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Two Worlds Unite in UNH Professor's New Book on Work and Motherhood

By *Tracy Manforte*
UNH News Bureau

DURHAM, N.H. -- The lives of working mothers are typically seen as a juggling act --wage-earners on the one hand and full-time mothers on the other. Each is seen as a separate entity, one having little to do with the other.

The problem is that's simply not reality, according to University of New Hampshire sociologist Anita Garey, whose new book "Weaving Work and Motherhood" examines what happens when the two worlds collide, as they more often do.

"I hope that my book will dispel both the myth that most women choose between employment and motherhood and the myth that most women are oriented toward either motherhood or employment," says Garey. "I would like readers to discover how women weave the two in their lives."

In the book published by Temple University Press, the UNH assistant professor of sociology and women's studies analyzes what it means to be simultaneously a mother who is employed and a worker who has children, moving beyond structural incompatibilities between work and family.

Part of Garey's research for the book involved interviews with women in the health service sector in hospitals, from registered nurses to secretaries and janitors. In 1995, the health service industry employed 15 percent of all employed women, and occupations within the hospital are typical of the kinds of female-dominated occupations that account for most of women's employment in the United States. Using an institution that operates 24 hours a day also was a helpful model to study various hourly shifts.

"My research reveals that motherhood is not simply a bundle of tasks to be performed or delegated, but is most importantly a relationship," she says. "Most mothers do not want to mother less; but rather, they want to find work structures that enable them to be employed, while continuing to retain those parts of the

care and nurturing of their children that they identify as central to being a mother."

Garey includes many candid first-person accounts from working mothers to illustrate how women integrate, negotiate and weave together these identities. Examples like the following appear throughout the book and lay the groundwork for the kinds of social solutions needed to integrate family life and employment:

- As one mother explains: "I want (my daughter) to believe -- because she asks why I have to work -- that to have the nice things that we have, I have to work . . . I have a career because I think it's important for me mentally to not just be a mommy . . . I guess it makes me feel more whole."
- Another woman talks about the frustrations of working an evening shift. "My husband is capable, but sometimes he can be lax . . . A lot of times I would come home and homework wouldn't be done, and he would say, 'Oh, she didn't tell me she had homework.' So I knew then I could never work evenings."
- And another recalls her struggle to return to work after bonding with her newborn. "Within several weeks I realized that (my daughter) was going to be fine. It wasn't that now I was a working person and I couldn't be a mother anymore. There really was something in between."

Garey, who earned a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California, Berkeley, is also co-editor of "Families in the U.S.: Kinship and Domestic Politics" (1998). She is completing a research fellowship at the Center for Working Families at UC Berkeley and will return to teaching at UNH in January.

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