

COMPARING PRIMARY SOURCES

On Working Mothers

Working mothers became an issue of concern to many Americans in the 1960s as more and more women sought employment outside the home. Opinions on the impact of working mothers on children, on women themselves, and on the whole family varied widely, from those who felt the effect was minimal to those who believed it was harmful to all concerned, including the mother's employer.

Read the following passages on working mothers. Then answer the questions that follow.

PASSAGE A

Benjamin Spock, M.D., Baby and Child Care, 1957 edition

To work or not to work? Some mothers have to work to make a living. Usually their children turn out all right, because some reasonably good arrangement is made for their care. But others grow up neglected and maladjusted. . . . You can think of it this way: useful, well-adjusted citizens are the most valuable possessions a country has, and good mother care during early childhood is the surest way to produce them. It doesn't make sense to let mothers go to work making dresses in a factory or tapping typewriters in an office, and have them pay other people to do a poorer job of bringing up their children.

A few mothers, particularly those with professional training, feel that they must work because they wouldn't be happy otherwise. I wouldn't disagree if a mother felt strongly about it, provided she had an ideal arrangement for her children's care. After all, an unhappy mother can't bring up very happy children.

What about the mothers who don't absolutely have to work but would prefer to, either to supplement the family income or because they think they will be more satisfied and therefore get along better at home? That's harder to answer.

The important thing for a mother to realize is that the younger the child the more necessary it is for him to have a steady, loving person taking care of him. In most cases, the mother is the best one to give him this feeling of "belonging," safely and surely. She doesn't quit on the job, she doesn't turn against him, she isn't indifferent to him, she

takes care of him always in the same familiar house. If a mother realizes clearly how vital this kind of care is to a small child, it may make it easier for her to decide that the extra money she might earn, or the satisfaction she might receive from an outside job, is not so important, after all.

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PASSAGE B

Letter to Ms. magazine, February 1973

Rather than hire a housekeeper and baby sitter for our three preschool children, my husband and I decided to "hire" me—to pay me a salary and contribute social security. The Internal Revenue Service said nay; this can only be done for someone not a family member. We tried to contract for disability insurance for me—in the event of my not being able to perform my housekeeping and child-care duties—but we have not yet found a carrier. I am not adding to the family income—and he cannot be compensated for a loss that does not exist.

The implication is clear—the establishment is making it more attractive to leave the home and let others raise their families. So I went job hunting. Results: very few jobs open in my field; higher salaries for men of the same background; hesitation to hire a woman with three "little ones" because I might not be dependable (miss work). Let's find out why men with families are considered good, stable, desirable employees and women are not.