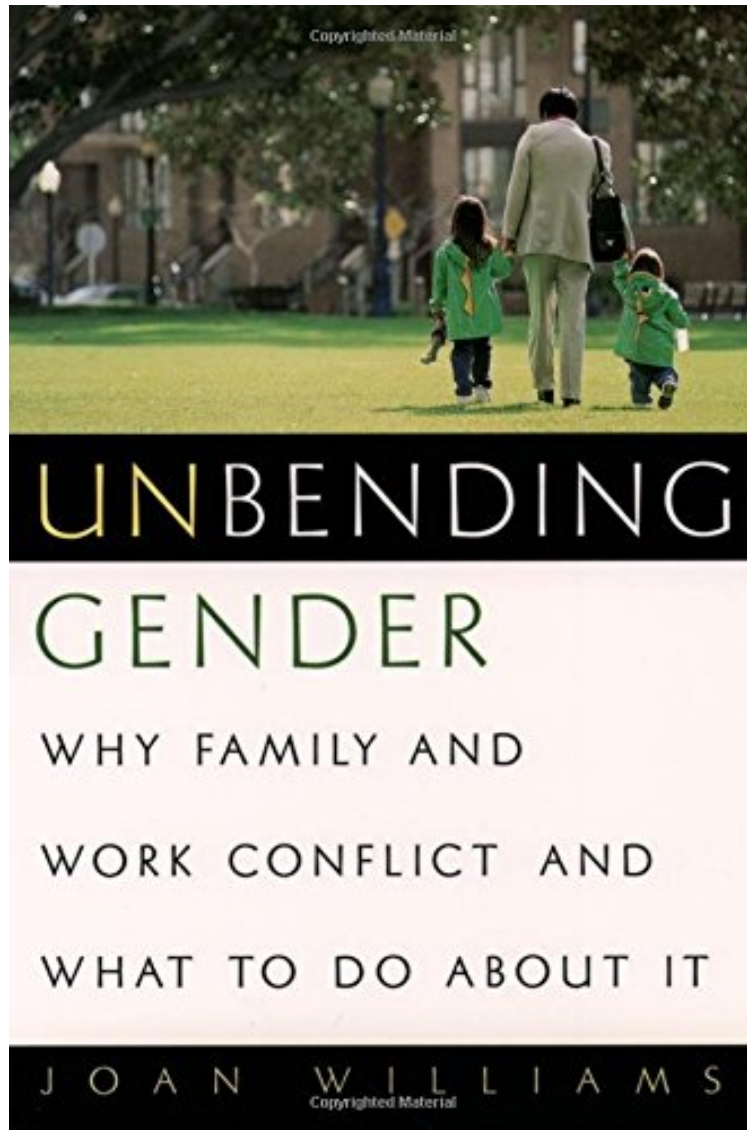


(Download) Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What To Do About It

# Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What To Do About It

*Joan C. Williams*

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**Joan C. Williams : Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What To Do About It** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What To Do About It:

11 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Essential reading for every woman lawyer By Ellen Ostrow Joan

Williams' scholarly, thorough, and accessible book is a must-read for every woman lawyer (and working woman) struggling to balance work and family. Each time I've recommended it to one of the women attorneys I coach I've seen their perspective transformed. They stop blaming themselves for their difficulties juggling their many life roles - suddenly they understand that they're facing a system which makes it impossible to do everything well. Williams' treatise on the issues most central to working women is thought-provoking and provides a useful framework for understanding why balance is so hard to achieve and how we might go about changing ourselves and our workplaces.<sup>5</sup> of 6 people found the following review helpful. Brings a new perspective and some concrete solutions. By A Customer I was assigned by Oxford University Press to copyedit this book before publication, and I was immensely impressed by it--much more so than by similar books I've worked on. She presents detailed, well-thought-out arguments illuminating aspects of work and family that are perennially in the news but which are usually treated simplistically (often with much moralizing and editorializing). Her argument is based on the premise that structural factors--factors in the way our society organizes individuals' labor--are one of the most important influences on what we usually see as intensely personal choices about work and family. Looking at the matter from this perspective allows her to trace the effects of it through such things as corporate policy on leave and promotions, judicial decisions on child custody and child support, and individuals' experiences, and to make a number of concrete proposals for that are well supported by legal precedent and a strong sense of what is possible and practicable in today's world. There are a lot of legal citations for those especially interested in the legal history of the matter, but it is clearly written, so you need not be a lawyer to get a lot from this book. After reading this book, you won't look at the "mommy track" in the same way!<sup>10</sup> of 12 people found the following review helpful. A New perspective on work and family roles. By maria levinson, MA This splendid book must be read by everyone trying to understand and remedy the strains on the contemporary family and to redirect the movement towards gender equality. While the majority of women with children are now employed outside the home, most "good jobs", from blue collar through corporate executive are still designed around men's bodies and "breadwinners'" ability to spend endless hours and energy on the job because they receive a constant flow of services from a partner. That partner, who may or may not be employed outside the home, does most of the family work but is "marginalized", that is, paid at a lower rate, and has lower status and power in the work world and in the family. This organization of market work and family work penalizes men, women and children. Reform requires reorganization of our work world, redefinition of our gender roles and a shift in the way society values and rewards family work, part time work and part time careers. The book is based on a wealth of new research and is a must for academics, policy makers, feminists and other activists working for a better society.

In *Unbending Gender*, Joan Williams takes a hard look at the state of feminism in America. Concerned by what she finds--young women who flatly refuse to identify themselves as feminists and working-class and minority women who feel the movement hasn't addressed the issues that dominate their daily lives--she outlines a new vision of feminism that calls for workplaces focused on the needs of families and, in divorce cases, recognition of the value of family work and its impact on women's earning power. Williams shows that workplaces are designed around men's bodies and life patterns in ways that discriminate against women, and that the work/family system that results is terrible for men, worse for women, and worst of all for children. She proposes a set of practical policies and legal initiatives to reorganize the two realms of work in employment and households--so that men and women can lead healthier and more productive personal and work lives. Williams introduces a new 'reconstructive' feminism that places class, race, and gender conflicts among women at center stage. Her solution is an inclusive, family-friendly feminism that supports both mothers and fathers as caregivers and as workers.

From *Publishers Weekly* In this theoretically sophisticated and thoroughly accessible treatise on gender, work and domesticity, Williams offers a new vision of "family-friendly" feminism that would support women in all the various roles on the worker-caregiver continuum. With special attention to the diversity of women's experience in terms of race and social class, this book challenges common assumptions about gender roles and women's choices concerning work, family and career. Arguing that the liberal feminist ideal of full equality in the workforce and the anti-feminist call to full-time domesticity do not represent a satisfactory range of options, Williams, who is the co-director of the Gender, Work and Family Project at the American University Law School, says that the time is ripe to acknowledge the "norm of parental care," and work to develop flexible employment policies that will mitigate the stresses of the work/family dilemma. The title of the book refers to the way in which our social and domestic patterns have proven more resistant to alteration than feminists had hoped, largely due to the powerful social forces that support conventional gender roles, particularly common expectations about mothers and caregiving. Williams proposes a major shift in feminist strategy, focusing on the needs of diverse families, broad recognition of the value of domestic work and an expansion of the limited scheduling options available to women and men in the workplace. Of interest to feminists, working women and caregivers as well as policy makers, this groundbreaking study presents an important new perspective on this evolving discourse. (Nov.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. "Finally, a logical look at the work vs. family debate.... Williams blends brilliant scholarship, rigorous analysis and family values in a

proposal to radically change the American workplace."--The Seattle Times"Williams would jump-start a movement with reasoned argument. Her documentation is encyclopedic and scrupulous."--The Nation"Like *The Feminine Mystique* and *The Second Shift*, *Unbending Gender* could ignite a new debate over what should happen next."--Yale Law Journal"An ambitious work and a precious accomplishment."-- Women's of Books"This book makes a notable contribution to the feminist literature for its eminently sensible, readable, and thoughtful look into the roots of women's disadvantage in market work...Highly recommended to readers who seek real explanations and solutions to labor market gender discrimination."--Choice

About the Author  
Joan Williams is Professor and Director of the Program on Gender, Work and Family at American University Law School. She lives in Washington, D.C.