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*Work and American Families*

## Diverse Needs, Common Solutions

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MANY AMERICAN FAMILIES FIND their lives increasingly rushed. The tempo may vary from steady to hectic to frantic, but a large and growing group perceives that life moves at a faster pace than it did for previous generations. Are these perceptions accurate? And, if they are, what has caused this speed up in the pace of life? In this chapter, we address the thicket of competing claims about whether or not daily life has become more hurried and less leisurely, and, if so, whether "overwork" is the main culprit creating this dilemma. Is the shortage of "time for life" real, or is it yet another example of an ambiguous and isolated social trend that has become exaggerated by anecdotal reporting and a lack of historical perspective?

In important ways, these questions—and the prevailing answers—are too simple. No one trend can adequately portray the complicated changes taking place in the American labor force and among American households. A more accurate account must recognize the diversity among workers and their families. In our study of how American working time has changed and how these changes have created new work-family conflicts for women and men, we drew on information from the *Current Population Survey* to compare the weekly working hours of U.S. workers in 2000 with those of workers in 1970.<sup>1</sup> These comparisons show that while one large segment of the labor force is working longer and harder than ever, another group of workers confronts the challenge of finding enough work. There are thus two aspects of the growing time divide. In its most obvious form, Americans are increasingly torn between commitments to work and to family life. Less apparent, however, are the ways in which the American labor force is diverging as some workers face increasing demands on their time and others struggle to find enough work to meet their own and their families' needs. Once this divergence is acknowledged, the discrepant claims about whether Americans are working more or enjoying more leisure can be resolved.

For a growing group of American families, feelings of overwork are real and well founded. Workers in these households are putting in very long hours at work. And even those not working especially long hours are facing new time squeezes as they cope with the challenges of managing a two-earner or a single-parent household. The lack of time for family life is not simply a matter of questionable choices made by some individuals, but instead reflects the way people's choices are constrained and deformed by our economy and the structure of our work organizations. The experience of feeling squeezed for time reflects fundamental and enduring changes in the nature and composition of American society. From this perspective, the scarcity

of time for the tasks of daily life is not just a personal problem, but a public issue of great importance.

## OUR OVERLAPPING TIME DIVIDES

Contrary to widespread belief, the average American work week has not changed dramatically over the last several decades. This does not mean that people's perception of not having enough time for family life is not real, but it does suggest that focusing only on the problem of long work weeks is not the only policy response required to meet the needs of today's diverse families.

A growing group of Americans are clearly and strongly pressed for time. These workers include employees who are putting in especially long hours, often against their own desires, and people in dual-earner and single-parent families who cannot rely on a support system anchored by a "stay-at-home" member. Women and men alike increasingly face challenging work without the "wives" once taken for granted by husbands in upwardly mobile careers and highly demanding jobs. Yet employers have not responded to these changed realities, assuming that devoted workers have—or should have—unpaid partners able to devote full-time to the myriad of domestic tasks on which not only family life but successful careers and secure communities depend. In the context of these dramatic social shifts in Americans' private lives, it is no surprise that many Americans *feel* that they are squeezed for time and working more than ever. The rise of highly demanding jobs, especially at the upper levels of the occupational hierarchy, and the lack of change in the structure of work pose dilemmas for many workers.

A "time bind" has clearly emerged in the contemporary United States. However, it has two different sources. For many workers, the time bind is rooted as much in the changing nature of family life and women's commitments as in the expansion of working time for individuals. Working parents in dual-earner and single-parent households have always faced a time bind, and the principal change over the last 30 years has been a marked growth in the number of people living in these family situations.

Other workers do face a time squeeze created by spending longer hours at paid work. This problem, however, is not universal, but rather concentrated among the professionals and managers who are especially likely to shape the terms of public discussion and debate. Although there are also blue-collar workers who put in substantial overtime or who work at two (or more) jobs (see Ryan, this volume), the highest proportion of extended-hour workers is found among professionals and managers. In addressing the new challenges and insecurities facing American workers and their families, we should be careful to move beyond generalizations about the "average" worker to focus on the variety of dilemmas workers are facing.

*The Occupational Divide and the Bifurcation of the Labor Market*

Even though the average working time of individuals has increased only slightly, important changes have nevertheless occurred in the American labor force. The continuity of the "average" work week obscures a new divergence between extremes at both ends of the spectrum. We have found a growing divide between those who are putting in very long hours at the workplace and those who are not able to work as many hours as they need. An occupational divide is developing between jobs that demand excessive time commitments and jobs that may not offer sufficient time at work to meet workers' needs or preferences.

Long work weeks are most common among male professionals and managers. Almost 40 percent

of men (37.2 percent, to be exact) who work in professional, technical, or managerial occupations work 50 hours or more per week, compared to one in five (21.3 percent) in other occupations. For women, the comparable figures are one in six for the professional and managerial positions versus less than one in fourteen for other occupations.

The changes in working time are connected to race as well, but to a smaller degree. And the race difference varies by gender. White men work two hours more per week on average than do Black, Hispanic or Asian-American men. These differences are most pronounced among those working 50 hours per week or more.<sup>2</sup>

For women, the story is reversed. Among women of similar ages, educational backgrounds, marital statuses, and occupational positions, White women work two hours less per week than Asian-American women and one hour less than Black women, and put in about the same number of hours per week on the job as do their Hispanic counterparts. Since they are more likely to be highly educated and to hold professional and managerial positions where working hours are longest, White women might be expected to work longer hours. Their higher participation in part-time work, however, offsets this effect and lowers their overall average.<sup>3</sup>

What factors are promoting the bifurcation of working time? At one end of the spectrum, employers have an incentive in encouraging long hours from salaried workers, who receive no additional earnings for the extra time they may be persuaded—or required—to work (see Landers, Rebitzer and Taylor, 1996). In addition, the segment of the labor force most at risk for these heavy time demands has grown markedly. When the Fair Labor Standards Act was passed in 1938, it hardly seemed necessary to protect the one in seven workers (or 14.8 percent of the labor) who were classified as professionals or managers. By 1995, however, that proportion had doubled to nearly two in seven (28.3 percent). The labor force now has a substantial number of workers who do not earn extra pay for “additional” time at work.

The costs of the most expensive fringe benefits, such as healthcare, are fixed for a full-time worker no matter how many hours he or she works. As the cost of these benefits has risen (especially as a proportion of total compensation), employers find it tempting to push full-time workers toward longer working hours. For all these reasons, employers face rising incentives to pressure salaried workers to put in more than the once obligatory forty-hour work week and to use working time as a measure of work commitment and a basis for promotions and raises.

Once long hours become the expected norm, informal rules develop that change the meaning of working time. More than just a way to earn a living, working time becomes suffused with moral meaning, and employers begin to equate time at work with career commitment. Time on the job comes to represent work devotion and organizational loyalty, and long hours may persist even if they are not the most efficient way of organizing work (Blair-Loy, 2003). Those who choose to put in fewer hours then run the risk of being branded “deviants” who depart from accepted “time norms” and are thus not worthy of serious consideration for advancement (Epstein et al., 1999).

At the other end of the occupational spectrum, those who are paid by the hour face a different situation. Especially when additional working time produces a sharp increase in hourly pay (such as time-and-a-half payments for working more than a forty hour week), employers may be less likely to demand long work weeks.<sup>4</sup> The rising cost of benefits, which adds to the appeal of extracting long hours from salaried workers, also makes it attractive to employ part-time workers. Since part-time workers are rarely offered a benefits package, part-time employment can substantially reduce labor costs. The creation of part-time jobs with low pay and few benefits may, in turn, force many workers to take several jobs to stay afloat, ultimately lengthening their work weeks as well. The high cost of

benefits thus tends to enhance the attraction of both long and short work weeks, depending on the type of occupation, without reducing the pressures on workers at either end.

Since the early 1980s, downsizing has become a common response to the growing pressures of international competition, as well as a speedy way to cut costs and increase profits. Yet rather than producing across-the-board increases in working time, downsizing has had different consequences for different levels of the occupational ladder. At the highest levels, the ranks of professionals and managers have often been trimmed, with those left behind expected to pick up the slack and put in more time. At lower levels, however, reducing jobs and outsourcing has superseded efforts to extend the work week. A general increase in the intensity of work thus does not automatically produce across-the-board increases in working time. A set of economic and social forces are encouraging the growth of jobs built on the premise of both long *and* short work weeks. While well-educated and highly trained workers who earn salaries may be facing increased pressure to put in long hours at the office, those with less secure jobs, such as hourly workers, part-time employees, and contingent workers, may have a difficult time getting the amount of work they desire, even though these workers may also face intensified pressures during the time they spend on the job. (See, for example, Pfeffer and Baron, 1988; Gordon, 1996; Ryan, this volume.)

Time demands, like other work-related opportunities and pressures, are not distributed equally across the labor force. The growing bifurcation into longer and shorter work weeks reminds us that the labor force consists of a diverse collection of workers. Any policy response needs to take account of the varying pressures, constraints, and contingencies attached to different jobs.

#### *The Aspiration Divide and the Gap Between Ideals and Options*

The increasing bifurcation of the labor force has engendered another time divide between the kinds of schedules workers desire and the options available to them. Especially at the extremes of the working time spectrum, the supply of jobs available neither reflects nor fits well with workers' preferences and needs. At both ends of this continuum, workers report a significant gap between their ideal and actual working conditions. Those putting in very long hours wish to work less, and those putting in relatively short hours wish to work more. While the drawbacks of long hours may be most obvious in the current climate, the drawbacks of short hours are equally significant. If current trends continue, we are likely to see a widening gap between those who would prefer to work less and those who wish to work more.

Whatever the benefits to employers, the personal and social costs of long work weeks are becoming increasingly obvious. Certainly, they undermine a worker's ability to achieve a reasonable balance between work and home, public and private, earning a living and caring for both self and others. Beyond these personal and family costs, however, there are social costs as well. Robert Putnam (1996, 2000) has called attention to the declining engagement in volunteer groups, civic associations, and other forms of participation in public life. Long work weeks no doubt undermine participation in civil society, especially for those trying to balance jobs and the time-demanding work of rearing children, and as we discuss below, they also undermine the prospects for gender and parenting equality.<sup>5</sup>

At the opposite end of the working time divide, significant personal, familial, and social costs are also linked to overly brief work weeks. Often, these jobs signify underemployment, inadequate income, and financial insecurity. They may also lack the benefits that provide a safety net for workers with full-time jobs. While some part-time workers are making adjustments to meet their family's needs, even workers who spend less than full-time at work may have little

flexibility to take needed time in the event of a personal or family illness or other emergency (Heymann, 2000).

Creating opportunities for a more equitable balance between paid work and the rest of life is thus not simply a private issue between employers and employees, but a matter of great public interest. The social need for greater balance can also be found in the personal ideals of workers, whose expressed desires belie the argument that the bifurcation in working time is merely a reflection of individual preferences. To the contrary, most workers aspire to a balance between home and work that eludes them. Many of those putting in very long hours would willingly forgo income and other benefits for the chance to work less and gain greater flexibility in how they use their time. Many of those with short working hours would gladly work longer if the opportunity arose. Workers' needs and desires are often out of sync with job structures and options. This suggests that the labor market, left to its own devices, has not produced the mix of jobs that matches the needs and preferences of the American workforce.<sup>6</sup>

The trend toward a bifurcation in working time neither reflects nor supports workers' desires for a balance between paid work and family time. Effective responses to this growing 'aspiration divide' must focus on establishing reasonable expectations and boundaries for how jobs are structured and rewarded. The public good and the welfare of families depend on creating public policies that promote a level playing field in which employers do not face incentives either to shorten or to extend the work week unduly.

#### *The Gender Divide and the Persistence of Work and Parenting Inequality*

The multifaceted time divides between work and family, long and short work weeks, and ideals and aspirations are converging to reinforce a "gender divide" between women and men. This divide takes several forms, all of which recreate older gender inequalities in new and problematic ways.

The bifurcation of the labor force, for example, is not gender neutral. Women are more likely to hold part-time jobs, which may not meet their families' financial needs or provide long-term opportunities for career development. Just as overly long work weeks erode the chances for parenting equality and men's equal family involvement, overly short work weeks—especially for women—can contribute to gender inequality at home and at work by placing pressure on women to take on more of the parenting and housework load. Women work about six hours less per week than men do, on average, and the proportion of women putting in very long hours trails the proportion of men by even more. And since the statistics most often cited on the gender gap in wages adjust for these differences, they capture only a portion of the gender gap in earnings that emerges from differences in working time. Crittenden (2001) endeavors to capture the full loss of wages resulting from motherhood due to reduced work weeks as well as years out of the labor force. She estimates that the cost of becoming a mother in terms of lost lifetime earnings can easily exceed half-a-million dollars for a middle-income woman and well over a million dollars for a woman with a college degree.

On the other side of the occupational divide, jobs requiring excessive time commitments also subvert gender equality. Certainly, the long hours expected of managers and other professionals contribute to the glass ceiling on women's mobility and women's relative absence in the highest echelons of management and the professions. What's more, we found that women holding highly demanding jobs with long working hours are less likely than their male peers to enjoy the flexibility and autonomy to meld heavy work commitments with life outside the office. Women who put in

long hours at the workplace are less likely than men with similarly long work days to report that they can exercise a measure of control over their schedules.

It is often said that the imbalances between men and women at home and work are simply the result of their preferences. Men prefer to work long hours; women prefer to spend more time with their families. But we found that both women and men tend to prefer a flexible balance between home and the workplace.<sup>7</sup> While women may wish to work slightly less than men, on average, this small difference is overshadowed by the large diversity within gender categories and by a growing agreement among men and women about what would ease their work-family conflicts. There are many women—and men—who would prefer to blend a thirty- to forty-hour-a-week work career with a rich and committed life outside the office. This balance is unlikely to prove workable, however, in jobs and occupations where fifty to sixty hours is the norm and heavy costs accrue to working less. Workers across the gender divide worry that any time they take for family pursuits will undermine their credibility as committed workers and exact a heavy price in the long run. The new occupational structure allows choices, but for too many these are forced choices between unpalatable alternatives—either too much work or too little.

It is thus highly misleading to equate workers' actions with their preferences. Meyers and Gornick (2003, p. 22) point out that in today's highly constrained environment, "the meaningful question is neither 'What do women and men want?' nor 'What do families want?' but, instead: 'In a much changed world—one where women are fully valued as earners and men as carers, where employment arrangements enable workers to combine employment and parenting, where public policies provide critical supports and incentives for both women and men—would women and men choose differentiated engagements in earning and caring, up through and including their children's teenage years?' " We simply do not know the answer to this question, they conclude, and will not know until public policies supporting a gender-egalitarian society are adopted, implemented, and sustained over time. Only then might we "be able to uncover what it is that women and men—and families—'really want' in relation to earning and caring."

#### *The Parenting Divide and the Penalties of Involved Parenthood*

The final divide is the one that separates involved parents from other workers. When it comes to parenting, mothers and fathers alike continue to confront work structures that penalize parental involvement and reinforce parenting inequities. Fathers as well as mothers would like more family-supportive workplaces and would trade other work-related benefits to have them.

The principles of justice and fairness are reason enough to remedy the inequities that continue to divide workers by gender and parental status. Beyond its intrinsic merit, however, equal opportunities for balancing work and parenting are crucial for the welfare of new generations and for the common good. In an era of diverse and changing family arrangements, children increasingly depend on the earnings of women and need to be able to count on a wide net of caretakers, including fathers, mothers, and others. For single mothers, who often are left to provide the lion's share of both breadwinning and caretaking on their own, the need to create both work opportunities and child care support is even more pressing. The precipitous rise of single-parent families headed by fathers, which now account for over 10 percent of all single-parent families, contributes to men's growing desire and need for jobs that do not penalize parental involvement. (See Jacobs and Gerson, chapter 3 and also Fritsch, 2001.) Creating equal opportunities—for women as paid workers and for men as family caretakers—is thus an essential ingredient in the formulation of effective and just social policies.

### WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?

Time, like money, is a scarce and unequally distributed resource. Although each day contains twenty-four hours and each week consists of seven days, institutional arrangements and personal responsibilities constrain the ways that time can be "spent." Yet today's social arrangements and economic trends pose time constraints and create time dilemmas in different ways for different social groups. In considering the future of family, work, and gender, we thus need to move beyond a focus on individual choices or values to consider the full range and social sources of our multifaceted time divides.

Our economy is producing too much work for some and too little work for others, leaving workers at both ends of the spectrum facing different, but equally severe, difficulties. Neither the structure of work nor the provision of public services has responded sufficiently to the widespread and deeply anchored changes taking place in our gender and family relationships. As a consequence, we face a growing divide not just between family and work, but also between overly-demanding and under-rewarded jobs, between women and men, between parents and other workers, and between workers' aspirations and the options they are offered. Any debate about the changing contours of time use needs to consider not just worker preferences in the context of forced choices but also the fundamental right of workers and parents to meet their own and their families' needs. Resolving our growing time dilemmas requires reconsidering the structure of work and the nature of community responsibility.

What are the implications of these time divides for developing effective social policies? Specific policy reforms will work best if they reflect a comprehensive, yet flexible vision of the goals we seek to achieve. These goals include a more equitable balance between work and family responsibilities, protection for parents and children and for the opportunities of all workers, and an array of genuine options for reducing the time divides separating home and work, women and men, the overworked and the underemployed. To reach these goals, we need to consider new and broader ways to restructure the workplace, to affirm the principle of equal opportunity as well as the rights of parents and workers, and to rethink the responsibilities of employers, communities, and public institutions.

There is, however, no "one size fits all" solution to the time divides of contemporary Americans. Beyond any one specific approach, work-family policies need to promote family-supportive working conditions without assuming or imposing a uniform vision on everyone. The new diversity in family arrangements and worker circumstances reminds us that social policies need to be sensitive to the myriad needs facing households with varying structures, incomes, and priorities. This means reducing time for the overworked and providing more work to the underemployed. It means establishing more flexibility in rigid job structures and creating institutional supports outside the workplace, such as community supports for childcare and child rearing. It means being attentive to the needs of workers contending with different economic resources, family circumstances, and gender arrangements. It means creating a range of policies that enable people to meet their work and family aspirations, as they define them and as they change over time. In short, workers need genuine options and social supports, not moralizing about the "choices" they have been forced to make. Indeed, creating a "culture of tolerance" that recognizes the diversity of needs among parents and workers may be the most important contribution a national debate can make.

In addition to discussing the place of work and family in our national culture, we need to consider three types of policy approaches: "work facilitating" and "family support" reforms that foster a better integration of family and paid work; "equal opportunity" reforms that insure the

rights of all workers, regardless of their gender or family circumstances, to combine the pursuit of work opportunities with parental involvement; and "work regulating" reforms that provide more equitable and reasonable ways to structure—and limit—working time. Each of these policy approaches is part of a broad array of needed reforms, including new workplace regulations and worker protections, the provision of social services, and legislative initiatives. We focus on each policy arena, but pay most attention to the possibilities for reorganizing working time. Although it has received far less attention than policy approaches stressing family support, changing the way we structure and regulate time holds the potential to alter the entire range of options available to workers and their families.

### FACILITATING WORK THROUGH FAMILY SUPPORT

Many worthwhile proposals to reduce work-family conflict are "work facilitating" because they help to reduce the barriers to participating in paid work, especially for dual-earning parents and employed mothers. Community-based and on-site childcare supports, for example, make it easier to combine work and family without necessarily reducing work commitments. Supports of this sort, while relatively undeveloped in the United States, are commonly available in other advanced industrial societies, where citizens are more likely to take such programs as daycare and parental leave for granted.

High quality childcare for young children is a central and, indeed, indispensable ingredient in any work-facilitating approach to work-family conflict. So, too, are well-developed after-school programs. Without such supports, parents are often forced to choose between providing for their children economically and providing for their children's psychological and emotional development. While these programs may seem out of reach, France's system of publicly funded, high quality preschools that are available to all makes it clear that universal childcare and after-school programs are not only worthy goals, but attainable ones. (See Gornick and Meyers, 2003, for a discussion of family-friendly policies in place in various European countries.)

In the United States, the lack of high quality, affordable childcare limits the ability of mothers to maintain their connection to the labor market after the birth of a child, and makes working full-time more difficult. Studies have found that some women report they would work more if childcare were more available (Hayes et al., 1990; Mason and Kuhlthau, 1992). Combined with parental leaves (Glass and Riley, 1998; Klerman and Leibowitz, 1999), childcare enables more mothers of young children to work. Thus, in these cases, addressing the concerns of working mothers has the potential for increasing the labor force and contributing to economic growth.

The dilemmas created by our collective resistance to creating high-quality childcare options are perhaps best—and most painfully—exemplified by the situation facing poor, single mothers. It is beyond ironic that poor mothers with meager childcare supports are being pushed into the least satisfying and most poorly paid jobs while middle-class mothers with better jobs face criticism for securing high-quality care for their children. These contradictions in our policies and perceptions surrounding work and family issues reveal more than just a deep ambivalence about the nature of social change; they point to the class and gender inequalities in how this ambivalence is expressed.<sup>8</sup> Childcare thus raises one set of issues for poor, single mothers and another for affluent parents. Yet all children, regardless of their economic and family circumstances, need quality care, and good social policy needs to recognize the collective stake we all have in providing it. Whether support is offered in the form of subsidies for kin networks and neighborhood efforts or for the direct provision of care, we need a variety of approaches that speak to the needs of parents and children

facing different obstacles and possessing differing resources. In Sweden, for example, mothers and fathers alike can take up to 16 months of paid parental leave, with legal assurances that the time they take to be with their children will not exact an undue toll on their careers when they return to the workplace.

Providing income supports to those in need is one of the most straightforward ways to support working families (Sklar et al., 2001). For those holding jobs at the bottom of the economic ladder, just staying afloat typically requires working two (or more) jobs and overtime. These jobs are often as personally unrewarding as they are economically unrewarded. Like those in high-paying and high-pressure professions, workers with more modest jobs, whether women or men, also generally seek a balance between work time and family time. But they also need to provide for the economic well-being of their families. Work-family policies should thus include efforts to insure that all workers are able to earn a decent standard of living—and, at the least, avoid falling into poverty—at a forty-hour-a-week job. With such income guarantees, some will surely continue to pursue overtime and supplemental jobs, but others will have the option of working less. At the least, a national minimum wage should guarantee that all full-time workers are paid enough to support their families without falling into poverty.

#### INSURING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY AND PROTECTING PARENTAL RIGHTS

Unless “family friendly” and “work facilitating” supports are intertwined with equal opportunity policies that insure the rights of workers regardless of gender or parental status, involved parents—who are more likely to be women, but increasingly include men as well—will have to sacrifice career opportunities for the sake of care, and committed workers will be forced to sacrifice family involvement for the sake of career and even financial security. In an economy that depends on the contributions of women as well as men, mothers as well as fathers, and parents as well as childless workers, we cannot afford to force people into such zero-sum choices.

Providing such protections will require legislative measures comparable to the rights gained by workers during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These legislative measures should outlaw discrimination against parents, provide equal work opportunities for women, and protect the rights of all parents to care for their children without incurring undue costs at the workplace. Just as the minimum wage and the forty-hour work week were legislative achievements that once seemed out of reach but are now taken for granted, securing parental rights and gender-equal opportunities at work need to be seen as an integral aspect of the restructuring of work and family in the twenty-first century. And just as earlier movements for workers’ rights once seemed overly intrusive but are now deemed essential to a productive and humane economy, insuring the rights of women and parents to care for their families without facing penalties at work also promises to enhance our social fabric as well as our private lives.

The costs now attached to taking some time from work to provide domestic care, for example, are not an inherent feature of work, but rather a socially constructed arrangement that is subject to social redefinition. Just as men who served in the military in the Second World War were not penalized for the time they spent serving their country, the time parents, and especially women, take to care for children need not be unduly penalized. As adults live longer and spend more years engaged in paid work, there should be protections for taking time for parental caretaking, especially for the relatively brief period when family responsibilities are at their peak. Without such opportunities for women and involved parents, many will find the price of care too high and those who do not will be penalized for their “sacrifices.”<sup>9</sup>

#### FAMILY SUPPORT THROUGH WORK FLEXIBILITY AND SOCIAL POLICY

Even if families could routinely rely on high quality childcare, widely available after-school programs, and income supports for the working poor, another crucial set of reforms would still be needed to give workers greater flexibility at the workplace, so that they have more options in deciding how to weave their public and private commitments. The Family and Medical Leave Act, for example, gives more private time to parents and those with ill or elderly dependents. These reforms increase the scope of the flexibility provided to workers and begin to redress the imbalance between work demands and family needs. By legislating the rights of workers across a broad range of work settings, these reforms provide a needed floor of *minimal* supports for new parents and others with heavy, but temporary family responsibilities. Studies of the impact of this legislation indicate that it has resulted in more workers being covered by this protection than had previously been the case (Waldfoegel, 1999).

Despite these demonstrable achievements, the United States still has a long way to go to catch up with many of our peers in the industrialized world. Europeans, for example, routinely enjoy four to six weeks of yearly vacation time. Recent legislation prohibits discrimination against part-time workers. In addition, access to a national health system gives most European workers the leeway to choose jobs and working hours without regard to their own or their family’s health insurance needs.

In a world where dual-earners and single parents are the clear majority of workers, a thirty-five hour work week not only makes sense but takes on a new urgency. Even this slight reduction in the standard would ease the time crunch on working parents, provide more time for caretaking, create the possibility of more gender equity in parenting and paid work, and allow workers in all types of families to participate more fully in their communities. Just as the forty hour work week has never been mandatory for everyone, the thirty-five hour work week would not be required of all. It would, however, become an expected standard that helps articulate the ideals, values, and norms of our society.<sup>10</sup> It would set expectations for employers and employees alike, promote coordination and efficiency within and among firms, and foster greater cooperation among workplaces, families, and communities.

The thirty-five hour work week may appear to be a radical idea, but the forty hour week seemed equally revolutionary before collective social action made it the standard. More important, the alternatives are less attractive. The most obvious alternative is to take no action and leave conditions as they are—that is, with the onus of responsibility on individual workers to cope as best they can. This scenario means leaving parents to face continuing and probably mounting pressure and allowing employers to presume fifty to sixty hour work weeks until these workers either burn out, retire early, or simply relinquish the hope of having a life outside of work. The next alternative is to emphasize individual flexibility and choice, but to ignore the structure of work in which such choices are made. Such an approach may help some workers find a better balance but only at the expense of equal opportunity and gender equity.

#### BRIDGING OUR TIME DIVIDES

The underlying demographic shifts and economic trends that have created our overlapping time divides have left few Americans untouched. As these demographic changes continue to make work and family issues more pressing, they are bound to gain political momentum. Some political observers, including Theda Skocpol (1999), Stanley Greenberg (1996), and Mona Harrington

(1999) have thus proposed to make support for "working families" the compelling rubric for advancing a progressive political agenda. Not simply a disparate collection of fanciful ideas, family-friendly policies are becoming increasingly central to the needs of families and to the nation's political agenda. What ordinary Americans need and increasingly want is not utopia, but rather a reasonable set of supports and options for managing work and family conflicts.

The policies we have suggested represent only a few of the myriad of possible approaches to address the problems of work and family change. Effective policies, whatever their form, can only emerge from a national debate that rejects a framework of parental blame to reconsider workplace organization and the structure of opportunities confronting workers and their families.

Hours matter in the balance people are able to strike in their lives, but solutions to modern family dilemmas most involve more than just tackling the problem of overwork. For the "over-worked Americans" concentrated in the professional and managerial occupations, job flexibility and genuine formal and informal support for family life matter as much as, and possibly more than, actual hours. For the "underworked," who are concentrated in the less rewarded and less demanding jobs, security and opportunity are paramount for their own welfare and that of their children.

One facet of change, however, spans the occupational and class structure: the emergence of women as a large and committed group of workers. They need and have a right to expect the same opportunities afforded men, and their families' well-being depends on their ability to gain these opportunities. We have found significant points of convergence between women and men in their commitment to work and their desire for family supports. However, we have also found that women workers, and especially those putting in long hours at professional jobs, have less job flexibility and do not enjoy the same level of support from supervisors and employers as do their male counterparts. Principles of justice as well as the new realities of families suggest that gender equity needs to be integral to any policy initiatives aimed at easing the conflicts between family and work.

At the broadest level, our discovery of multiple and intertwined time divides suggests that reform efforts should uphold two important principles: equality of opportunity for women and men and generous support for all involved parents, regardless of gender. We cannot afford to build work-family policies on old, outdated stereotypes, in which women are seen as less committed to work than men. Yet we can also not afford to build our policies on new stereotypes, in which working mothers and, to a lesser extent, fathers are depicted as avoiding their families and neglecting their children.

These images place all too many workers in a difficult bind, in which work commitment is defined as family neglect and family involvement is defined as a lack of work commitment. These are inaccurate images that offer untenable choices. If our findings are a guide, what workers need most is flexible, satisfying, and economically rewarding work in a supportive setting that offers them a way to integrate work and family life. With these supports, contemporary workers and the generations to follow will be able to bridge the time divides they face.

## NOTES

1. For a full listing of our sources, see Jacobs and Gerson (2004).
2. The differences between White men and their Black and Hispanic counterparts narrow roughly by one hour per week when education, age, occupation, and marital and parental status are taken into account, but these differentials in working time are not completely erased.

3. Interesting and important differences by race, marital status, and other factors are too numerous to discuss in detail here. For example, the longer working hours of African-American women are not simply a matter of their lower marriage rate, since married African-American women work about 3 hours longer per week than do White women.
4. Some situations may lead employers to prefer a smaller number of workers putting in overtime despite the added costs. In cyclical industries, for example, where expected downturns mean periodic layoffs and union contracts may require employers to assist those experiencing layoffs, firms may prefer a smaller workforce. And despite the increase in hourly pay, there are no additional benefits costs associated with requiring a smaller pool of workers to put in overtime. Nonetheless, analysis of national survey data indicate that those eligible for overtime tend to work fewer hours than those who are not eligible (Jacobs and Gerson, 1997).
5. See also Skocpol, 1999, for a discussion of the complexities of the issue of civic participation.
6. We recognize that one strand of economic theory suggests that an efficient labor market should produce just the type of jobs that workers want. In other words, if employers offered jobs that were too far out of line from what workers want, they would be forced to pay an extra "compensating differential" to attract an adequate staff. The evidence presented thus far, as well as findings on shift differentials for evening and night work discussed in Chapter 16, suggest that the labor market does not operate in this way. For a more detailed discussion of this issue, see Jacobs and Steinberg (1990) and Wax (2002).
7. To explain how contemporary women and men are experiencing the vast changes taking place at the workplace, in the home, and in the conflicts between them, we draw on findings from *The National Study of the Changing Workforce* (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg, 1998).
8. In another irony of the debate over childcare, affluent families, including those with nonworking mothers, routinely rely on nursery schools and "early childhood education programs" to give their children an educational head start. Yet "early education" becomes "childcare" when the focus turns to critiques of employed mothers.
9. For economic analyses of the benefits of equality in parenting and work, see Folbre (2001) and Gornick and Meyers (2003). Crittenden (2001) offers a critique of the myriad economic penalties attached to caring for children, as also noted in Jacobs and Gerson, chapter 6.
10. As Epstein et al. (1999), point out, the current normative standard for professional workers now extends well beyond the forty hour week, which is defined as "part-time" in law and other highly pressured occupations. These writers call for a fundamental restructuring of the "time norms" that equate work success with all-consuming commitment.

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