



# **How American Men's Participation in Housework and Childcare Affects Wives' Careers**

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## **Abstract**

This study is about how American dual career couples with children share household and childcare responsibilities. I focused on how much husbands engage in domestic responsibilities and how that affects their wives' career. First, I conducted a literature review on time-use related to work and family life balance. Second, I interviewed fourteen couples and four working women. I then compared their experiences with those of Japanese working couples. Overall, American husbands spend four times as much time on housework and childcare than Japanese husbands do. Although the American government provides less generous support for childcare compared with Japan's, American women manage to balance their career and family lives by using private services and sharing housework and childcare with their husbands. On the other hand, in Japan, working women are responsible for almost all household and childcare duties, often relying on some public childcare services. In order to promote gender diversity in the workforce, Japanese society has to provide more opportunities for men to participate in household responsibilities.

## **Preface**

“My children are not any problem, but my husband is,” a woman said to me. It was a Saturday afternoon two years ago. We met in a reception after a conference for Japanese business women. She was a manager of a large company and mother of two. Conversing with this woman made me decide to conduct this study. As female managers represent only 10% of the Japanese business community, the fact that she is a manager and has children was impressive to me.

When I asked her how she manages to balance work and family life, she answered similarly. As the conference was held on a Saturday, she had to prepare breakfast, lunch and dinner for her husband who stayed at home the whole day. Although her teenage children could take care of themselves, her husband could not and complained about her going out on a Saturday. I wondered how she balances her career and family life. The relationship between her and her husband seemed to be too traditional. As a magazine journalist, I had covered working women's issues for several years. My interest had been employers' and governmental policies for promoting gender diversity and childcare support.

Talking to her, I realized that there is a vicious pattern in Japanese society. Inequality at home influences work at the office. If men do nothing at home, women have to take the entire responsibility at home, reducing their responsibility at the office. That generally discourages women from continuing to work, or traps them into the “mummy track”. That is, the business community has fewer expectations for women to take leadership positions. No matter how employers and government provide progressive policies for working women, without changing their

partners' behavior at home, it is extremely difficult for women to continue working while raising a family. This situation is the reason I chose to study the relationship of dual career couples. Are there any ways to cut the vicious circle in work and life?

In order to find some solutions, I studied American husbands' household responsibilities and role in childcare, as well as how that affects their wives' careers. This study was conducted from August 2006 to July 2007. During that period, I was a Fulbright Visiting Scholar at the Center for the Education of Women, University of Michigan<sup>1</sup>.

My study includes several steps. First, I conducted archival research, reading about 100 academic articles and books related to American couples' time use, perception and behavior regarding sharing household responsibilities and working women's issues. Second, since November 2006, I interviewed fourteen couples with children and four working women, asking their experiences in sharing housework and childcare. I also talked to twenty stay-at-home dads by attending a conference in November 2006. To keep their privacy, I did not write the names of interviewees who kindly took their time with me. I heartily thank them. The interviews made me understand

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<sup>1</sup> I really appreciate the people who encouraged and supported me to study in the U.S., gave me advice, and help me find interviewees. Maurine H. Beasley, Dee Blackwell, Heather Branton, Charlie Brown, Jean Campbell, John and Ruth Campbell, Marcie Pitt-Catsoupes, Yan Chen, Elizabeth Karen Clark, Mellisa Coleman, Aimee Cox, Lynne Cripe, Robert Drago, Tom and Patty Englin, Mihoko Eriguchi, Andy Ferguson, Yasuko Fumuro, Sakie Tachibana Fukushima, Kathleen Gerson, Barbara Hopland, Kimiko Horii, Maiko Ichinayagi, Kay Iwata, Mizuho Iwata, Kyoko Kato, Sue Kaufmann, Akiko Kawai, Shinichiro Kawakami, Mariko Kitao, Miyuki Kobayashi, Chimaki Kurokawa, Pei-Chia Lan, Carolyn Lewis-Stone, Linda Lucas, Hiroko Matsumoto, Aki and Kathy Matsushima, Jennie McAlpine, Ellizabeth McGillvray, Jeanne Miller, Mami Mita, Patricia Moonsamy, Doreen Murasky, Masayo Nagai, Joanna Sook Park, Judy Pehrson, Yoh Otsuka, Janice Reuben, Lawrence Root, Ann Sado, Maki Sasaki, Jun Shibayama, Kazuhiro Shibuya, Gilia Smith, Noah Smith, Kan Takeuchi, Tomohiko Taniguchi, Hiroko Tatebe, Kozue Tominaga, Zulaikho Usmanova, Jean Waltman, Hiroko Yamashita, Rieko Yoshida. My employer, Nikkei Business Publications is generous enough to let me take one year leave for the study. I especially thank the Fulbright Journalist Grant, which provided me financial support and entitlement to study in the U.S. During my stay in Ann Arbor, I also enjoy balanced life for myself as my partner, Kan Takeuchi, finished his Ph.D. This makes me think deeply about balanced life for dual-career couples. Last but not least, I would like to note my appreciation for the Center for the Education of Women (CEW), which gave me wonderful, helpful and friendly environment for study, and where I was exposed to the best of American people. Special thanks to Beth Sullivan and Carol Hollenshead. Beth takes charge of the visiting scholar program at CEW and took care of me like a true sister. Carol accepted my offer to affiliate with CEW as a visiting scholar. As my background is non-academia, without her flexible decision making, my offer would not have been accepted.

the reality of dual career couples' daily lives in the U.S. This opportunity was helpful for me to seek some solutions for Japanese counterparts struggling to balance work and family lives. Officially, I interviewed thirty-two people, but there are many unofficial conversations which helped me understand how American couples balance work and family lives. Every time I mentioned my study, people smiled, laughed or began to talk about their own experiences, which suggests that my study is of universal interest. I thank all of them<sup>2</sup>.

### **Background of my study interest: the Japanese population is declining**

Recently in the Japanese business community, gender diversity has become a hot topic. In 2005, Japanese population began to decline<sup>3</sup>. As this was the first noted population decline since the beginning of kept statistics in 1899, this new trend came as a huge shock. The business community expects a labor shortage in the near future; thus, they have to hire, retain and promote talented women—not only men. In other words, Japanese companies have finally realized that without attracting talented working women in their workforce, they have no future. As a result, Japanese companies have seriously committed to promoting gender diversity. Many of them have created offices for the issue. In May 2007, 74 large Japanese companies like IBM Japan, SONY and Recruit created a non-profit organization called Japan Women's Innovative Network (J-win) by sharing knowledge and networking. J-win made an alliance with Catalyst, an American non-profit organization which has over 40 years experience in promoting gender diversity<sup>4</sup>. Other NPOs like GEWEL organize secret meetings for gender diversity managers in Tokyo to provide safe places to discuss this issue frankly (Otsuka, 2007).

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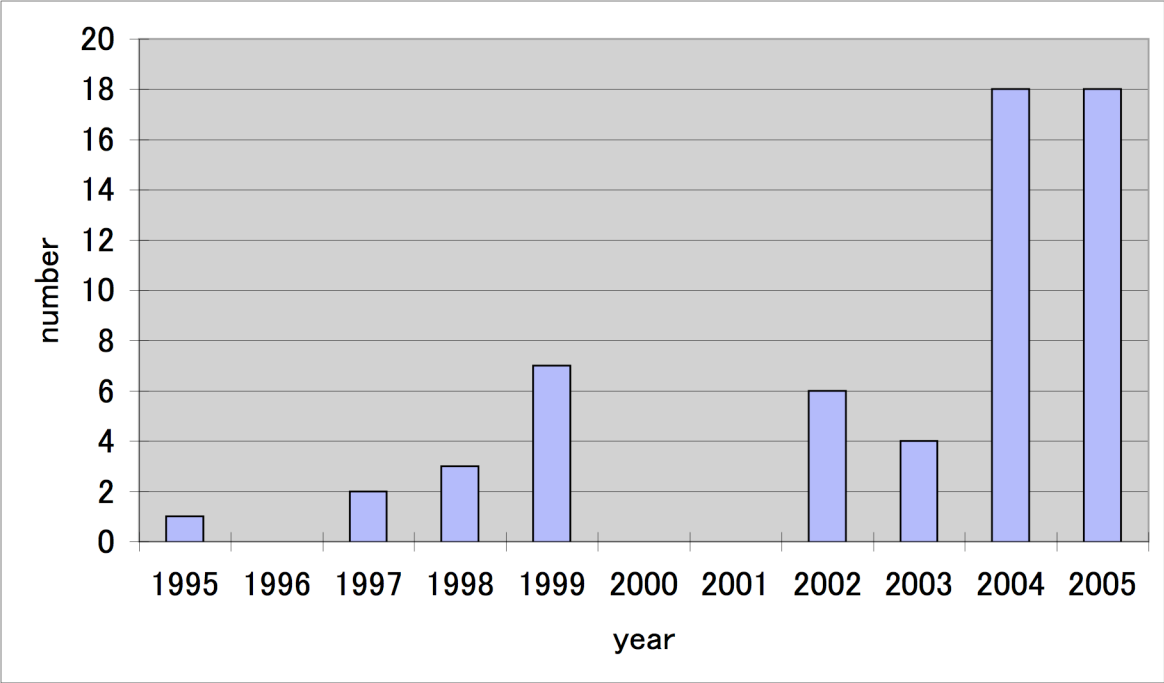
<sup>2</sup> During my stay in the U.S., I gave some talks. Feedback and suggestions people gave me at the following events were really appreciated: *Lecture for undergraduate students at South Florida University and Florida Consortium of Women's Studies Programs* (February, 2007, Tampa, FL), *Women's Studies Conference* and Keynote speech for *International Women's Week* (March, 2007, Franklin & Marshall College, Lancaster, PA), *ORC World Wide Meeting* (May, 2007, Washington D.C.), and Center for the Education of Women Visiting Scholar Presentation (June, 2007, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor). There are many conferences which I learned useful information for my study. I thank the speakers, attendances and organizers of those conferences. *The Institute for Operations Research and the Management Sciences* (INFORMS: November, 2006, Pittsburg, PA), *At home Dads Convention* (November, 2006, Kansas City, MO) and *Labor and Employment Relations Associations* (LERA: June, 2007, Washington D.C.) .

<sup>3</sup> On 22<sup>nd</sup> December, in 2005, Japanese Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare announced that there are 106.7million new born babies and the number of death was 107.7 million. Total population decreased by 10,000.

<sup>4</sup> J-Win <http://www.j-win.jp/about/index.html> (June 12nd, 2007 access)

Media attitudes have also changed. In 1995, the first article mentioning “gender diversity” appeared in one of the four major Japanese newspapers, *Nikkei Shimbun*. Especially in the past three years, the number of articles about gender diversity at workplaces to appear in Japanese major newspapers is increasing. Now "gender diversity" is a new and trendy phrase in Japan (Figure1).

**Figure 1: Numbers of articles that appeared as "Gender Diversity" in Japanese major news**



As for promoting gender diversity, one clear goal the Japanese business community shares is increasing the number of female managers and executives. This is especially true for large companies with over 5,000 employees; 74% of them have begun "Positive Action" to promoting gender diversity (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2004). To accomplish this goal, employers are introducing family-friendly policies for their employees. The Japanese government has also made efforts to make workplaces more family-friendly. In 2005, the *Assisting Strategies for Raising Next Generation Law* was enacted. This law requires that employers with over 300 workers each submit a plan to promote their employees’ balance between work and life. In 2006, the Japanese government and Welfare published a proposal to promote work and life balance for male workers specifically. This proposal focuses on making the working environment hospitable to men’s participation in childcare responsibilities (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2006). Overall, the Japanese business community and policymakers have understood that this women's

issue is not only the subject of social justice, but also one of economy<sup>5</sup>.

## **Reasons for the study of American couples**

Japanese society currently seeks to increase the female workforce while not reducing the birth rate. These two issues seem to be contradictory.<sup>6</sup> In order to find some solutions for the challenges Japanese society face, I chose to study American couples. As American women's economic status is the highest in the world and their birth rate is the highest among developed countries, I assumed that there must be many role models—those who balance their career and family life.

One question I was frequently asked is, "Why study Americans? Why not women in Northern European countries?" as these countries' governments provide generous childcare support. As a magazine journalist, I have covered Nordic countries' gender diversity and childcare policies<sup>7</sup> and have personally liked them. But following Nordic countries seems unfeasible given the current Japanese situation. First, the Japanese government has an enormous public debt<sup>8</sup>. It means Japan cannot afford to expand the public sector; rather, it should cut its expenditure. Secondly, tax increases for promoting gender equity or family-friendly policies seems not be realistic, as no politician likes to take the initiative to increase taxes (Japanese public opinion strongly disagreed with that<sup>9</sup>). Given the Japanese political climate, seeking family-friendly policies without increasing taxes or government expenditure is pragmatic. Last but not least, in Nordic countries, the women are not necessarily taking leadership roles in business, and gender segregation at work force is starker. For example, in Sweden, 58% of government officials are women, but women account for only 28% of managerial positions. In Finland, women consist of only 6% of executives (Costa, 2000). And only 3% of senior managers are women in Sweden (Kimmel, 1993).

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<sup>5</sup> On August 28<sup>th</sup>, 2007, Research Institute of Economy, Trade and Industry will hold a symposium about "Work and Life Balance and Gender Diversity," where Japanese sociologists and Economists will present their research.

<sup>6</sup> There is a study which concludes that if one society offers enough support work and life balance for working women, birth rate would not decline, by analyzing OECD countries data (Yamaguchi, 2005)

<sup>7</sup> Article for *Nikkei Business Associe* 6<sup>th</sup> Sep 2005, based on interview the chief of Bureau of gender equality, Norway

<sup>8</sup> The debt-to-GDP ratio rose from 14.7% to 91.6% in the last 15 years. No other G7 countries have experienced such a rapid increase in the debt. As of 2006, the debt-to-GDP ratios of other countries are, 43.6% in the U.S., 42.9% in Britain, 51.3% in Germany, 42.1% in France, 95.7% in Italy and 25.5% in Canada. (OECD Economic Outlook No. 80, Annex Table. 33).

<sup>9</sup> In 2005, there was a plan to increase the tax rate for office workers in order to balance the budget, but soon after a policy advisor who is a specialist of tax policy mentioned the plan, he was severely criticized by media and working people. As I have known this scholar personally, I noticed that the criticism was groundless, but no politicians could support him or accomplish his tax reform plan.

Again, although I personally like Nordic countries' generous policies for childcare, given the fiscal deficit and political climate in Japan, focusing on individual activities rather than governmental ones is more feasible. And I would like to seek the way of improving women's economical status in private sectors. Thus, studying American couples fit my study of interest.

Japanese society is currently experiencing an increase working women and a decrease in the number of children. In the U.S., the same phenomenon was reported more than two decades ago (Gerson, 1985), (Women's Research and Education Institute, 2002). Thus, there are many previous studies about working women, childcare and changing couples' relationships. Although there are still challenges, in the U.S., working mothers are the majority. 71 % of women with children under 18 and 57 % of women with children under three are in the labor force. These women manage to balance their careers and child-rearing by using family-friendly policies provided by their employers, which introduce progressive work-and-life balance policies in order to attract skilled labor forces (Evans, 2006).

## **Interview overview**

This is the demography of my interviewees:

- 14 couples and four working women.
- All wives are professionals or managers.
- All are in their 30's to early 60's.
- All have at least one child.
- 90% have two kids.
- 90% have a BA or an advanced degree.
- Three husbands are at-home dads.

I have asked my interviewees,

- How do they share household responsibilities?
- How do they share childcare?
- What kind of childcare services do they use?
- Are they satisfied with the current arrangement?
- What kind of government support do they expect?

## **Comparison of Japan and American women**

### **1) Economic status:**

According to the World Economic Forum's Gender Gap Index, United States was ranked No.1 for women's economic participation and opportunity, whereas Japan was ranked 83rd (Hausmann. et al, 2006). The index was made based on the gap between men's and women's status in each country. Although Japanese GDP is 2nd highest in the world<sup>10</sup>, in the gender gap index, Japan ranked lowest among developed countries; the gap between men's and women's economic status is large. On the other hand, in the U.S. the gap between men's and women's economic attainment is relatively small compared with other countries. As for the women's labor participation rate: 58.1% in Japan and 65.6% in the United States (OECD, 2007).<sup>11</sup> As for women in the managerial positions, in the U.S., about 50% of managers are women (Chan and Utgoff, 2005); on the other hand, in Japan, only 10% of managers are women (Japanese Statistics Bureau, 2004). American women occupy 15% of the board room in Fortune 500 companies (Catalyst, 2006). Thus, in Japan, increasing female managers is the current challenge, whereas in the U.S., increasing female executives is a challenge.

### **2) Birthrate:**

The United States is the only developed country with a growing population, as the total fertility rate (TFR) is 2.1. A major reason behind this is that immigrant women from South America tend to have a large number of children, but non-Hispanic white women's TFR is also high: 1.8 (Dye, 2005). This number is the in the same range as Nordic countries' TFRs, where government provides generous childcare support. After declining fertility rate by 1975 like other developed countries, American women's fertility rate began to recover (Figure 2). On the other hand, in Japan, the fertility rate has been constantly decreasing since 1970.

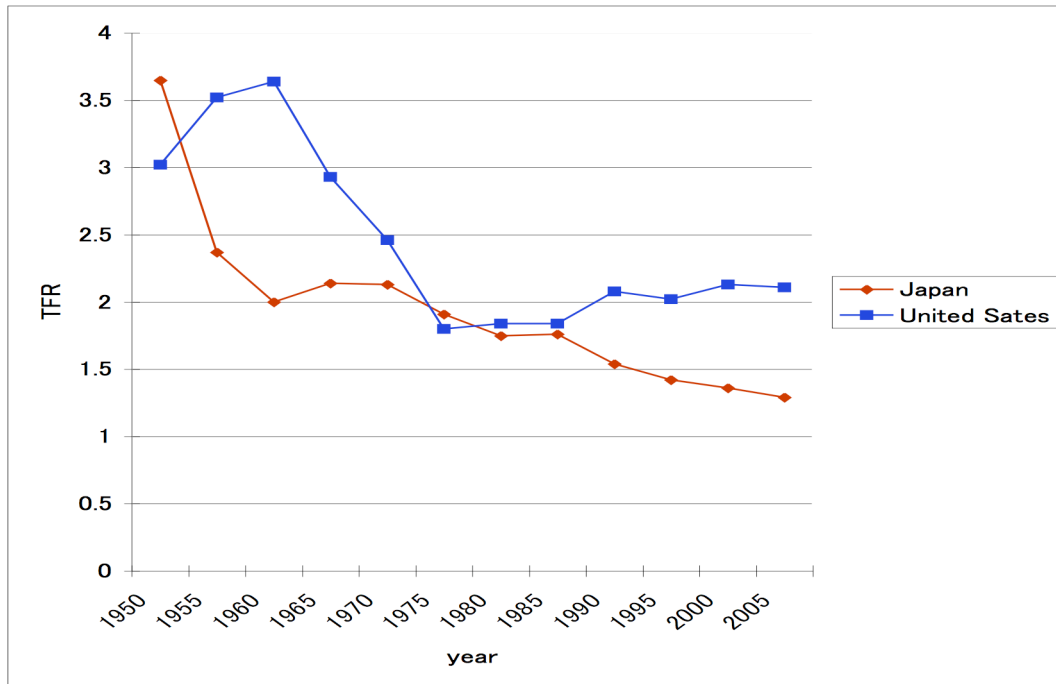
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<sup>10</sup> In 2006, GDP of United States was \$ 13,244.55 billion and that of Japan was \$ 4,367.46 billion (IMF)

<sup>11</sup> The figure is the share of women of working age (15 to 64years) in employment in 2005



Figure 2: Number of children per women (Total Fertility Rate)



(National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, Japan)

### 3) Perception of having children

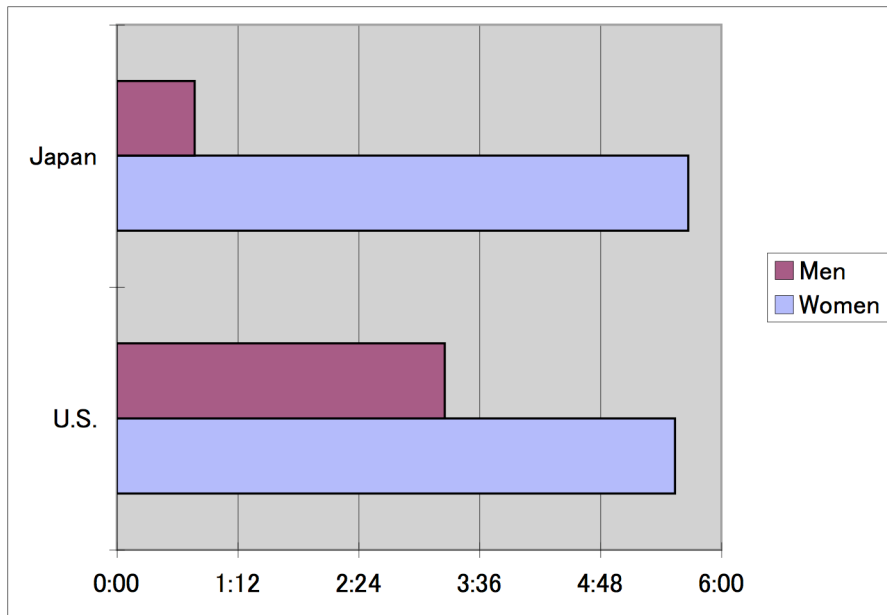
When it comes to birthrates, the Japanese tend to frame it as a policy issue, but here I would like to cover individual attitudes (I will mention policy later). Women's perceptions of having children affect their birthrate. In Japan, my interviewees and friends follow conventional wisdom: **having both a career and children is not impossible, but very difficult.** For Japanese women who want to work as fulltime regular employees, with two children nearly means giving up their careers (Matsuura and Shigeno, 2005). In fact, only 20% of women with children under a year old and less than 30% of women with children from one to two years old currently work (Japanese Bureau of Statistics, 2001). On the other hand, in the U.S., women seem to have more positive perceptions of having both career and children. One of my interviewees in her 30s, with a doctorate, said to me, "**We [she and her friends] talk about whether to have two or three children. Not whether to have one or zero.**" She also said that two children are the norm among her friends. Talking to her made me understand the fact that 57 % of American women with children under three are at work.

## Hypothesis: Husbands' participation at home is the key?

My hypothesis: American husbands do more housework and childcare. That helps their wives have both careers and children. In order to confirm my assumption, I first began to study time use survey among American dual career couples.

In general, Japanese women do far more than their husbands do at home. In the household with children under six, Japanese working mothers spend five hours and forty minutes a day for housework and childcare whereas fathers spend only forty-six minutes. In the U.S., working mothers also do more at home. They spend five hours and thirty-two minutes for housework and childcare whereas fathers spend three hours and fifteen minutes per day (Nagai, 2006). From Figure 3, we can understand that there is almost no difference between housework and childcare hours between American and Japanese women, whereas there are huge gaps between men in those countries.

Figure 3: American and Japanese working women and men's housework and childcare hours per day



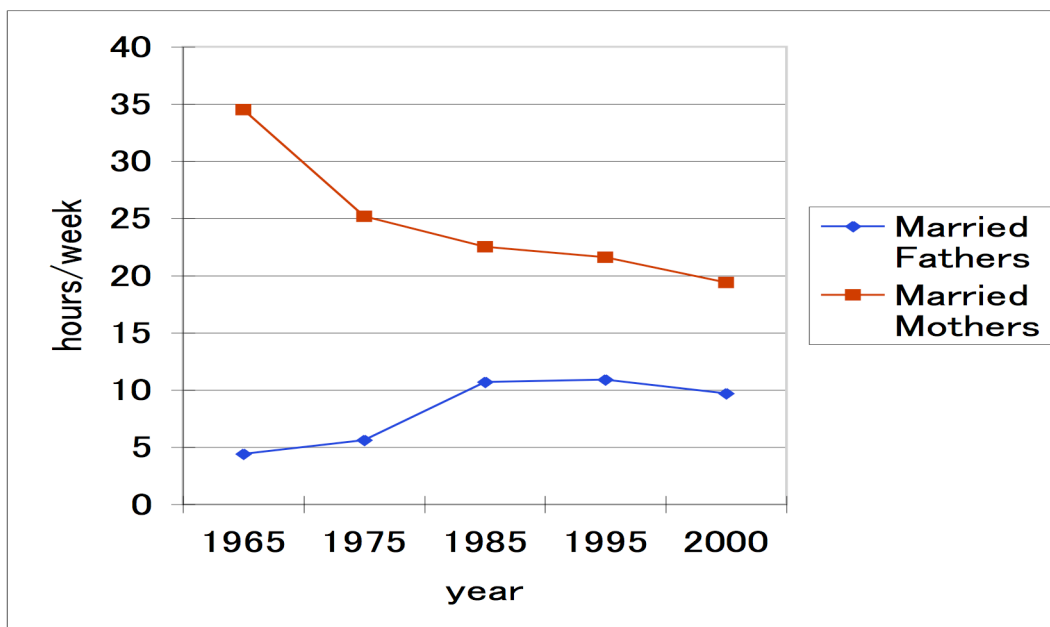
American fathers do 4.2 times as much housework and childcare as Japanese fathers do. Even for Japanese women who work over 35 hours per week, their husbands' household-related hours only

add up to thirty-six minutes per day, whereas these women spend three hours and fifty minutes per day for domestic work. Thus, the challenge facing Japanese dual-career couples is clear—is it possible to increase men's participation at home? Without increasing men's participation at home, women can not continue working and getting promotions while raising children, even though their employers and government offer generous childcare support.

### **Trend of housework hours in the U.S.**

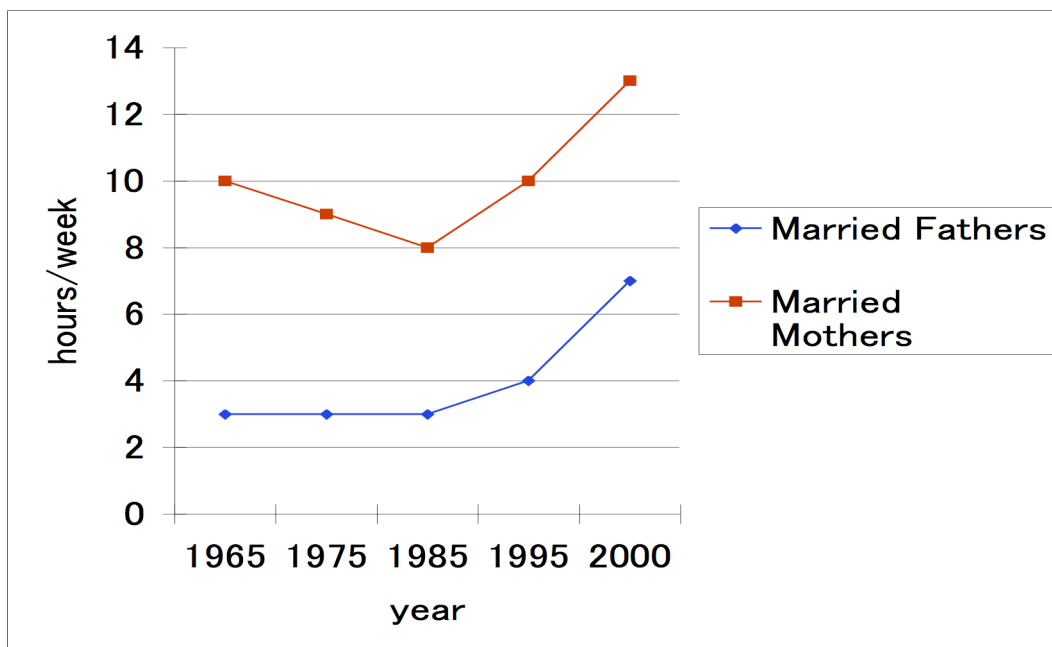
Seeing the historical change of American men's participation towards household responsibilities makes me optimistic in responding to the question, “Can Japanese men change?” Forty years ago, American men did almost no housework, as current Japanese men do not. In 1965, American working mothers did domestic work about 35 hours per week whereas husbands did only five hours. The gap between women's and men's spend time for housework was seven to one. Since then, American working mothers have reduced their hours of domestic work, whereas men have increased that (Figure 4). As a result, the gap between men and women has diminished from seven times to two (Robinson and Milkie, 2006).

**Figure 4: Total hours in primary housework activities per week**



In the U.S., men's participation at home has increased since 1981 mainly because they do more childcare than in the past (Pleck, 1993). Figure 5 shows that American men's childcare-hours per week have more than doubled since 1965. In 2000 men spent seven hours per week on childcare. The main reason which changed men's attitudes towards household responsibilities seems to be the economy. In the late 1970's to mid 80's, American men's economic status fell because the structure of industry changed its shift from manufacturing to services<sup>12</sup>. This made men without college degrees unable to earn enough income to be a single breadwinner (Gerson, 1993). In the same period, women's academic attainment and economic status improved (Women's Research and Education Institute, 2002). This transformation definitely changed both men's and women's perception of how they share financial and household responsibilities.

**Figure 5: Primary Child Care, Average Weekly Hours**



There are also studies which analyze changes in fatherhood in the last two centuries. American fathers' attitude toward their children varies widely between generations, ethnicities and labor conditions. Overall, younger generation's fathers are less strict than older generations (Griswold, 1993). Although Japanese demographic history is different from America's, I can find similar

<sup>12</sup> In the conference of *Labor and Employment Relations Associations* (LERA: June, 2007, Washington D.C.), "Seeking new American Dreams" was discussed. In the meeting, researchers and union representatives argued how the American middle class has been disrupted in the last three decades. One point was that the decrease of income and health care coverage has made American middle class lose their stability.

changes in Japanese fathers' attitudes. When I look at American men's attitude change in the long term, I hope that same change will happen to Japan in the near-future, and more and more fathers can participate in childcare responsibilities.

Many scholars have studied the elements affecting the amount of housework hours in American couples. Important elements are cohabitation and separation. When men and women live together, men reduce housework hours 3.6 hours, and women increase 4.2 hours. If they separate, men increase housework hours 5.2 hours whereas women reduce 5.3 hours (Gupta, 1999). Seeing this study makes us convinced of the conventional wisdom that marriage is beneficial to men's careers but detrimental to women's careers. A survey for business people with MBAs from Wharton and Drexel supports this perspective. Married men with high income and social status tend to think that marriage is beneficial for their career, but women do not. The authors conclude that married women have more pressure than married men or single women (Friedman and Greenhaus, 2000).

### **Why do men do less at home? : an economic perspective**

One major argument which justifies men's low participation in household responsibilities is the economy (Becker, 1981). In general, men earn more than women do.<sup>13</sup> Thus, wives' concentration on domestic responsibility and their husbands' on financial responsibility is rational for couples who want to maximize their household income. In fact, when men earn 100 % of household income, they do only 10 % of housework. This is a fair arrangement in this situation, as men take whole financial responsibilities and women do not do at all. Economy explains the rationality of sharing household responsibilities among couples of single breadwinners and housewives (Akerlof and Kranton, 2000).

### **Why do men do less at home? : Gender Identity**

If the abovementioned theory explains how household responsibilities are conventionally shared, then it follows that when men earn 0%, they should do 90 % of the housework. Yet in reality, when men earn 0 % of household income, they do only 37 % of the housework (Ibid, 2000). In these situations where wives earn more than their husbands, gender roles are a better explanation than economy. Among 33 million American dual-career couples, 25.2% wives have already

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<sup>13</sup> In 2004, women's median weekly earnings were 80% of men's (Chen and Utgoff, 2005).

higher incomes than their husbands' (Chao and Utgoff, 2005), but women still tend to think they are not breadwinners. A study of 150 dual-career couples concluded that only 15% of wives are "co-breadwinners," and many wives think their husbands are breadwinners even if wives earn more than their husbands do (Potuchek, 1997). Women who earn more than their husbands are struggling to balance work and life, as well as their gender identity (Pappenheim and Ginny Graves, 2005).

Outside the U.S., a similar phenomenon is observed in Australia. When women's incomes are higher than their husbands', women increase their household responsibilities (Drago et al, 2005). Scholars conclude that women whose income is higher than that of their spouses try to make up for their female identity by doing more housework than other women, who earn less than their husbands. All in all, regarding the sharing of household responsibilities, we can explain the current phenomena partly by economy and partly by gender.

When I see the different perspective about housework between men and women, one survey concludes that couples who share housework successfully have more frequent sex and have better marriages. The author writes that *he (a male interviewee) realized that when he did housework, his wife felt loved and appreciated—and was subsequently more inspired to show love and appreciate him* (Chethik, 2006).

### **Voices of at-home dads**

Interviewing at-home dads and their wives helped me understand the reality of sharing household responsibilities. Overall, my interviewees are more fair and logical than people argued in previous studies. As for my interviewees of at-home dads, they take about 70% to 80% of household responsibilities and childcare. One of these men said to me, "**She [his wife] earns three times as much as I do. That why I decided to stay at home.**" He cooks, cleans the house, does the laundry and takes care of their two daughters. His wife is a manager of a sales department who works from 50 to 60 hours per week. Her salary is enough to support her whole family and to buy a house in a nice neighborhood. "**I do no housework during weekdays as I am very tired,**" she said. During weekends, she does about 30 % of cleaning and cooking with her daughters. She said, "**Domestic work is a therapy for me.**" Her attitudes towards housework is similar those of male single breadwinners.

As for my interviewees, the major reason of men's staying at home is raising small children. These couples would like to take care of their children by themselves, not by using childcare services. I interviewed another couple whose decision-making is very logical. **"We [He and his wife] estimated our future income. She had more opportunity for promotion and raises. That is why I stay at home."** He does 50% of the cooking, 70% of the dishes and house-cleaning and 100% of financial management. When their children were small, this husband took 100% of childcare.

In a previous family study, it was argued that when women have more opportunity of promotion, they reduce housework hours (Perterson and Gerson, 1992). The at-home dad households I interviewed were applicable to this conclusion. These couples' way of sharing household and financial responsibilities is similar to those of male single breadwinners and their full-time housewives. My interviewees reversed gender roles. Their decision making can be explained by economy, not by gender.

### **Masculine housework and feminine housework**

There are many things to be done at home. In the morning, we make breakfast and wash the dishes. In the evening we buy groceries and other home-related stuffs. After coming home, we fix dinner and wash the dishes. Several times a week, we clean the rooms, vacuum and do laundry. Car and yard maintenance cannot be forgotten. Paying the bills and sending birthday cards should also be done on time. Only 18% of men share half of housework and childcare (Hochschild, 1989). In other words, less than one fifth of men are egalitarians.

**"My husband does car maintenance. This seems not to be housework, but also necessary for household management,"** said a female executive of a large corporation and the mother of two. Eventually, I realized that when women say that their husbands do "car maintenance" or other "car related things," they implied that they take the majority of household responsibilities. Their husbands do little at home, but these women are satisfied with the arrangement, or at least would not like to complain about it.

There are two kinds of housework. One is "routine housework" and the other is "occasional housework." The former includes cooking, cleaning, laundry and so on. These works cannot be postponed. Someone must do them almost everyday. On the other hand, there is occasional

housework, which includes car repair, yard maintenance and so on. Average married American women do routine housework 32 hours per week, whereas men do 10 hours (Coltrane, 2000). Planning household responsibilities is another element which makes disparity between men's and women's housework hours. In a study of 500 middle-class families, men do this "mental labor" for two hours per day whereas women do this for three hours per day (Yun Suk-Lee, 2005).

### **Result of my interviews: How much do husbands do and why?**

As for my interviewees, husbands do housework and childcare from 20% to 80%. Four couples share fifty-fifty. There are a variety of reasons which make these men do housework and childcare. Some husbands think that their family background made their cooperative attitude towards household responsibilities and childcare. One husband in his 40s said, "**I grew up with sisters who are strong feminists. If I called them 'girls,' they got angry**". He has shared almost 50% of housework and childcare. He thinks that his exposure to feminists during childhood shaped his egalitarian attitude. In the interview, he often emphasized the importance of his wife's job for her self-esteem and contribution to society. This made me understand that he valued his wife's career no matter how much she contributes to household income. Another husband mentioned his family background as well. His brother worked in a restaurant and his sister worked as a waitress in the same place. This environment made him learn how to cook. Sometimes he was left in charge of the house when he was a child. In these occasions, he did housework in the absence of his family members. Growing up in a single-mother household is another reason several husbands mentioned. One husband in his 30s said, "**I grew up with a single mother. For me, seeing working women is natural.**" Another husband in his 30s said to me, "**I experienced the absence of my father. I would like to be a perfect father for my children. Maybe I try to overcompensate for my own childhood.**"

### **How does husbands' participation at home affect their wives' career?**

One of the egalitarian husbands in his 50s said, "**There is too much housework. If my wife does them alone, she will be overwhelmed.**" He said that although he was not good at doing housework when they got married, he learned. He said, "**Like how we study many subjects at schools, we can learn how to do the ironing or laundry.**" As he is in his 50s, for this generation, he is a progressive husband. His wife assured that they shared fifty-fifty at home. She is a manager in her department and one of the pioneer women in her employer.



Sometimes a husband becomes supportive towards his wife's career unintentionally. A husband with a professional degree from a very prestigious institution is an example. His wife once stayed at home to raise their two children. Several months ago, she returned to work and is very successful now. At first, she was expected to work full-time, but almost no overtime. But her employer became very successful, and she enjoyed her job so much that she eventually worked long hours—at least 60 hours a week. After her success, her husband changed his employer partly in order to have more time with his children. Now he has time to read to them after going to bed. When his wife has to go to the office early in the morning, he takes care of the children until the nanny comes to their house. He said, **“When my wife stayed at home, I felt that I have to take whole financial responsibility. Coincidentally, she returned work and became successful. That gave me a choice to change my job.”** According to him, currently her income is larger than his, and he feels **“a little weird.”** He seems to be half-traditional and half-egalitarian. Given his academic and career background, he can afford to be a single breadwinner. That comprises the traditional part of him. On the other hand, he seemed to be very proud of his wife's success, willing to change his attitudes towards family responsibilities. That makes up the egalitarian part of him. His cooperative attitudes and complex feelings were impressive to me.

Husbands' egalitarian attitudes affect their wives' careers. One of these husbands in his 30s has prioritized his wife's career since their marriage. He moved and changed jobs in order to adjust to the geography of his wife's job assignment. When I interviewed him, he worked a job without overwork in order to take childcare responsibility. He said, **“My wife is talented and smart. I really want to support her career.”** He explained to me how demanding his wife's job is and how without perfect support from family members, a person can not be successful in that field. He seemed to be proud of being a perfect supporter of her.

Another husband in his 30s showed his egalitarian value in a different way. For him, sharing fifty-fifty both domestic and financial responsibility is preferred. He said, **“Getting married means sharing responsibility, I think. Sharing financial and household responsibility is natural for my generation”.** In fact, his wife wanted to work on a part-time basis in order to spend more time with her children, but he did not agree with that as he does not like to reduce household income. Currently, his wife takes the responsibility of earning 50% of household income. Although this husband works long hours, about 60 or 70 hours per week, he also took 50% of household and childcare responsibility by telecommuting. He is a man of his word.

## **What do these husbands think of themselves?**

Being interested in these husbands' self-recognition, I asked them if they think of themselves as progressive or conventional among their friends. There was a gap between what they really do and their evaluations. When I see the husbands who share 50% of housework and childcare, they have different perceptions, as they are surrounded by different people.

There are some men who think themselves as average. One husband in his 30s said, **"In my generation, women are also well-educated. So it is unfair if men do nothing at home and just watch TV and drink beer."** In fact, he and his wife met when they were undergraduate students; both of them earned upper degrees in professional schools. There are other men who think of themselves as progressive. One of them in his 40s said, **"I know there is a balance, but my coworkers almost do nothing at home. So I am uncommon compared with my co-workers."** Overall, men in their 30s who share half of the household and childcare duties think that they are "average" or "common." On the other hand, men in their 40s tend to think of themselves as "progressive" when they share half the household and childcare duties, as their friends and coworkers share less than they do. Many studies showed that younger men are less conservative towards gender roles. Year after year, men have become more egalitarian and family-friendly (Willinger, 1993), (Thornton and Young-DeMarco, 2001).

## **What do wives think about their husbands' attitudes?**

From my (Japanese) perspective, the majority of my male interviewees do their fair share at home. Yet what do their wives think about their husbands' attitude? Are they satisfied with current arrangements? I divided the wives' answers into four categories.

### **1) Pretty satisfied with husbands' sharing:**

A wife in her 30s said, **"He is really involved, and he is also very sensitive. I really appreciate his mother's way of raising him."** They share almost fifty-fifty. He had taken a one year parental leave when she was assigned a job in another city. During this period, he stayed at home and took care of household and childcare responsibilities. He said he enjoyed grocery shopping with his children, as well as doing other things. When I interviewed them, I saw that his son followed him and asked him to play with him. His son has become attached to him because he is an involved father. His wife is a director of a large corporation and a mother of two. In Japan,

only 1.8% of women are at her level. Talking to them helped me understand how important having good partners are for women who would like to have both a career and children.

One woman with an MD said, **"Without him, I could not have had my career and two children."** Her husband has supported her career since they got married. He took care of their children when she needed to focus on her study, and moved and changed jobs in order to prioritize her career. Sometimes, he even declined the offer of promotion in order to keep a flexible schedule. This couple regards themselves as uncommon.

## **2) Satisfied with husband's attitude:**

A wife in her 50s said, **"He doesn't know how to do some of the housework. But he has never refused doing anything because he is a man."** She has taken responsibility for majority of housework and childcare, but she is satisfied with the situation. Part of the reason is his acknowledgement. He admitted that **"she took majority of responsibility. I felt that my helping was supplemental. I could have done more."** Although he is modest enough to say he was not an equal sharer of housework and childcare, in reality he did a lot for his children's after-school activities coaching baseball, softball, soccer and wrestling three to four times per week. Especially during summers, he did these activities four or five times per week. That is, mothers and fathers can commit to childcare in different ways. As for this couple, the wife might take responsibility of the childcare when their children were small, but the husband's participation when their children were school-age was appreciated by his wife.

## **3) Not satisfied with husband's attitude:**

A wife of a corporate executive said, **"When my husband does only two pieces of housework, he thinks he did 200!"** Another wife said in a similar tone, **"He thinks that women should work inside the house. If he washes the dishes, he feels he really helped today."** These women have a good sense of humor that made their discontent turn into funny stories and not serious problems. I felt their husbands' uncooperative attitudes towards household responsibilities are almost the same as Japanese men's. Their experiences seem useful to Japanese couples. According to these American wives, discussing how to share with other couples is good for finding solutions. These women go to the same church, and they organize a study group once a week where husbands and wives go together. In the meeting, they talk not only about religious issues, but also about sharing several family issues with other members. One day a wife raised the issue of sharing household

responsibilities and complained that her husband does almost nothing at home. Other wives had the same feeling. After discussion, husbands came to understand this issue affects not only them but other couples as well. Eventually these men came to realize that they should do more housework.

#### **4) Unsatisfied with current situation:**

**"He would say that he is involved but in reality the burden is mine to figure out childcare. And it is still not fifty-fifty."** Although her husband tries to spend more time with children, sometimes this "effort" is not enough to satisfy working mothers.

All in all, I can say that for couples over 50, husbands' attitudes are the issue; for couples in their 30s, husbands' sharing is the issue. Younger wives, then, are more demanding.

#### **How do they decide to share household and childcare duties?**

Some couples are logical when they share household and childcare duties. They make to-do lists and then share tasks. Other couples make each one's schedule tables and compare them, figuring out who will take children to after-school activities or daycare. Many couples take turns cooking and doing the dishes. For example, if the wife makes dinner, the husband should do the dishes.

There are also couples who share based on their strongest skills. The majority of wives cook and clean the house. Husbands do car maintenance, financial planning and yard maintenance. In other words, when couples share naturally, they share based on gender.

#### **Who cleans the house?**

Many couples use house-cleaning services once or twice a month. If couples do not outsource cleaning, mainly the wives are responsible for cleaning rooms because they have higher standards of cleanliness than their husbands. Several wives said with smiles, **"As we [she and her husband] have different standards, I clean the house."** In other words, husbands tend not to care if rooms are not clean. This is relevant to me as I and my partner discuss this same topic over and over again. Though far from the majority, some husbands are better at cleaning than their wives are. Some like to clean their rooms. Other men clean just their rooms because they are responsible for that. These husbands who are willing to clean rooms share at least 50% of household responsibilities. Thus, I conclude that men who are good at cleaning are better sharers.

## Whose career is prioritized?

Couples with higher education sometimes got jobs in remote places. For dual-career couples, finding jobs in the same city is an issue. A study of 835 college-educated dual-career couples showed that only half of them prioritized husbands' careers. About 30% of dual-career couples do not prioritize either career, or they prioritized each other's career in turns (Moen, 2003).

When one person prioritizes their spouse's career, s/he uses family-friendly policy in order to adjust their family's needs. Among my interviewees, five husbands have experiences to prioritize their wives career. These men moved, changed jobs or worked schedules for family reasons. They took childcare leave or followed their wives' moving and stayed at home for some period. Three husbands used flextime such as telecommuting and part-time arrangements. Some husbands worked part-time in order to do housework and childcare. They individually negotiated with their employers to use family-friendly policies. Not only are they egalitarian, but they are also affected by industrial relations. As these husbands have good academic backgrounds, they are competitive in a labor market. Thus, they do not hesitate to negotiate with their employers to use family-friendly policy. I noticed some wives whose husbands are willing to take advantage of flexible working schedules to enjoy balancing work and family lives.

Still, many well-educated professional women quit jobs because their relationships with their husbands at home are traditional. Their husbands' high income and uncooperative attitude towards household responsibilities made many professional women *shut out, not opt out* (Stone, 2007). What I learned from my interviewees is exactly the contraposition of this study. If husbands' attitudes are liberal at home, their wives can continue careers and get promotions.

Seniority is also a factor when these people ask their employers for flextime. As bosses trust workers with long experience if s/he is to work outside their sights. A male engineer worked a part-time arrangement when he had his first son. His employer was very supportive of his decision, as he was trusted the capability and motivation towards his job. He had worked for his employer for 11 years before requesting the part-time arrangement. One female executive had a similar experience. She said, "**As I have worked here over 20 years, people trust me even if I work at home.**" She usually works three days per week at her home office. Working 60 or 70 hours per week and having two children, she is ultra-busy. But she can balance because she can

work at home.

### **Why do mothers continue working?**

I also asked wives the motivation behind why they continue working. There are two major answers: financial reason and demand from the job market. One wife in her 50s said, **"I work for my children. In order to keep a middle-class life, I must work."** Another wife mentioned benefits. **"I work in order to receive health insurance for my family."** As her husband is an independent contractor, he did not receive insurance. Their reasoning is logical and clear.

Women's employability is also an issue. **"I stayed at home and raised two kids. One year later, my former boss called and asked me to come back,"** said a woman in her 30s with an MBA, the director of a large company. When she asked her boss to let her work at home, he admitted her request because the company needed her skills and past experience. Now she works from home and goes to her office once or twice a week. She is the first person in her company to work from home at her level. Another woman who is a lawyer had a similar experience. She also once stayed at home, but her current employer wanted to hire her. As for women in their 30s, their skill for special jobs and employers needs made them continue working.

### **Low expectations of government**

In this study, what surprises me the most is Americans' perception towards public childcare. As for my interviewees, none of them like public daycare. Many people claimed low-quality, and others complained how expensive quality daycare is. Thus, my interviewees have wholesale negative perspectives towards public day-care. Eight of my interviewees clearly said, **"Having children is an individual choice,"** and **"I do not think government should use tax payers' money for childcare. Not all people have children."**

In comparison, Japanese middle-class dual-career couples prefer to use public daycare. From a Japanese perspective, government is responsible for providing high quality and affordable daycare. And the majority of Japanese citizens think that government services are reliable.

As for the perception of the responsibility of government support for childcare, in Japan 60% strongly agree with governmental support, whereas in the U.S. only 34% do. There is also the difference between Japanese and American people in wanting their government to play a role in

childcare support. While the Japanese expect financial benefits and public daycare provisions, Americans just want government to promote flexible working schedules. Overall, the Japanese consider that government has a responsibility to provide childcare services whereas Americans do not think so (Shirahase, 2006). Americans' low expectations seem to affect government policy. In the U.S., Family and Medical Leave Act provides opportunity for women to have 12 weeks leave when they give birth, but this is unpaid leave. In Japan, employed women can take 14 weeks leave when they give birth. Especially, after six months following childbirth, employer must not let women work.<sup>14</sup> During this period, women can receive 60% of salary from health insurance system. Japanese parents also can take parental leave, up to one year<sup>15</sup> with 40% of salary from employment insurance.<sup>16</sup>

## **Conclusion**

Again, how many American husbands do housework and childcare, and how does that affect their wives' careers?

### **1) Individual attitudes**

Compared with the Japanese, American husbands are more progressive. They spend on housework and childcare four times as much time as Japanese husbands. In the U.S., the disparity of domestic work hours between men and women is smaller than in Japan. American women's relatively high economic statuses affect husbands' attitudes. As women take more financial responsibility, men come to think that they should take household responsibilities.

### **2) Industrial relations**

Some American husbands use family-friendly policies. This is very helpful for their wives' careers. These husbands negotiated with their employers to get the schedules they desired. The relationship between employers and employees are more individualistic than in Japan. Americans rely on individual negotiations whereas Japanese depend on official policy.

### **3) Labor market**

Some husbands supported their wives' careers by taking significant percentage of household and

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<sup>14</sup> Labor Standards Act, Article 65

<sup>15</sup> Childcare and family care leave act Article 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9

<sup>16</sup> Employment Insurance Law Article 61-4

childcare responsibilities. Sometimes these husbands work part-time or take jobs without overwork. When their children grow up, or when their wives' working schedule are not heavy, husbands found other jobs which they enjoy, with more responsibility or opportunities for promotion. One of my interviewees was in the middle of negotiations with his prospective new employers about salary and paid leave days. After several years of supporting his wife's career, he felt that it was time for him to get a more interesting job. His undergraduate degree in science and an MBA put him in a very competitive position in the job market. There are other husbands who negotiated with their employers about working schedules. In other words, husbands' negotiation power in the job market and job mobility itself enable husbands to support their wives' career. Although this kind of freedom of choice seemed a luxury only for men with professional degrees or special skills, employability enables some people to have better balance.

### **Limitations of this study**

My sampling is biased towards well-educated, upper middle-class people. The results of my study seem to be that work and life balance for men is only the privilege afforded elite people. But this is not true. Men without higher education participate in household responsibilities as well. Previous studies have shown that there are twists between men's attitudes and their actions. Highly educated men tend to have liberal attitudes, so they might seem to be egalitarian. But in reality, as their income is high enough to be a single breadwinner, their wives can stay at home and take the whole responsibility at home. On the other hand, husbands without college education are financially vulnerable, which makes them accept their wives' work outside home. Then these men take household and childcare responsibilities, whereas their attitudes tend to be relatively conservative. All in all, there are gaps or twists between perception and reality (Hochschild, 1989).

### **What can the Japanese business community do to promote WLB?**

After studying American dual-career couples, I think that the Japanese business community should revitalize the job market for mid-career people by way of individual-based negotiation.

Currently, the Japanese business community tries hard to promote family-friendly policy. This is good, but changing the relationship between business people and employers is also necessary.



## **Common challenges Japanese and American business communities face**

Overall, American working mothers enjoy better balance than Japanese working mothers do. But there are still some challenges among American working women. The roots of the challenges are the same in Japan. The first issue is psychological. Even in the U.S., where women's economic status is higher than those of other countries, they feel uncomfortable when they negotiate their salaries or job positions. Women tend to be afraid of being pushy and ask less than men with the same capability. This characteristic affects unequal sharing household responsibilities as well (Babcock and Laschever, 2003). The second issue is rewards. Successful businesswomen are highly likely to give up children. In a study of executive women in the financial industry, two-thirds had no children, as their jobs require that they be available all the time. As a result, women who decided to devote all their time to their jobs have more opportunity for promotions, and tend to alienate women who would like to balance their work and life (Blair-Loy, 2003). The third issue is working norms. Overall, the business community prefers employees who can work the longest hours and do not hesitate over work. Even if a company introduces progressive family-friendly policies, without changing culture, balance is not possible (Rapoport. Et al, 2002). Historically, American working-class people have believed that if they work very hard, they can be happy. This belief made people work long hours even sometimes as family lives or their health are sacrificed (Moen, 2005). Many scholars argue that American society should reconsider the concept of "ideal-worker" and make the society where people can enjoy balanced work and family life (Williams, 2000).

These points American scholars argue above are also discussed in Japan now. Reading these studies makes me understood that Japanese and American business communities share same problems, although America is more advanced in solution level.

## **American government should provide affordable daycare**

As the United States is the wealthiest country in the world, the government definitely can afford to support future generations. Many scholars argue childcare support for working parents. There is a consistent perspective that current policy does not fit American people's working conditions, where majority of children are raised by working parents (Haymann, 2000). Overall, I respect American professional couples' individualism. They negotiate with their employees relying on

their market value. Japanese should learn from them. On the other hand, from my Japanese perspective, American couples have made enough of an effort to balance their work and family life by themselves. Now American middle-class families are entitled to ask not what they can do for their country, but ask what their country can do for them.

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