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Explaining the gender gap in help to parents: The importance of employment

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*Although it is well established that adult daughters spend more time giving assistance to their parents than do sons, the sources of this gender gap are not well understood. This paper asks: To what extent can this gap be explained by structural variation, especially the different rates of employment and kinds of jobs that women and men tend to hold? Using data from the National Survey of Families and Households (*N = *7,350), the paper shows that both employment status and job characteristics, especially wages and self-employment, are important factors in explaining the gender gap in the help given to parents, and that these operate similarly for women and men.*

Over the past couple of decades, a growing body of literature in a number of different fields finds a gender gap in help to kin: Women spend significantly more time giving help than do men. More specifically, most of this literature suggests that women are more likely to assist their own parents and, when married, more likely than their husbands to provide help to their spouse's parents (e.g., Allen, Blieszner, & Roberto, 2001; National Alliance for Caregiving and AARP, 1997; Stone, Cafferata, & Sangl, 1987; Walker, 2001; for an exception concerning help to parents-in-law, see Lee, Spitze, & Logan, 2003). Women's preponderance as providers of assistance to parents has been well documented but remains largely unexplained.

To explain this difference between women and men, we can turn to broad theories developed to account for gender gaps in other kinds of family work, both in and outside the home. In their explanations of gender gaps in family work, many theories focus on the *structural forces* that operate in adult life (e.g., Epstein, 1988; Gerson, 1993; Risman, 1998). Though variously defined, these structural factors are typically understood as an array of material, objective, and external constraints and opportunities (Hays, 1994; Rubinstein, 2001). Structural explanations for the gender gaps in family work often emphasize the constraints and opportunities generated by the different employment experiences of women and men. Because men are more likely to be employed and, when employed, to have more lucrative and time-consuming or satisfying jobs than women, their jobs pull or push them away from family responsibilities (Gerson; Risman). When women have the same employment conditions as men, they will give the same amount of help as men; that is, once we take into account such different employment experiences, the structural model suggests, gender as a dichotomy is neutralized and will yield little independent effect.

Alternative theories assert that structure cannot fully account for the gender gaps in family work. Some of these theories attribute gaps to an essential gender dichotomy rooted in biology (for reviews, see Epstein, 1988; Marini, 1990; Udry, 2000). Another set attributes them to psychological differences between women and

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men created by early socialization (Chodorow, 1978, 1999; Gilligan, 1982; Witt, 1994). Still another traces them to cultural factors that operate in adult life (Brines, 1994; Greenstein, 2000; Potuchek, 1997; West & Zimmerman, 1987). All of these alternative theories, irrespective of whether they focus on biology, early socialization, or cultural differences, assert that even when adult men and women are located in the same structural positions—more specifically, hold the same jobs—they differ in the amount of family work they do. According to these theories, we would expect a gender gap to exist even between women and men who are employed in the same kinds of jobs. We also would expect similar employment experiences to shape the help given to parents in different ways for adult women and men.

This article seeks to determine how much of the gender gap in the amount of help given to parents is tied to distinctively structural forces, especially employment and its conditions, that operate in adult women's and men's lives. Using national data, we ask two questions. First, to what extent do women's and men's different employment experiences account for the gap in the amount of help they give to their parents? Second, are similar employment conditions associated with help to parents in different ways for women and men?

Literature Review

To identify potential explanatory factors, we turn to two sets of literature that explore the relationship between paid employment and gender gaps in family work: (a) research that examines domestic work, specifically the large literature examining housework and child care, and (b) the smaller body of research focusing on help to kin, especially to parents and parents-in-law. In both literatures, two types of studies are relevant: (a) those that attempt to explain gender gaps and look at men and women together, and (b) those that seek to identify the gender-specific processes that operate among women and among men and examine them separately.

Gender, Employment, and Domestic Work

Because it examines related issues about the gendered tradeoffs between employment and family work, we first draw on the well-developed literature on domestic work. Although the findings are inconsistent, this research did find that the amount of domestic work is related to various aspects of employment, and that differences in paid employment explain at least some part of the gender gap in such family work.

Those studies that compared men's and women's housework found that this gap is usually reduced but not fully explained by employment (for reviews of this literature, see Coltrane, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). These studies offer partial support for the structural theories of gender gaps, but leave some room for alternative explanations.

Other research examined women and men separately, and found some similarities and some differences in the relationship of employment to men's and women's domestic work, once again offering some support both to the structural theories and their alternatives. Looking at women, studies found that their employment is directly linked to their domestic work. Researchers have shown that employed women do less housework than nonemployed women, and some studies have shown that specific employment characteristics are linked to housework. Both the amount and proportion of household income that women earn are negatively associated with the time they spend on housework (Brines, 1994; Hersch & Stratton, 1997; Hundley, 2000) and mothering (Budig & England, 2001). Time spent on the job matters as well: The more hours women spend on the job, the fewer hours they spend on housework (Bianchi, Milkie, Sayer, & Robinson, 2000; Shelton & John, 1996). Although an early study by Staines and Pleck (1983) found job schedules to be unrelated to women's housework, Presser (1994) and Silver and Goldscheider (1994) found that nonstandard schedules increase their housework. Finally, studies suggested that self-employment provides a kind of flexibility that women use to do more housework and child care (Boden, 1996, 1999; Carr, 1996; Connelly, 1992; Silver, Goldscheider, & Raghupathy, 1994).

Less research has focused on men. Looking just at employment status, Berk (1988) suggested that employed men's housework differs little from that of nonemployed men, although both Brines (1994) and Greenstein (2000) argued that men without jobs do less domestic work. Even less research examined the relationship of men's employment characteristics to their domestic work. Importantly, almost all of this research found that employed men's housework is less tied to job demands than women's (Hochschild, 1989). Whether in terms of income, hours, or

self-employment (though not schedules; Presser, 1994), the relationship with domestic work for men is either weaker than for women or nonexistent (Bianchi et al., 2000; Hersch & Stratton, 1997; Silver, 1993), suggesting that factors other than just the structural ones operate.

Overall, the body of research on domestic work emphasizes, on the one hand, the power of structure in creating the gender gap. Especially for women, jobs shape domestic work: As a structural model would predict, the more money women earn and the more hours they work for pay, especially on standard schedules, the less housework they do. On the other hand, this literature also suggests that the gender gap in domestic work cannot be entirely explained by employment characteristics. Moreover, men and women respond to similar employment circumstances in somewhat different ways. As alternative models might predict, men's employment is less tied to domestic work than women's.

Gender, Employment, and Helping Parents

The second set of relevant literature focuses specifically on help to kin, especially parents, and its relationship to gender and employment. Very few of these studies, however, concentrated on the gender gap in help and tried to explain why women and men give different amounts of help. Those attempting to explain this gender gap tended to take employment into account in some way; some focused on the relationship of parental help only to employment status, whereas others assessed the relationship of that help to employment characteristics, especially job hours and earnings.

Focusing on employment status, some researchers found that the differences in the amount of help women and men provided remained significant when they controlled for that status, and that employment status had no significant relationship to help to parents (Finley, 1989; Montgomery & Kamo, 1989; Stern, 1995). Assessing employment characteristics, Laditka and Laditka (2001) found that the gender gap in the likelihood of helping and hours of help to parents persisted when they controlled for the number of hours employed. In contrast, Gerstel and Gallagher (1994) looked at a broader set of employment characteristics, including a number of objective employment characteristics such as job hours and flexibility, wages, and type of job, as well as subjective characteristics such as job centrality. Although none of these factors individually predicted help to parents, as a group they significantly reduced but did not completely eliminate the gender gap.

Overall, no study that focused on the gender gap in help adult children give their parents could fully explain this gap even though some suggested that employment and its characteristics reduce it, providing partial support to the structural theories. None of the studies, however, both used a representative national sample and examined the broad range of job characteristics we might expect to explain the gender gap in help to parents.

Although very few studies directly assessed the role of employment in explaining the gender gap in helping parents, a number of studies examined the relationship of employment conditions and help to parents for women and men separately. Of those that looked at women, some studies found that employment status and employment characteristics—in particular, time spent on the job—are closely tied to the provision of help; both having a job and working longer hours are associated with giving less help to parents (e.g., Boaz & Muller, 1992; Doty, Jackson, & Crown, 1998; Ettner, 1996; Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000). In contrast, other studies found that women's employment status (Brody & Schoonover, 1986; Farkas, 1992; Himes, Jordan, & Farkas, 1996; Matthews & Rosner, 1988) and hours on the job (Pezzin & Schone, 2000; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Wolf & Soldo, 1994) are not significantly associated with the likelihood or amount of help to parents. A third set of studies reported mixed findings regarding the relationship between women's employment characteristics and the help they give. Pavalko and Artis (1997) found that although having a job did not affect whether women began to give help to a disabled relative or friend, employed women who started giving help subsequently reduced the hours they spent on the job. In one of the rare studies that looks at earnings rather than hours, Couch, Daly, and Wolf (1999) found that helping elderly parents is negatively associated with the wage rates of married, though not unmarried, women.

The literature on men is smaller than that on women, but somewhat more consistent. Most studies found that longer work hours (Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Starrels, Ingersoll-Dayton, Dowler, & Neal, 1997) and higher incomes (Campbell & Martin-Matthews, in press; Couch et al., 1999) are associated with

less help to parents. In contrast to these studies, a study by Gerstel and Gallagher (2001) found that neither income nor job hours has a significant relationship to total hours of help that married men give to either parents or parents-in-law.

We might expect that a number of other job characteristics, in addition to earnings and hours, would be associated with help to parents, albeit possibly in different ways for women and men. First, as mentioned previously, the domestic work literature argued that self-employment provides some flexibility, which women, though not men, use to do more domestic work. This suggests that self-employed women could also use this flexibility to give more help to extended kin, including their parents. Budig (2003), however, has shown that even though men's self-employment is often associated with autonomy and control, women's self-employment is significantly more likely to impose constraints, and hence may limit the ability to provide help. Second, the domestic work research also found that job schedules are linked to housework, and Neal, Chapman, Ingersoll-Dayton, and Emlen (1993) found job schedules linked to the stress of those employees who provide help to their parents. Therefore, we might expect a relationship between job schedules and amount of help given to parents. Third, previous work emphasized the spillover of subjective feelings on the job to families (see Perry Jenkins, Repetti, & Crouter, 2000, for a review), although the evidence is again mixed regarding whether this process operates similarly for women and men within nuclear families (Rogers & May, 2003). No prior research, however, has examined the relationship of any of these job characteristics, whether self-employment, job schedules, or job satisfaction, to the amount of help that either adult men or women give parents.

Overall, existing studies have examined only a subset of potentially important job characteristics, and there is a fair amount of disagreement about the relationship between help to parents and the employment conditions. The inconsistent findings are likely the result of three important differences among the studies.

First, studies used widely different operationalizations of help and employment. Sometimes defining it broadly and sometimes narrowly (Connidis, 2001), the operationalization of help ranged from the likelihood of providing any help (e.g., Laditka & Laditka, 2001; Neal et al., 1993; Stern, 1995), to the likelihood of providing specific kinds of help (e.g., Campbell & Martin-Matthews, in press; Farkas, 1992) or certain amounts of help (Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000), to the number of tasks provided (e.g., Finley, 1989; Starrels et al., 1997), to the hours of help, whether annual (e.g., Couch et al., 1999; Laditka & Laditka) or monthly (e.g., Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001). In terms of time spent in paid work, some looked at total employment hours, either per week (e.g., Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001; Pavalko & Artis, 1997) or annual (e.g., Johnson & Lo Sasso), in some cases including those not employed as working zero hours (e.g., Laditka & Laditka), whereas others compared those employed full time to those employed part time and not employed (e.g., Boaz and Muller, 1992; Pezzin & Schone, 2000). In terms of earnings, some focused on wage rates (Couch et al., 1999) but others examined yearly incomes (Campbell & Martin-Matthews, in press; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001). Moreover, most studies either treated employment as a dichotomy or examined only one employment characteristic at a time, failing to examine simultaneously how a number of employment characteristics shaped the help that children gave parents.

Second, the studies differed in their methods of analysis and in their use and definitions of controls. Whereas most studies treated help to parents as a dependent variable and employment as an independent one, some used help as an independent variable and employment as an outcome (e.g., Starrels et al., 1997; Stone & Short, 1990; Wolf & Soldo, 1994), and some used help as both a dependent and an independent variable, estimating multiple equations (e.g., Ettner, 1996; Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000; Pavalko & Artis, 1997; Pezzin & Schone, 2000). The majority of analyses were based on cross-sectional data, but there are a few that used longitudinal data (e.g., Johnson & Lo Sasso; Pavalko & Artis; Stern, 1995). Related to the different ways of measuring help and employment, and different kinds of data used, studies used different analytic techniques. Some used qualitative analyses (e.g., Archbold, 1983; Matthews & Rosner, 1988), and many used linear (e.g., Doty et al., 1998; Finley, 1989; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001) or logistic (e.g., Farkas, 1992; Himes et al., 1996; Laditka & Laditka, 2001) regression methods to model either help to parents or employment conditions. Still others used various methods for joint or subsequent estimation of multiequation models predicting both paid employment and help to parents (e.g., Couch et al., 1999; Johnson & Lo

Sasso; Pezzin & Schone). Studies also differed in their use and definitions of control variables, which we address in more detail below.

Third, the studies focused on different populations and used different types of samples. Some drew on nonprobability samples (e.g., Archbold, 1983; Brody & Schoonover, 1986; Matthews & Rosner, 1988) or regional samples (e.g., Finley, 1989; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001; Pezzin & Schone, 2000; Rossi & Rossi, 1990). Most collected information from those giving help, but a few others collected it from recipients (e.g., Doty et al., 1998; Stern, 1995). Studies also often focused on a certain stratum of givers—for example, middle-aged (e.g., Farkas, 1992; Lang & Brody, 1983) or married (e.g., Brody & Schoonover; Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001; Wolf & Soldo, 1994). Further, even though some included all parents and parents-in-law (e.g., Gerstel & Gallagher, 1994, 2001; Rossi & Rossi), many studies focused on a certain type of recipient—for example, impaired or disabled parents (e.g., Ettner, 1996; Himes et al., 1996; Stone & Short, 1990; Wolf & Soldo) or disabled elders more broadly (e.g., Doty et al., 1998), just on mothers (e.g., Finley, 1989; Lang & Brody), on parents in a certain age range (e.g., Finley; Laditka & Laditka, 2001; Matthews & Rosner, 1988), or on respondents' own parents but not their parents-in-law (e.g., Farkas; Laditka & Laditka). Studies also often sampled on the dependent variable, focusing exclusively on those who gave considerable care to impaired parents (e.g., Boaz & Muller, 1992; Doty et al.; Montgomery & Kamo, 1989). Such research yields a truncated view that makes much labor invisible: It neglects those in the early stages of a "caregiving career"—before a family member is seriously disabled (Aneshensel, Pearlin, Mullan, Zarit, & Whitlatch, 1995; Stoller, 1990)—and neglects that large population that provides routine but intermittent help to those who are not seriously impaired but who do need some informal assistance. The study population foci or sample selection procedures of such studies make it impossible to generalize to the general population of women and men with living parents.

In sum, no prior research has explained the gender gap in the amount of help given to parents and parents-in-law. Much research used narrow operationalizations of help and a narrow range of employment characteristics and focused on limited populations of help providers. Finally, much research examined only women or, less frequently, only men, making it impossible to assess either the factors explaining the gender gap or whether employment conditions—including wages, job hours and schedules, self-employment, or satisfaction—differentially shape the help that women and men give. Each of these analyses is needed to substantiate a structural theory of gender and help provided.

Other Relevant Factors Shaping Help to Parents

Although the primary focus of this article is the relationship between employment and help to parents, research shows that other factors that we will use as controls also influence the help that adult children provide to their parents. Studies vary greatly in their use of controls, sometimes making it difficult to compare findings. One thing is clear, however: Carefully selected controls are essential to examining the relationship between employment and the gender gap in help to parents. Previous studies have identified a number of important factors, including characteristics of the individual adult child, characteristics of the adult child's nuclear family, and extended family characteristics.

With regard to characteristics of the adult child, one important variable is race. Research has suggested that African Americans, especially women, even when employed, are much more likely than Europ Americans to help their parents (Connell & Gibson, 1997; Lee, Peek, & Coward, 1998). Research also suggested that as adult children age, they reduce the unpaid help they give to their parents (Couch et al., 1999; Ettner, 1996; Pavalko & Artis, 1997). A number of studies found that men's and women's education shapes their help to parents, albeit the findings are inconsistent as to whether it is those with more or less education who provide more help (Couch et al.; Himes et al., 1996; Laditka & Laditka, 2001; Shuey & Hardy, 2003). Some research also suggested that when men and women are themselves in poor health, they are less likely to give help to their parents (Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000; Laditka & Laditka; Pavalko & Woodbury, 2000), although other researchers found that not to be the case (Dautzenberg et al., 2000; Himes et al.).

In terms of nuclear family characteristics, research suggested that married daughters give less help to their parents than unmarried ones (Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000; Rossi & Rossi,

1990). Although some research on men showed the same pattern (Rossi & Rossi), other research found that unmarried sons give less help to their parents than do married sons (Campbell & Martin-Matthews, 2000). Further, at least some research suggested that the presence of children reduces assistance to parents (Gerstel & Gallagher, 2001; Pezzin & Schone, 2000); others, however, find no relationship (Dautzenberg et al., 2000; Laditka & Laditka, 2001).

Finally, extended family characteristics are especially important. Johnson and Lo Sasso (2000) argued that the relationship between help given and employment is much weaker when extended family characteristics, especially number of siblings and parental need (whether in terms of their finances or health), are excluded from the analysis (see also Eggebeen & Hogan, 1990). Indeed, many studies attested to the importance of these factors in shaping help to parents, reporting that greater parental need increases, whereas greater number of siblings, especially sisters, reduces the amount of help one gives to parents (Dautzenberg et al., 2000; Matthews, 1987; Spitze & Logan, 1990). In addition, consistent determinants of help to parents include their proximity and gender; those who live closer to their parents give more help (Lee, Dwyer, & Coward, 1993; Logan & Spitze, 1996), and mothers are more likely to receive help than fathers (Laditka & Laditka, 2001; Wolf & Soldo, 1994).

Thus, we include as controls in our models these characteristics of the adult child (including race, age, education, and health), characteristics of the adult child's nuclear family (including partnership status and number of minor children), and extended family characteristics (including parental proximity to the adult child, parental health-related and financial needs, marital status and gender, and number of siblings).

Research Hypotheses

Overall, our contribution to the literature is the use of a general population national sample of individuals across the adult life course to assess the relationship both of employment status and key employment characteristics to the gender gap in the amount of routine help that adults give to parents and parents-in-law. We also assess whether the relationship between employment and help operates similarly for women and men. Hence, this article has three main research hypotheses.

> Hypothesis 1: We hypothesize that employment status reduces the gender gap in help given to parents, with controls for key variables.

> Hypothesis 2: We hypothesize that, although the fact of employment reduces the gender gap, that gap nevertheless persists among the employed, and the amount of help that employed women and men provide varies because they confront different objective employment conditions and have different subjective experiences on the job. More specifically, we expect that those employed in time-consuming, lucrative, or satisfying jobs—conditions more characteristic of men's jobs than women's—provide less help than those employed fewer hours in less demanding, lucrative, and satisfying jobs.

> Hypothesis 3: Following the research findings on housework and child care, we hypothesize that although employment status and employment characteristics, such as wages and hours, are important in explaining the gender gap, men and women do not respond to them in the same way. We hypothesize that employment status and characteristics—including earnings, hours, schedules, self-employment, and job satisfaction—are more strongly tied to parental assistance for women than for men.

Overall, our analyses begin to assess the extent to which gender differences in helping parents are explicable by structural variables (in particular, employment and its conditions) that are associated with but analytically distinct from gender.

Method

Data

This paper uses data from the second wave (1992–1994) of the National Survey of Families and Households (NSFH), in which a total of 10,005 main respondents were interviewed (see Sweet & Bumpass, 1996; Sweet, Bumpass & Call, 1988, for more details on NSFH). We use a subsample ($n = 7{,}350$) that includes all those respondents who have living parents and/or parents-in-law. To ensure the generalizability of the findings to the entire population of adult children, we do not limit our analysis either just to those who give some help or to those giving care to the

infirm; instead, we include all respondents with surviving parents, regardless of parents' age, health status, or residential status.

Dependent Variable

This article uses help given to parents as the dependent variable because we are interested in understanding the gender gap in giving help rather than the gender gap in employment. This also allows us to be consistent with and to make comparisons to much other research on these issues.

Our measure of help is the number of hours of help given by a respondent to parents and/or parents-in-law in an average week in the past month. It was obtained using the following question: "Taking all kinds of help together, in an average week in the last month, how many hours would you say you spent helping your parents and parents-in-law?" This variable has a mean of 3.41 hours of help and a median of 1 hour of help. The variable ranges from 0 to 60 hours. Over two fifths (41.9%) of the total sample provided zero hours of help (38.8% women and 46.3% men). The original variable was truncated at 75, but we truncated it at 60 to reduce the effect of outliers by assigning the value of 60 to all cases with higher values. We also tried truncating at a number of other values such as 30, 40, and 50, and that did not appreciably alter our results.

Unfortunately, separate data are not available for the hours of help given to mothers and fathers, or to parents and parents-in-law, even though the literature suggests that differences exist in the amount of assistance given to these sets of parents (e.g., Lee et al., 1993; Rossi & Rossi, 1990; Wolf & Soldo, 1994). Because we are primarily interested in assessing the extent to which employment explains the gender gap in the amount of help given, combining parents and parents-in-law is less of a problem than it would be if we were focused on explaining who receives help.

Controls

Controls include characteristics of the respondent, including age, race, education, and physical health; characteristics of the respondent's nuclear family, including marital status and number of minor children; and characteristics of extended family, including proximity to parents, parents' health-related need, parents' financial need, parents' gender, parents' marital status, and number of siblings and siblings-in-law in respondent's family. The Appendix provides means and standard errors of each of these control variables for women and men separately, both for the total sample and for the employed subsample.

Respondent's age is measured in years. To control for respondent's race/ethnicity, we use two variables: Black/African American and Other minority (*White* is the omitted category). The category *Other minority* includes Latinos and Latinas, Asian Americans, and Native Americans. They were combined because they are not sufficiently represented in the sample to be controlled for separately, but we did not want to merge them with either of the other two groups. Coefficients for this category should not be substantively interpreted, however. Respondent's education is measured by the total number of years of education completed. Respondent's health is measured by a dichotomous variable representing answers *poor* and *very poor* (on a scale from 1 = *very poor* to 5 = *excellent*) to the question, "Compared to other people your age, how would you describe your health?"

Respondent's marital status is represented by a dichotomous variable that indicates whether the respondent is married or cohabiting, with unpartnered being the omitted category. The minor children variable is the number of respondent's and spouse's or partner's children 18 years old or younger living in the respondent's household, truncated at 4.

In terms of parental characteristics, geographic distance from parents is represented by four dichotomous variables: coresident parents (at least one parent or parent-in-law shares a residence with the respondent), parents within 2 miles (respondent does not coreside with parents or parents-in-law but lives within 2 miles of at least one of them), parents within 3 to 25 miles, and parents within 26 to 300 miles (more than 300 miles to the closest parent is the omitted category). These categories are based on the frequency distribution and Roschelle's (1997) categories.

Parents' health-related need is a dichotomous variable based on the respondent's evaluation of each parent's physical health (on a scale from 1 = *very poor* to 5 = *excellent*), as well as two questions asking whether any of the respondent's parents (a) need help moving around inside the house or with personal care such as eating,

bathing, dressing, or going to the bathroom; or (b) have serious problems with memory or mental confusion. If the respondent rated any parent's or parent-in-law's health as very poor or poor, or if the respondent answered *yes* to either of these two questions, the respondent was coded as having a parent with health-related need. The parents' financial need is a dichotomous variable based on the question, "Do any of your parents or parents-in-law have problems because of too little income to meet day-to-day needs?" Parents' gender is a dichotomous variable indicating whether the respondent has a living mother and/or mother-in-law. (We also examined the relationship of having a male parent or parent-in-law, as well as a same-gender parent or parent-in-law, to help hours. Because these were not significant in any of the models, we did not include them in the analyses presented here.) Parents' marital status is a dichotomous variable that measures whether the respondent has at least one unmarried parent or parent-in-law.

Finally, number of siblings is the total number of respondent's full siblings, half siblings, stepsiblings, and siblings-in-law (spouse's or partner's full siblings, half siblings, and stepsiblings), truncated at 11. Unfortunately, NSFH II does not provide data separately on the number of sisters and brothers.

Employment Characteristics

Respondent's employment status is a simple dichotomy: whether the respondent currently works for pay. For characteristics of employment, we include variables indicating both objective and subjective conditions of respondent's main job. The first objective employment characteristic, respondent's wage, is the natural logarithm of respondent's hourly wage on the main job. For salaried employees, it is calculated using his or her weekly, biweekly, monthly, or yearly salary, and typical hours of work. We logged the wage variable to bring its distribution closer to normal.

Part-time employment is a dichotomous variable created using an hours of employment variable that is the number of hours that the respondent typically works per week. It is based on the hours worked last week on the main job if that was a typical week for the respondent, or on the number of hours worked in a typical week if the last week was not typical. Respondents are considered working part time if they work less than 35 hours a week. (We also tried using job hours as a continuous variable and separating those working overtime; none of these specifications of job hours exhibited any relationship to help to parents.)

Our next set of objective employment characteristics includes three work schedule variables. The first two—*rotating shifts* and *irregular work hours*—represent the schedule of hours that the respondent is working (*fixed shift* is the omitted category). Respondents who answered *yes* to the question, "Sometimes work schedules regularly alternate between day shifts and evening or night shifts. Is this true of your schedule?" were coded as working rotating shifts. Respondents who answered *no* to that question but also answered *no* to the question, "Is the time you start and stop work about the same each day that you work?" were coded as working irregular hours (the omitted category, fixed shift workers, answered *yes* to this last question). For the schedule of days, we used the weekend work variable—a dichotomy based on the question, "Do you sometimes work on Saturdays or Sundays?"

Finally, the last objective characteristic of employment, the self-employment variable, is a dichotomy based on the question, "Do you work for yourself, in a family business, or for someone else?" Respondents who answered that they work for themselves were coded as self-employed.

Our subjective employment measure is job satisfaction, which is the respondents' rating on a 7-point scale (from $1 = very\ dissatisfied$ to $7 = very\ satisfied$) of overall satisfaction with their jobs.

Analytic Strategy

Our analysis consists of four parts. First, we look at the total sample to assess the gender gap in help given to parents and test whether the gender difference in employment rates explains that gap. Second, we examine the relationship of employment to giving help for women and men separately. Third, we focus on employed respondents and examine whether their employment characteristics explain the gender gap in help to parents. Finally, we analyze the relationship of these characteristics to giving help for employed women and men separately.

To obtain generalizable results, all of the analyses (conducted using Stata 8.0) use analytic

weights constructed by NSFH staff to adjust for both oversampling and attrition bias, and to match the sample to the U.S. adult population in race, age, and gender composition. We also use standard error estimates corrected for sample design—that is, for clustering and stratification. (For a discussion of sample design effects in NSFH, see Johnson & Elliott, 1998.)

To assess the extent of the gender gaps in help and employment, we conduct bivariate analyses comparing means by gender for the dependent and main explanatory variables. We present weighted survey means for hours of parental help and employment variables by gender, and perform two-tailed tests to determine the statistical significance of the gender differences.

Next, we turn to multivariate analyses. Our dependent variable represents the number of hours of help given, and is therefore a count variable (nonnegative variable with integer values counting number of events). Count variables are often treated as though they are continuous and the linear regression is applied. The use of linear regression modeling for count outcomes, however, can result in inefficient, inconsistent, and biased estimates (Long, 1997). Fortunately, a variety of models deal explicitly with count outcomes. In our case, the *z*-statistic for alpha indicates overdispersion of the dependent variable, thus indicating the need for a negative binomial rather than Poisson model (Cameron & Trivedi, 1986). Our dependent variable also displays the presence of many zeros (41.9%), which suggests the need for zero-inflated models. The Vuong statistic also indicates a preference for zero-inflated models (Long). We can theorize that some respondents are likely to just happen to have zeros at the time of the survey (i.e., in the average week in the past month) and would report a nonzero count if asked another time, whereas others never provide any help and thus would report zero hours every month. Therefore, we need a separate process predicting membership in this *always zero* group.

Thus, we use zero-inflated negative binomial regression. The zero-inflated negative binomial model is represented by two equations (see Long for details): a negative binomial equation predicting count of events for those not in the *always zero* group, and a logit equation predicting the membership in the *always zero* group. Consequently, two sets of parameters are estimated. The first set, β parameters, is interpreted in the same way as the parameters from the Poisson models. A positive coefficient indicates an increase in the number of hours of help, and a negative coefficient indicates a decrease. The size of the coefficient can be most conveniently interpreted in the form of $100*(exp(\beta) - 1)$ as the percentage change in the number of hours per one-unit increase in the independent variable, holding other variables constant. The second set, γ parameters, indicates changes in the probability of being in the *always zero* group. These coefficients are interpreted in the same way as the parameters of binary logit models. Thus, a positive coefficient indicates that one unit change in the independent variable increases the probability of being in the group that always has zero counts. The amount of change can be also interpreted in the form of $100*(exp(\beta) - 1)$ as the percentage change in the likelihood of belonging to the *always zero* group.

In addition to the coefficients from these two equations, we can calculate and interpret so-called marginal (or partial) effects for each independent variable based on both equations simultaneously. These coefficients represent the partial derivatives of $E(Y|X)$ with respect to specific values of X. They represent the change in the expected count for a unit change in X given a specific starting value of X. Because the model is nonlinear, the value of the marginal effect and its significance depend not only on both sets of parameter estimates but also on the values of the independent variables used in its calculation. Marginal effects are usually computed with all nondichotomous independent variables held at their means. For dichotomous independent variables, they are calculated using the discrete change method by assessing the change in the count that occurs with an increase in the independent variable from 0 to 1. These coefficients allow us to assess the total effect of each variable, combining its two components (effect on the positive counts and effect on the *always zero* group membership). Therefore, for the sake of simplicity, we focus primarily on interpreting marginal effects.

Although some stress the endogenous nature of both employment and assistance to parents (Couch et al., 1999; Ettner 1995, 1996; Johnson & Lo Sasso, 2000; Stern, 1995), for a number of reasons, we treat employment and its characteristics as a set of exogenous variables. First, as Ettner (1995, 1996) demonstrated, the relationship between employment and help to parents is not diminished when treating both

employment and help as endogenous, and instrumenting for help. Therefore, there is no reason to expect that it would diminish when treating employment and help as endogenous, and instrumenting for employment. Second, as Stern (1995) and Stone and Short (1990) argue, families make long-term decisions about providing help to elderly parents and associated employment decisions. Thus, one needs data on employment and help for a number of years to detect any endogeneity of employment using lagged dependent variables (Stern), and such data are not available. Finally, if one uses cross-sectional data and relies on other variables as instrumental for employment status and its characteristics, it is impossible to distinguish the effects of employment from those of other predictors on the gender gap in help to parents. Because our main goal is to assess the role of employment in explaining the gender gap in help to parents, rather than simply predicting the hours of such help, this would be highly problematic.

Thus, using zero-inflated negative binomial regression, we construct a number of models entering groups of variables in a step-by-step fashion. First, we enter gender, then gender and controls, and finally, gender, controls, and employment variables. We employ such a strategy because we are interested in separating those changes in the gender gap that are due to the controls, and those due to the employment variables when all other relevant factors are controlled for. Assessment of the *changes in the gender variable coefficient across the models* allows us to discuss the power of controls and employment characteristics in explaining the gender gap, whereas analysis of *individual coefficients for controls and employment variables* allows us to assess the relationship of each variable to the amount of parental help.

After constructing these step-by-step models for the total sample and for the employed-only sample, we estimate final models that include both controls and employment variables separately for women and men to assess the differential effect of the explanatory variables by gender. We perform two-tailed tests to determine the statistical significance of the differences between the coefficients of men's and women's models. Note that the statistical significances of the differences between the coefficients presented in the tables are not based on interaction terms in a combined model for men and women together. We estimated such pooled models with interactions, however, and the results were similar.

Results

Hours of Help Given and Employment Status

We begin our analysis with the first and simplest issue—the gender gap in help given to parents—by specifying the amount of help provided by women compared to men. We find that there is a large and statistically significant ($p \leq .001$) gender gap. Women provide about 3.8 hours of help per week to parents and parents-in-law, whereas men provide about 3.0 hours. Further, we find that men are much more likely to be employed than women (85% of men and 69% of women in the sample are employed). But does that employment difference account for the difference in help hours?

In Hypothesis 1, we predict that even after controlling for a number of key variables, the fact of employment itself will help explain the gender gap in help. Table 1 examines this hypothesis.

The top part of the table presents marginal effects evaluated with all of the independent variables held at their means. Looking across the models, we find that when one considers such marginal effects, employment status renders the gender gap insignificant. More specifically, as the gender coefficient in Model 2 shows, women give their parents significantly more help than do men with controls in the model; however, the gap is reduced by the controls from 0.78 of an hour (48 minutes) to 0.58 of an hour (35 minutes). Further, when we introduce the employment variable, the gender difference is no longer significant; it decreases to 0.44 of an hour (about 27 minutes) (see Model 3). Thus, Hypothesis 1 is confirmed: Employment status is associated with a reduction in the gender gap in help to parents, and when combined with controls, makes insignificant the marginal effect of gender on help to parents.

The two equation coefficients (presented in Table 1 marginal effects), however, suggest that whereas employment eliminates the gender gap in positive counts (as shown in the negative binomial equation), it does not eliminate the gap in membership in the *always zero* group (as shown in the logit equation). That is, men are significantly more likely than women to consistently refrain from providing any help to parents.

Although controls reduce the gender gap in the *always zero* group, employment is associated with an increase in it. Employed men are less likely than nonemployed men to be in the *always zero* group (the relationship is not significant for women; however, we do not find a significant difference between women and men).

Next, in Hypothesis 3, we predicted that different processes would operate for women than for men. Therefore, the last two columns in Table 1 present separate models by gender. Although several controls have a different relationship to women's than men's help to parents (including age, number of minor children, and parents' health needs), we find no significant differences between women and men in the relationship of employment status. Therefore, to the extent that employment status is associated with a reduction in the gender gap, this is because of the differential employment rate of women and men rather than the differential effect of employment on women and men.

Explaining Hours of Help Given Among the Employed

Although we found that employment status is associated with a significant reduction in the gender gap in help to parents, this gap persists among the employed. We hypothesized that the varying conditions of employment explain why employed women provide more help to parents than do employed men. Limited to the employed, Table 2 presents hours of help to parents for employed women and men, and a summary by gender of the various employment characteristics that we expect to be associated with amounts of help.

First, in Table 2, we see that employed women give significantly more hours of help to parents than do employed men (3.4 vs. 2.8 of an hour). Second, we see that men and women differ on a number of employment characteristics. On the one hand, women receive significantly lower wages, are more likely to work part time, are less likely to work on weekends, and are less likely to be self-employed than men. We hypothesized that these differences in employment conditions would help explain the gender gap in hours of help to parents. On the other hand, women and men do not differ significantly in their job satisfaction or the likelihood of working rotating shifts and irregular schedules. Nevertheless, because these characteristics may influence parental assistance, and may do so differently for men and women, we include all of these employment characteristics in our models in Table 3.

Looking at employed respondents only, Table 3 presents data on the relationship of employment characteristics to the gender gap in help. Because the two-equation coefficients do not provide additional analytic insights into these models, we present only marginal effects in Table 3; the two-equation coefficients are available from the authors upon request.

As Model 1 in Table 3 shows, among the employed, there is a significant gender gap before we enter any other variables. The second column (Model 2) in the table introduces the controls. In the next column, we introduce employment characteristics (Model 3). With these employment characteristics in the model, the gender gap is no longer significant. In fact, employment characteristics explain almost as much of the gender gap as do all of the controls taken together. The gap is reduced from 0.65 of an hour (39 minutes) to 0.49 of an hour (29 minutes) after controls are introduced, and it goes down to 0.37 of an hour (22 minutes) and becomes insignificant with the introduction of employment characteristics. We stress that among the employed, the marginal effect of gender and both the effect on the positive count and the membership in the *always zero* group are rendered insignificant. Therefore, employment characteristics in conjunction with controls fully explain the gender gap among the employed; thus, we confirm Hypothesis 2.

More specifically, two employment characteristics are statistically significant for the total employed sample. First, we find that higher wages are associated with fewer hours of help. As men and women differ on this job characteristic, with women working in lower wage jobs, it creates a gender gap. This suggests that changing the pay of jobs that employed women and/or men hold would significantly reduce the gender gap in help to parents. Second, we find that the self-employed provide less help than those who work for someone else. Therefore, women's lower likelihood of self-employment is associated with an increase in the gender gap. The direction of this relationship is surprising because we might expect that self-employment would provide flexibility that would allow workers to give more help to parents. Instead, it appears that the self-employed have more demanding jobs that allow them less opportunity to provide help.

TABLE 1
WEEKLY HOURS OF HELP TO PARENTS, TOTAL SAMPLE AND BY GENDER: RESULTS OF ZERO-INFLATED NEGATIVE BINOMIAL REGRESSION ($n = 7,350$)

Variable Name	Total Model 1	Total Model 2	Total Model 3	Women ($n = 4,306$)	Men ($n = 3,044$)	Sig. Diff. in Effects by Gender
Marginal Effects						
Gender	0.779***	0.581*	0.425	—	—	—
Controls						
Age	—	−0.003	−0.010	0.021	−0.034*	**
Black	—	0.582*	0.665*	1.127*	0.188	
Other minority	—	0.043	0.062	−0.205	0.185	
Education	—	−0.115*	−0.102*	−0.081	−0.089	
Poor health	—	−0.184	−0.323	−0.466	−0.276	
Partnered	—	−1.448***	−1.373***	−1.432***	−0.859	
Number of minor children	—	−0.122	−0.147	0.046	−0.345*	*
Coresident parents	—	8.954***	9.159***	13.053***	6.646***	
Parents within 2 miles	—	2.593***	2.755***	3.891**	1.675	
Parents within 3–25 miles	—	1.765***	1.985***	2.575**	1.258	
Parents within 26–300 miles	—	1.156	1.397	1.734	1.329	
Female parent	—	−1.030	−1.171	−0.272	−1.532	
Parents' health-related need	—	0.998***	1.030***	1.546***	0.555	*
Parents' financial need	—	1.057***	1.003***	0.947**	1.087*	
Unmarried parent	—	0.964***	0.965***	1.026***	0.956**	
Number of sibs/sibs-in-law	—	−0.095*	−0.088*	−0.080	−0.094	
Employment						
Employed	—	—	−0.920**	−0.690*	−0.966*	
Constant	3.383	3.033	3.026	3.251	2.749	
Negative Binomial Equation						
Gender	0.230***	0.191*	0.140	—	—	—
Controls						
Age	—	−0.001	−0.003	0.006	−0.012*	**
Black	—	0.178*	0.203*	0.310*	0.067	
Other minority	—	0.014	0.020	−0.064	0.066	
Education	—	−0.038*	−0.034*	−0.025	−0.032	
Poor health	—	−0.062	−0.110	−0.150	−0.104	
Partnered	—	−0.427***	−0.408***	−0.401***	−0.288*	
Number of minor children	—	−0.040	−0.049	0.014	−0.125	*
Coresident parents	—	1.480***	1.500***	1.726***	1.327***	
Parents within 2 miles	—	0.690***	0.726***	0.903***	0.518	
Parents within 3–25 miles	—	0.527***	0.587***	0.691**	0.423	
Parents within 26–300 miles	—	0.341	0.404*	0.459	0.420	
Female parent	—	−0.296	−0.332	−0.085	−0.450	
Parents' health-related need	—	0.311***	0.322***	0.443***	0.194	
Parents' financial need	—	0.310***	0.297***	0.265**	0.346**	
Unmarried parent	—	0.328***	0.329***	0.328***	0.358**	
Number of sibs/sibs-in-law	—	−0.031*	−0.029*	−0.025	−0.034	
Employment						
Employed	—	—	−0.281***	−0.204*	−0.314*	
Constant	1.105***	1.478***	1.723***	0.800	2.379***	

TABLE 1. CONTINUED

Variable Name	Total Model 1	Total Model 2	Total Model 3	Women ($n = 4{,}306$)	Men ($n = 3{,}044$)	Sig. Diff. in Effects by Gender
Logit Equation						
Gender	−11.722***	−0.705**	−0.927***	—	—	—
Controls						
Age	—	0.024	0.016	0.021	0.003	
Black	—	0.182	0.237	1.211	−0.274	
Other minority	—	−0.287	−0.321	0.701	−0.752	
Education	—	−0.181**	−0.172**	−0.232	−0.133	
Poor health	—	0.381	0.171	−0.224	0.165	
Partnered	—	0.143	0.131	0.372	0.392	
Number of minor children	—	0.098	0.090	−0.104	0.062	
Coresident parents	—	−57.871***	−39.979***	−4.799	−35.054***	***
Parents within 2 miles	—	−4.254**	−3.950***	−4.205	−4.885	
Parents within 3–25 miles	—	−2.547***	−2.403***	−3.752	−2.478**	
Parents within 26–300 miles	—	−1.194**	−1.107*	−1.228	−1.004**	
Female parent	—	−0.663	−0.773*	−1.303	−0.045	
Parents' health-related need	—	−0.212	−0.165	0.186	−0.351	
Parents' financial need	—	−0.575	−0.607	−0.615	−0.601	
Unmarried parent	—	−0.439*	−0.445*	0.017	−0.475	
Number of sibs/sibs-in-law	—	0.014	0.024	0.021	0.006	
Employment						
Employed	—	—	−0.839**	−0.712	−1.174**	
Constant	−13.131***	2.283	3.234*	2.526	3.064	
Alpha	2.854***	1.718***	1.694***	1.774***	1.611***	—
−2 log likelihood	7.441×10^8	7.039×10^8	7.029×10^8	3.695×10^8	3.315×10^8	—
Adj. McFadden's R^2	0.001	0.055	0.056	0.049	0.067	—

Note: Weekly hours of help to parents includes both parents and parents-in-law. Statistically significant differences are indicated as follows: $*p \leq .05$, $**p \leq .01$, $***p \leq .001$ (two-tailed). The last column indicates statistically significant gender differences in effects of independent variables.

To further test Hypothesis 3, Table 3 shows the separate models for women (Column 4) and men (Column 5), and presents significance tests for gender differences (Column 6). Although these analyses again show the differential effect of some controls on women and men, there are no significant differences in the relationship of employment characteristics to the help that women and men give to parents. Even though we find that self-employment has a significant relationship only to the help that women (but not men) provide, the difference between women and men is not statistically significant.

Finally, the employment variables *not* significantly associated with help to parents are worthy of note. We expected that those working overtime would be even less available to provide help to their parents than would full-time employees; that is not the case. We also expected that job schedules would be associated with the provision of help and support; that was not the case for women or men. Finally, we expected that those deeply satisfied with their jobs would be less likely to take time to provide help to their parents; that was not the case either. (In addition to using job satisfaction as a 7-point scale, we also examined the tails of the distribution to ascertain whether those particularly satisfied would provide less help; they did not.)

DISCUSSION

The gender gap—not only in care provided in nuclear families but also in help within extended families—is still very much with us. As Walker (2001) writes, however, the mere description of this gender gap "tends to reify the immutably distinct nature of women and men" (p. 45). Rather than describe or reify it, we sought to explain the gender gap using a structural

TABLE 2
GENDER DIFFERENCES IN HOURS OF HELP TO PARENTS AND EMPLOYMENT CHARACTERISTICS, EMPLOYED RESPONDENTS ($n = 5,597$)

Variable Name	Women	Men
Hours of help to parents	3.449	2.797**
	(8.688)	(7.928)
Wages (logged)	2.225	2.532***
	(1.009)	(0.824)
Part-time employment	0.241	0.066***
	(0.656)	(0.347)
Rotating shifts	0.082	0.085
	(0.303)	(0.336)
Irregular work hours	0.118	0.137
	(0.436)	(0.445)
Weekend work	0.424	0.538***
	(0.687)	(0.589)
Self-employment	0.087	0.140***
	(0.371)	(0.398)
Job satisfaction	5.299	5.243
	(1.912)	(1.737)

Note: Weighted means (or proportions for dichotomous variables) and survey standard deviations (in parentheses) are presented.
*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).

approach that stresses variation among women and among men.

Using employment as a dichotomy, we find that the fact of having any job significantly reduces the gender gap in the provision of help to parents. For women, these findings are consistent with much of the literature on housework. For men, however, these findings contrast with some oft-cited research concerning the gender gap in both housework and kin work. Brines (l994) and Greenstein (2000), for example, use a cultural model to suggest that men without jobs affirm their masculinity by doing significantly less housework than those employed. In contrast, we find that men not employed give more help to parents than do employed men. The results from the logit portion of the model (Table 1), however, indicate that although employed men give fewer hours of help than those not employed, the employed are also less likely to be in the *always zero* group who consistently provide no help to parents. This gives some support to a cultural argument that nonemployed men seek affirmation of their masculinity by withholding help from their parents (Brines). Overall, however, we come closer to confirming the findings of Rossi and Rossi (1990), who used a regional sample to suggest that employed men provide less help to kin than do those not employed.

The next part of our analysis shows that even though employment status significantly reduces the gender gap in help, a more sophisticated structural analysis, looking beyond dichotomies (i.e., having a job or not), is needed to explain the gender gap that persists even among the employed. In fact, job characteristics, especially wages and self-employment, explain almost as much of the gender gap as do all other controls taken together, including marital status, parents' proximity, and parental need. Our analysis unpacks gender into its structural components. Indeed, such a structural analysis proves more successful in explaining the gender gap in help to parents than most other analyses of gender gaps, whether of parenting or housework.

Our findings suggest that, all things being equal, employed women and employed men give equal amounts of help to parents and parents-in-law. We emphasize, however, that all things are not equal: On average, employed women and men differ in their employment characteristics, and hence, we argue, they differ in the amount of help they give to parents.

Further, our findings contradict the argument of much research on the gender gap in housework and child care, which argues that insofar as the gender gap in family work is explained by employment characteristics, it is more because of variation among women than among men. We find that women's assistance to parents is not more sensitive to variation in their employment than is men's. We do find, however, some differences in women's and men's responses to a few other factors. For example, an analysis of the controls suggests that women are more responsive than men to the needs of their parents. In particular, both in the total sample and among the employed, women provide more help when their parents' health conditions are poorer; this association does not appear for men.

We conclude that both of our central findings support a structural model more than alternative models, whether biological, psychological, or cultural. First, the structural model is supported because we find that the gender gap in the amount of help can be explained by employment and its characteristics, along with controls. Second, and equally important, a structural model is supported because we find that these employment conditions operate in a similar fashion for both women and men.

TABLE 3
WEEKLY HOURS OF HELP TO PARENTS, ALL EMPLOYED AND BY GENDER: RESULTS OF ZERO-INFLATED NEGATIVE BINOMIAL REGRESSION ($n = 5,597$)

Variable Name	Total Model 1	Total Model 2	Total Model 3	Women ($n = 2,993$)	Men ($n = 2,604$)	Sig. Diff. in Effects by Gender
Gender	0.652**	0.491*	0.365	—	—	—
Controls						
Age	—	−0.019	−0.011	0.013	−0.019	
Black	—	1.181***	1.208***	1.753**	0.535	
Other minority	—	0.337	0.351	0.242	0.104	
Education	—	−0.111*	−0.051	−0.049	0.011	
Poor health	—	−0.221	−0.286	−0.316	−0.292	
Partnered	—	−0.628*	−0.612*	−1.055**	−0.117	
Number of minor children	—	−0.194	−0.202	0.071	−0.434**	*
Coresident parents	—	9.366***	9.019***	10.199***	10.969*	
Parents within 2 miles	—	2.440**	2.427**	2.859*	3.115	
Parents within 3–25 miles	—	1.853**	1.734*	1.949*	1.986	
Parents within 26–300 miles	—	1.662*	1.605*	1.059	2.571	
Female parent	—	−0.870	−0.711	−0.627	−0.630	
Parents' health-related need	—	0.962***	0.955***	1.297***	0.469	*
Parents' financial need	—	0.864**	0.865**	0.731*	0.802	
Unmarried parent	—	0.979***	0.930*	1.143***	0.746*	
Number of sibs/sibs-in-law	—	−0.090*	−0.087*	−0.106*	−0.036	
Employment						
Wages (logged)	—	—	−0.430***	−0.473***	−0.402*	
Part-time employment	—	—	0.007	0.150	−0.344	
Rotating shifts	—	—	0.602	0.053	1.098	
Irregular work hours	—	—	0.151	0.232	0.121	
Weekend work	—	—	0.081	0.024	0.056	
Self-employment	—	—	−0.552*	−0.654*	−0.326	
Job satisfaction	—	—	0.033	0.013	0.023	
Constant	3.070	2.709	2.679	2.918	2.336	
−2 log likelihood	5.575×10^8	5.283×10^8	5.271×10^8	2.482×10^8	2.761×10^8	—
Adj. McFadden's R^2	0.001	0.053	0.055	0.049	0.068	—

Note: Weekly hours of help to parents includes both parents and parents-in-law. Statistically significant differences are indicated as follows: *$p \leq .05$, **$p \leq .01$, ***$p \leq .001$ (two-tailed). The last column indicates statistically significant gender differences in effects of independent variables.

We caution, however, that in this analysis, as well as in most prior research, theoretical models other than the structural one have been treated largely as residual. In such a residual approach, whatever differences remain between women and men after researchers controlled for the structural factors are then attributed to one of the alternative theoretical explanations, most often the cultural one. Such studies do not include direct measures of biological, psychological, or cultural differences between women and men.

Brines (1994) and Greenstein (2000), for example, suggest that the differences in housework persist because of the different values and meanings of employment and family for women and men: For men, employment is the key marker of masculinity; for women, employment has assumed greater symbolic salience but has not displaced family obligations from the core of femininity (see also Williams, 2000). But they do not study empirically the relationship between such values or meanings and housework. Their attribution of gender differences to the cultural realm is purely theoretical. To fully assess whether there is a relationship of culture to help to kin, future research should include direct measures of women's and men's ideas about gender, employment, and help to kin, and of the

informal messages that they receive from relatives, supervisors, and coworkers (Gerstel & Sarkisian, forthcoming).

Our key findings together raise a series of questions. First, why are structural characteristics more successful in explaining the gender gap in help to parents than in explaining gender gaps in other sorts of family work—say, that of caring for children? Perhaps it is the more voluntary nature of giving assistance to parents that explains its greater responsiveness to employment conditions. This difference can be also attributed to cultural differences in the meaning of helping parents compared to housework or child care. It is possible that helping parents is less central to a gendered performance of self—to "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987)—than are other kinds of family work. Consequently, structure can exert more of an effect on this kind of work than on housework or child care.

Second, what are the causal processes underlying the relationship between employment characteristics and parental support? A limitation of this study is our inability to establish their causal sequence. As we indicated earlier, the causal explanation could go in either direction. One explanation would be that helping parents creates a wage penalty for both women and men, very similar to the wage penalty found for mothering (see Budig & England, 2001; Waldfogel, 1997); it also reduces women's opportunity (or desire) to be self-employed. A second explanation suggests that the higher wages and self-employment of men and women produce opportunity costs of helping and reduce adult children's willingness or ability to provide help, or increase their ability to purchase help (Brody & Schoonover, 1986). To untangle these causal pathways, panel data with multiple follow-ups or retrospective life histories are needed. Although the NSFH data are longitudinal, only two waves of these data are available, and the time between these waves—5 to 6 years—likely precludes an effective assessment of causal ordering. This time period makes it difficult to track numerous transitions into and out of jobs. Over one quarter of the labor force switched employers in just the last 12 months, over half changed employers in the previous four years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2000), and many others have likely changed jobs but stayed with the same employer. Similarly, we expect that individuals are likely to change the amount of help they give parents multiple times within this time period. (Although there are little data on transitions into and out of giving help, see Aneshensel et al., 1995 for a conceptual model of the career of caregiving.) Because of the frequency of changes in jobs and helping, the NSFH is inadequate to the task of establishing a causal model, and so too are other longitudinal data sets such as the Health and Retirement Study, which does not contain enough detail on transitions in jobs or help. To establish the causal sequencing of help and employment, future research should collect detailed yearly panels, optimally in combination with retrospective life histories of the sort developed by Freedman and colleagues (Freedman, Thornton, Camburn, Alwin, & Young-DeMarco, 1988) on jobs and helping.

A third question concerns the finding that other aspects of employment, including job hours, job schedules, and job satisfaction, are unrelated to helping parents for either women or men and contribute very little to the gender gap. Why so little effect of these other employment characteristics? This could be a result of various self-selection processes that shape the employed subpopulation, because parental caregivers with certain employment characteristics are more likely to become nonemployed. For example, those with low job satisfaction or those working an inconvenient schedule may be more likely to exit the labor force to provide help to an ill parent. Or perhaps parental assistance is simply resistant to these conditions of employment for both women and men. As Epstein (1988) pointed out, social scientists are often keen to report statistically significant differences but are inadequately attentive to similarities or the absence of significant effects. It is important, both for theory and policy, to ascertain not only those aspects of employment that are associated with family work but also those that bear little relationship.

Our findings also suggest the importance of structural characteristics that we used as controls. In accord with much of the previous literature, we found that parental characteristics—especially parents' proximity, physical and financial need, and marital status—are important factors in explaining the amount of help given to parents, even though the salience of parents' health-related need is much higher for women. Further, we also found that marriage and cohabitation reduce the amount of help that adults give to their parents, especially for women. Specifically, with all other variables in the model held constant, partnered women give 1 hour and 26 minutes less assistance than unpartnered women give. In comparison to

those without partners, partnered men's hours of help are also lower, although not significantly so. This finding provides some evidence for the Cosers' (1974) conceptualization of marriage as a "greedy institution," especially for women. It suggests that marriage and cohabitation reduce the total amount of help provided to parents and parents-in-law rather than simply reshuffle some of this help from husbands to wives.

Partners but not children place significant limitations on the assistance that women give to parents and parents-in-law, whereas having children significantly reduces the help that men provide. Perhaps men's family work is a zero-sum game. Either their parents *or* their children can be recipients, whereas women's ability to provide help stretches to fulfill the needs of both children and parents. Future research should investigate this relationship of parental support to marriage and children, and interactions of these with employment in influencing the help that women and men provide.

To conclude, we stress that our analysis of the gender gap in parental help matters not only theoretically but also has important practical and policy implications. Families are under increasing pressure to provide private assistance. Recent federal and state administrations, committed to decreasing the public role in welfare, have called for increased reliance on families. Numerous policies of recent administrations—including the shortening of federally funded hospital stays (Gordon, 2001), cost-cutting efforts in Medicaid (Harrington Meyer & Kesterke-Storbakken, 2000), and the passage of the Family and Medical Leave Act (Gerstel & McGonagle, 1999)—reinforce a wide range of family-based assistance to those in need. It is not, however, some objectified family that gives help; the women in families have tended to do so.

If, as advocated by powerful political forces, more of such assistance is relegated to families, what are the consequences? On the one hand, because women are concentrated in less lucrative jobs and are less likely to be self-employed, they will probably be the ones to shoulder much of this increased load, which will further increase the gender gap in family work. On the other hand, those women (and possibly some men) who feel they want to or have to give help will quit their jobs or get less lucrative jobs, possibly intensifying the gender gap in employment. Further, others who stay in their jobs, either because they wish to or cannot afford to quit, may not be able to give assistance and support. Although women and men in more lucrative jobs provide less help, they are more capable of purchasing it when the need arises. Consequently, their parents might have many of their needs met even with a decline in public provision. Among those in less lucrative jobs, however, many women and men will neither be able to quit their jobs nor pay for substitute help that their parents or parents-in-law need. The politics of privatizing assistance, then, may intensify a series of inequalities. It likely will deepen the gender gaps in family work and employment, and deprive many elderly (especially elderly women because they outnumber elderly men), and the poor, whose children are unlikely to have lucrative jobs, of the help they need.

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APPENDIX
MEANS, STANDARD ERRORS, AND GENDER DIFFERENCE SIGNIFICANCE TESTS FOR CONTROL VARIABLES

	Total Sample		Employed	
	Women	Men	Women	Men
Age	40.217	40.823*	39.205	39.513
	(13.319)	(14.446)	(12.479)	(13.008)
Black	0.115	0.097**	0.111	0.088***
	(0.347)	(0.287)	(0.309)	(0.269)
Other minority	0.098	0.097	0.095	0.096
	(0.426)	(0.446)	(0.377)	(0.457)
Education	13.134	13.462***	13.518	13.667
	(3.409)	(3.146)	(3.389)	(3.084)
Poor health	0.197	0.181	0.165	0.142
	(0.594)	(0.509)	(0.546)	(0.419)
Partnered	0.717	0.764***	0.699	0.782***
	(0.610)	(0.479)	(0.630)	(0.451)
Number of minor children	1.092	0.892***	0.993	0.962
	(1.518)	(1.188)	(1.345)	(1.250)
Coresident parents	0.081	0.112**	0.079	0.097
	(0.431)	(0.450)	(0.456)	(0.385)
Parents within 2 miles	0.227	0.207	0.211	0.209
	(0.516)	(0.418)	(0.491)	(0.448)
Parents within 3–25 miles	0.337	0.332	0.346	0.344
	(0.652)	(0.562)	(0.672)	(0.555)
Parents within 26–300 miles	0.196	0.181	0.214	0.179**
	(0.522)	(0.411)	(0.540)	(0.414)
Parents' health-related need	0.939	0.958**	0.941	0.963**
	(0.287)	(0.232)	(0.280)	(0.219)
Parents' financial need	0.359	0.311***	0.336	0.295*
	(0.643)	(0.573)	(0.640)	(0.601)
Female parent	0.154	0.124**	0.149	0.119**
	(0.419)	(0.407)	(0.403)	(0.361)
Unmarried parent	0.627	0.593*	0.610	0.574*
	(0.505)	(0.644)	(0.536)	(0.641)
Number of sibs/sibs-in-law	5.217	5.427*	5.148	5.475***
	(3.762)	(3.939)	(3.900)	(3.862)

*$p \leq .05$. **$p \leq .01$. ***$p \leq .001$ (two-tailed).