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THE MOVEMENT OF WOMEN IN AND OUT OF THE LABOR FORCE

"Love and Success: Can We Have It All?" was the headline over an article in a recent issue of Glamour magazine. The subhead proclaimed the feminist answer to that question in large type: "Yes, say today's high-powered young women. Reining in your ambition is no longer an acceptable price to pay for love."

The article started off with enthusiastic examples of highly-paid professional or business women who are successful in their careers, just like men. One was a lawyer, one a doctor (license plate MS MD 1), one a vice president of a large corporation.

It all sounded so perfect -- until the fine print on the back page revealed the costs. One survey shows that, among women who earn $50,000 or more, the divorce rate is four times the national average. Another survey shows that, among women who earn $25,000 or more, the divorce rate is more than twice the average for all women.

A third survey shows that, among professional and managerial women whose median income is $20,000 to $25,000, 46% are single, 19% are divorced or separated, and 58% are childless, all figures much higher than the national average. A fourth survey shows that women who go on to graduate school divorce more often than those who stop after four years of college.

The real answer to the "love and success" question is, anything's possible, but a woman who tries for both at the same time should know in advance that it is a high-risk lifestyle and she should be prepared to pay the price.

Until the 20th century, women always participated in the labor force just like men, whether on the farm or in the craftsman's shop. It simply required the productive labor of both husband and wife, and often their children too, to make ends meet. When the Industrial Revolution swept across America in the 19th century, women worked in the factories just like men.

One of the greatest achievements of the American economic system is that, by the end of World War I, our productivity had increased so much that the average working man

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was able to bring home a wage sufficient that his wife did not have to labor in the factories, mines, or fields. "Female emancipation" meant freeing women from the harness of the labor force so that they could have a better quality of life in a home environment.

Over the last ten years, inflation and high taxes have cut so deeply into the take-home pay of the average working man that women are being pushed by the millions out of the home into the factories and even into the mines. Almost half of all American wives are now in the labor force.

The funny thing is that some people call this "liberation." They even brag about the higher and higher percentage of women in the labor force, as indicated by government statistics.

The rationale behind the current push for affirmative action for women is that "an oppressive society," "business discrimination," and "the outdated stereotype of woman in the home" are to blame when a given category of employment includes fewer than 50% women. Affirmative action programs are designed to force employers, through federal and financial penalties, to increase artificially the percentage of women employed in each job classification, especially the "nontraditional."

The fourth annual "American Family Report", a national survey conducted by Louis Harris and Associates for General Mills, has plenty of evidence to indicate that most women have not chosen full-time labor-force participation as their life's goal. The survey results show that 39% of women would prefer to work only at home, and another 14% would prefer to do only volunteer work, making a total of 53% who do not want to be in the labor force at all. Another 32% want part-time work only, leaving only 12% of all American women who want full-time employment in the labor force.

In response to the question, "Do you think the trend toward both parents working outside the home has had a generally positive, a generally negative, or no effect at all on families?", 52% of Americans answered "generally negative."

In the days before the federal government took such an active role in regulating employment, one man's wage could support a wife and family. Now, with high taxes and double-digit inflation, it seems to take 80 hours of work a week to support a family. Instead of progress, might this be regression to a 19th century economic system?

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