family-Friendly Workplace Act*, that allow them more time with their families would greatly assist them in achieving the balance they are looking for. Additionally, an increase in the number of employers offering flexible working arrangements such as flex-time and telecommuting would create more satisfying employment options for these mothers.

Finally, as stated clearly in the “Resolution on Institutional Childcare”, the Southern Baptist Convention does not want the federal government intervening in child care programs or policies. All levels of Southern Baptist communication support this message, and therefore, advocate that funds be directed through state or local
governments to aid the creation of quality child care options. Increases in the Child Care and Development Block Grant, funneling funds for child care into state and community channels, would be a good solution for the Southern Baptist population. This option would serve the child care needs of low-income families without direct federal government intervention that Southern Baptists dislike. Although Southern Baptist leadership would prefer children not be placed in care outside of the home, they do approve of quality, local programs for families that need such an option.

Public policy targeted at children and families in the United States largely centers on providing family income tax credits, creating early education opportunities for children in low-income families, and offering employee-sponsored savings accounts. Despite recent increases in tax credit savings and proposals to increase subsidized child care, U.S. policies have been criticized as not being up to par by international standards. Some critics suggest that the government provide more after-school programs and higher credits for child care. Opponents of these views want to eliminate tax policies that discriminate against stay-at-home mothers and hope for more private sector initiatives to create flexible workplaces. The mixed participation of Southern Baptist mothers in the home and the workplace supports a more moderate stance regarding public policy.

Families with working mothers can benefit from more flexible workplaces and quality, local child care, while families with non-working mothers can use additional tax breaks. Like many Americans in the low-to-middle class, Southern Baptist families need policies
that help them juggle the multitude of their responsibilities without compromising their moral beliefs.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

The role that women have played in the workforce since World War II has added a dynamic element to labor history in the United States. Through their persistence and dedication, women have significantly expanded their influence and presence in the U.S. workplace since the mid 1940’s. Though their achievements have created an endless amount of opportunity for women, the participation of mothers in the workforce has become a highly debated and controversial subject. Many books and articles have been written about the struggles and triumphs inherent in the lives of working mothers. There have also been just as many publications written about the value of mothers who opt for full-time motherhood over paid employment. The purpose of this study was to determine how such messages regarding motherhood and employment are being played out in America’s evangelical population, more specifically, the Southern Baptist Convention. This research exploring the views communicated to mothers within this group has resulted in interesting insight into this population of conservative Christian Americans.

Review of Hypothesis

The primary hypothesis of this research argues that the Southern Baptist mothers receive clear directive from the denomination regarding their suggested roles in the home and in the workplace. Fitting with the conservative nature of this Christian organization, this hypothesis sought to prove that such directive encourages these mothers to prioritize
child rearing over career building. The secondary hypothesis sought to prove that the church’s view regarding the employment of mothers would support public policy in favor of stay-at-home moms and community sponsored child care options. After an extensive look at the messages about motherhood communicated throughout this denomination, there is mixed data in support of both the primary and secondary hypotheses.

The variety of messages found within different levels of Southern Baptist communication challenge the validity of the primary hypothesis arguing that clear messages in support of stay-at-home moms exists throughout the Southern Baptist organization. While all forms of communication analyzed affirm the importance of motherhood, the formal and informal messages differ in their treatment of combining work and mothering responsibilities. Formal church messages including the “Baptist Faith and Message Statement,” the “Resolution on Honor for Full-Time Homemakers,” the “Resolution on Institutional Childcare” and the “Resolution on Women in Combat” all provide clear guidance regarding the God ordained role of women to be the primary caregivers for children in the home. Additionally, statements made by three influential church leaders, Albert Mohler, Penna Dexter and Paul Brewster, further affirm the church’s position encouraging women to forgo full-time careers to care for their children at home. The discrepancy in the denomination’s message is evident in the pages of three of the denominational publications, LifeWay, HomeLife magazine and ParentLife magazine. All three sources extend support and guidance to both stay-at-home and employed mothers. Unlike the messages communicated through the formal church
outlets, these publications give practical solutions for mothers juggling work and family responsibilities and offer tips on child care arrangements. Although these informal publications approach working outside the home as if it is an everyday reality for many Southern Baptist women, it is important to note, that many of the articles suggest self-employment or flexible employment options that give women more opportunities to spend time with their children and attend to responsibilities at home. In sum, after analyzing a variety of formal and informal communication channels within the Southern Baptist Convention, it is evident that mothers receive mixed messages regarding their suggested role in the workforce. While prioritizing family is consistently emphasized and full-time mothers are wholeheartedly supported by church doctrine and leadership, informal publications acknowledge and offer support for mothers who work outside of the home.

The mixed messages communicated by varying church outlets suggest some interesting realities regarding mothers in this population that in turn affect the public policy recommendation for this group. Though the secondary hypothesis sought to show support for policy favoring stay-at-home mothers and community based childcare, additional concessions for workplace flexibility should be added to such policies. Although the traditional gender roles of women are emphasized throughout this denomination, many Southern Baptist women either by choice or due to financial need work outside the home. Interestingly, articles in *HomeLife* and *ParentLife* magazine indicate that these working mothers have a preference for self-employment or flexible
work opportunities. With that said public policy geared toward the Southern Baptist population must accommodate families with stay-at-home mothers as well as mothers that work. Policies that offer family tax credits, create more workplace flexibility, and promote state or locally organized child care would be in the best interest of Southern Baptist families. The mixed participation of Southern Baptist mothers in the home and the workplace supports a more moderate stance regarding public policy. Families with working mothers can benefit from more flexible workplaces and quality, local child care, while families with non-working mothers can use additional tax breaks. Ultimately, it is important that Southern Baptist families, like all American families, are supported by policies that help them juggle life’s demands without compromising their religious values.

*Opportunities for Further Research*

The findings regarding the values communicated to Southern Baptist mothers are particularly interesting when looked at within the context of current U.S. trends in women’s employment and offer some interesting avenues for further research. As was established in Chapter 2, recent nationwide polls show that mothers of young children are more inclined to not work at all or to find part-time employment opportunities. There is greater awareness in work-life balance and women in many professional industries are leaving their careers at a surprising rate. Many mothers are demanding flexible work opportunities that are challenging employers to adopt more progressive policies and options for women with families. All of these national trends show a noticeable shift in
women’s attitudes toward work, but also interestingly exhibit many similarities to the values and behaviors of Southern Baptist mothers.

Although much of the Southern Baptist values regarding women’s roles and work emanate from Biblical teaching and church tradition, their values show the same concern for children and families as those being expressed in secular America. Like the mothers surveyed nationwide in the PEW Research study, Southern Baptist women ultimately prefer to either stay at home with their young children or to engage in flexible employment opportunities. Additionally, as was expressed within all levels of church communication, Southern Baptist women consistently prioritize family over employment. This value similarly seems to be expressed in secular America by the increased propensity for women to leave their professional careers or transition to traditionally female employment positions. Finally, regardless of their ideal employment situations, a majority of both secular and Southern Baptist mothers are currently employed in full-time positions. Whether personally or financially motivated, this reality indicates that the vast majority of mothers are juggling many responsibilities at home and at work.

This research on the messages communicated to Southern Baptist women has provided some interesting conclusions about the values behind the decisions these mothers make regarding employment. In order to further understand the complexities of these decisions and to develop policies to alleviate the burdens felt by these women additional research should be conducted. Surveying or polling Southern Baptist women to understand their behavior from a quantitative standpoint would likely help the
denomination create programs directly targeted at its members. Additionally, such research would aid lobbyists and public interest groups in advocating for tax incentives and child care programs that meet the needs of Southern Baptist families. Although the Southern Baptist Convention holds some controversial views regarding women and families, this group exerts a large amount of influence over a sizeable number of Americans. Gaining further understanding of the behaviors and values of this group will add additional insight into the debates revolving around motherhood and employment in America today. The history of women’s labor in this country has experienced profound change over the past sixty years. Given the unique teachings of the Southern Baptist Convention in addition to recent demands from secular mothers, women’s labor history will likely continue to evolve in new and surprising ways into the future.
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