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Fighting For Time

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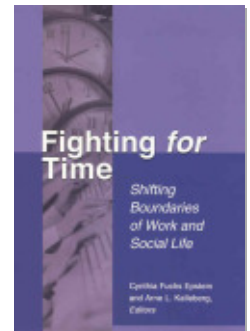
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— Chapter 2 —

Understanding Changes in American Working Time: A Synthesis

Jerry A. Jacobs and Kathleen Gerson

TIME ON THE job is a central and increasingly contested terrain in the lives of Americans. Working time sets the framework for both work and family life, and since time is not an expandable resource, long hours at the workplace must inevitably take time away from the rest of life. Long schedules of sixty hours a week or more mean that a worker is forced to scramble for time at home, inevitably missing even simple daily rituals such as breakfast or dinner with family and friends. Yet short workweeks of thirty hours or less, which offer more time for private pursuits, are not likely to provide the financial support most families need. Working time is thus basic to understanding broader aspects of changes in work-family relationships.

Many Americans appear to feel more pressed for time than ever before. Since the early 1990s, when Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American* (1991) hit a nerve in the American imagination, popular and academic concern about the time squeeze has continued to grow. The sense that the pace of life is increasingly hectic has prompted a burgeoning field of research on the difficulties facing contemporary workers as they try to resolve the competing demands of work and family.

Curiously, despite the concern for time-squeezed Americans, official statistics suggest that little if any change has occurred in the average workweek over the last several decades. Some time-diary

researchers, such as John Robinson and Geoffrey Godbey (1999), have even argued that a more important trend is the growth of leisure time. Does this mean that the common perception is simply wrong? Are the statistics skewed for some reason? Do the time squeezes of contemporary life stem from other social changes rather than from working time per se? How can we reconcile these divergent views?

This essay offers a framework for resolving these debates and apparent contradictions. Drawing on findings presented in our book, *The Time Divide: Work, Family and Gender Inequality* (Jacobs and Gerson 2004), it presents some of our most central conclusions about how to understand the causes, contours, and consequences of changes in working time over the last several decades.¹ In so doing, we aim to offer a more inclusive and coherent picture of these important social trends. Our analysis shows that time pressures are indeed real, but they have different roots than those suggested by Schor. We also find that no single trend can capture the variety of changes that characterize the labor force as a whole. Instead, it is more useful to see time as a new form of social inequality that is dividing a number of groups in our society—the overworked and the underemployed, men and women, and parents and nonparents, to mention a few. For this reason, it is crucial to move beyond a focus on national averages to look carefully at the way work is increasingly divided into longer and shorter workweeks. We also need to pay attention to the ways that family change has created different time pressures for different types of households. Across occupational contexts and demographic groups there is growing variation in the time demands confronting workers and their families. Once we pay attention to the complexity of our increasingly diverse labor force and family structures, the pieces of the puzzle fall into place.

TRENDS IN THE WORKWEEK

Although it may come as a surprise to most, the average length of the workweek has remained remarkably constant over the last thirty years. According to our analysis of the March Current Population Survey, a large national survey conducted monthly that forms the basis for many of the nation's labor-force data, the average man worked about 43.5 hours a week for pay in 1970; his counterpart in

2000 worked 43.1 hours. For employed women, the average workweek was 37.0 hours in 1970 and 37.1 hours in 2000 (see table 2.1).

We know that working time partly reflects the state of the economy, with the workweek shrinking during a recession and expanding during boom times, but what is remarkable is how slight these variations have been despite large changes in the nature of American economic life.² Reflecting the sluggish economy, from 2000 to 2002 men's average working hours declined less than one hour per week (0.7 hours), and women's hours declined less than half an hour (0.4 hours).³ Even during the more severe recession of the early 1980s, the average workweek for men lost just over one hour per week and that for women, less than half an hour.

Another important component of working time is vacation time, which has grown slightly for some groups and remained roughly constant for others. In 1997, those with one year of service with a firm received an average of just under two weeks of vacation time, while those with five years of service received 13.8 vacation days on average, up from 12.4 days in 1980. Those with ten years of service received just over three weeks of vacation, and those with twenty years of service received four weeks on average. Thus, it typically takes American workers twenty years of continuous service with one firm to obtain four weeks of paid vacation, and many

TABLE 2.1 Hours Worked per Week by Male and Female Nonfarm-Wage-Earning and Salaried Workers, 1970 and 2000

	Total Hours Worked (Mean)	Percentage Working Less Than Thirty Hours per Week	Percentage Working More Than Fifty Hours per Week
Men			
1970	43.5	4.5%	21.0%
2000	43.1	8.6	26.5
Women			
1970	37.0	15.5	5.2
2000	37.1	19.6	11.3

Source: Authors' estimates based on the March 1970 and 2000 Current Population Survey data.

never attain this degree of continuity in employment. Even those who do enjoy substantially less vacation time than workers in many European countries, where five- and six-week vacations are the legal standard for most. The vacation time enjoyed by American workers is surely paltry compared to that of other postindustrial nations, but it does not appear to have worsened substantially in recent years. Of course, we cannot know if changes have occurred in American workers' use of the vacation time they have accrued, but we have found that most employees take most of the time that they are offered.

The Growing Dispersion of Working Time

Though the length of the average workweek and average vacation time have changed only slightly, this overall stability can be misleading. The puzzle remains: If there is no substantial change in these averages, why do so many people feel so busy? In fact, the unchanging average masks a number of important changes that explain why large and growing groups of Americans are more squeezed for time than ever before.

One important trend is the growing dispersion—or variability—in the workweek among different types of jobs and workers. As jobs have diversified, the notion of an average workweek has less meaning than in the past (see table 2.1). In 1970, just under half of both men (48.2 percent) and women (48.5 percent) reported working forty hours a week. By 2000, these figures had dipped to just over two in five (41.0 percent for both men and women). In the same time period, the proportion working very long weeks has increased. In 1970, 21.0 percent of men worked fifty or more hours per week; by 2000, this figure had climbed to 26.5 percent. Among working women, the percentage working fifty or more hours per week rose from 5.2 to 11.3 percent during the same time period. Simultaneously, the percentage of workers who put in relatively short workweeks has also risen.

The busiest occupational groups tend to be professionals and managers. Over one in three men (37.2 percent) who work in professional, technical, or managerial occupations put in fifty hours or more per week on the job, compared to one in five (21.3 percent) in other occupations. For women, the comparable figures are one in

six for those in professional and managerial positions, compared to fewer than one in fourteen for other occupations. The gap in working time between the college-educated and those with more limited educational credentials has also grown since 1970. If life seems increasingly fast-paced to the many scholars and observers who write and read about these matters, it is partly because they are members of the group where this experience is indeed quite common.

Thorstein Veblen, writing in 1899, highlighted leisure as a defining feature of an elite lifestyle. By midcentury, however, this longstanding pattern had been reversed, as Harold Wilensky noted in 1963. During the decades since Wilensky wrote about this reversal, the gap between the amount of leisure that the poor have compared to the better-off has grown, with the poor and less educated having more leisure time—whether chosen by them or imposed on them.⁴ Thus, life feels busier and is busier for many Americans, especially those in the most highly rewarded occupations, yet alongside this development, a countervailing trend has left other American workers with less time at work than they might need and prefer.⁵

The Transformation of Family Life

A second, even more fundamental, change has occurred in the demographic composition of American families. Working time looks and feels different from the point of view of whole households than it does from the point of view of individuals. Yet the standard analyses of working time focus on the schedules of individual workers. Although individual schedules are surely the obvious place to start, time squeezes are created and experienced in the context of family units rather than of isolated individuals. A sixty-hour workweek takes on a different meaning for a husband married to a woman who also puts in sixty hours a week on the job than it does for a neighbor with the same working hours whose wife is not employed, or for a single parent, or for a single woman or man. Examining the workweek from the point of view of the whole family, rather than the individual, provides important insights into the way time pressures are experienced.

When we combine the hours of paid work for married couples (see table 2.2), we find that the length of the paid workweek has indeed increased from 52.5 hours per week in 1970 to 63.1 hours

TABLE 2.2 Trends in Joint Hours per Week of Paid Work by Nonfarm Husbands and Wives Aged Eighteen to Sixty-Four, 1970 and 2000

	Mean Total Hours Worked	Percentage Working Less Than Seventy Hours	Percentage Working More Than One Hundred Hours	Husband's Hours	Wife's Hours
1970					
All couples	52.5	63.4%	3.1%	38.9	33.6
Both work (35.9 percent)	78.0	24.9	8.7	44.1	33.9
Husband only works (51.4 percent)	44.4	96.0	0.0	44.4	0.0
Wife only works (4.6 percent)	35.5	99.6	0.0	0.0	35.5
Neither works (8.2 percent)	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
2000					
All couples	63.1	53.7%	9.3%	41.5	26.4
Both work (59.6 percent)	81.6	18.9	14.5	45.0	36.6
Husband only works (26.0 percent)	44.9	95.2	0.0	44.9	0.0
Wife only works (7.1 percent)	37.2	97.9	0.0	0.0	37.2
Neither works (7.2 percent)	0.0	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

Source: Authors' estimates based on the March 1970 and 2000 Current Population Survey data.

per week in 2000. This leads to a paradox: the average individual workweek has not changed substantially for either men or women, but the paid workweek of many families has changed significantly. Why? Primarily because women's labor-force participation, particularly married women's, has grown dramatically. In 1970, male-breadwinner families (in which the husband worked for pay and the wife did not) represented a majority, though a small one, of married couples (51.4 percent). By 2000, this group represented barely more than one quarter of married couples (26.0 percent). Dual-earner couples have risen to predominance. In 1970, dual earners represented just over one third of married couples (35.9 percent). By 2000, they represented three in five (59.6 percent). In fact, dual-earner couples today are more common than were male-breadwinner couples thirty years ago.

The workweek of dual-earner couples today is quite similar to that of such couples several decades ago, but there are many more dual-earner couples than there used to be. The vast majority of the change in working time over the last thirty years can be traced to changes in the kinds of families that predominate, rather than changes in working time within these groups. Moreover, in addition to the large change in family types, there also has been a small increase in the workweek for each type of family. Dual-earner families thus put in 81.6 hours per week on the job in 2000, compared with 78.0 hours per week in 1970. Male breadwinners worked 44.4 hours per week on average in 1970 and 44.9 hours per week in 2000.

Single parents, who are overwhelmingly mothers, constitute another important group whose members are truly caught in a time bind. Over one-fifth (21.9 percent) of families were headed by women in 2000, more than double the 1970 percentage (9.9 percent) (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). But despite the fact that the proportion of families living in these circumstances rose dramatically, their average workweek actually remained unchanged over three decades: 38.5 hours per week. Although single fathers constitute a much smaller group than single mothers, it is a rapidly growing one, and these men face the same time dilemmas as single mothers. The proportion of families headed by single fathers doubled from 1.2 percent in 1970 to 2.4 percent in 2000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 2002). Single dads thus work about the same average

workweeks as single moms—36.8 hours per week for single fathers in 2000, which represents a drop of two hours since 1970. Here again, despite relatively unchanging average workweeks, the dispersion of working time has grown for single fathers and mothers, as it has for other groups. Being a single parent poses daunting time dilemmas that a growing group of mothers and fathers cannot escape.

BEYOND WORKING TIME

Changes in the configuration of working time, along with changes in family structure, are central to understanding how and why Americans feel overworked and time-squeezed. Furthermore, the influence of these forces is magnified by other social changes that may be less obvious but are equally important. Some of these changes are linked to ways that jobs are structured, regardless of how much time they demand. Some are linked to changes in private life that have added intensifying time pressures. At the workplace, aspects of work such as intensity, scheduling, and flexibility may matter as much as the time a job takes, especially for those in time-consuming occupations. At home, the social and cultural organization of child care and housework are equally consequential. Changes in working time, then, are best understood as part of a much larger picture.

Intensity of Work

The intensity of work can be as important as the amount of time it takes. Although it is difficult to measure, work demands may well have intensified in recent decades. Comparatively small changes in working time may thus obscure more subtle changes in the effort, energy, and concentration expected on the job.

Over the course of the twentieth century, the rise of new technologies fueled improvements in labor productivity as they helped raise living standards for most Americans. These changes allowed workers to produce more in a shorter period of time, but they also likely contributed to increasing expectations for more concentrated effort on the job.⁶ Corporate downsizing may also have increased the scope of many white-collar jobs, as fewer employees have had

to assume broader responsibilities. Thus, a range of factors make it reasonable to conclude that many late-twentieth and early-twenty-first-century workers are putting in more concentrated effort than their counterparts in earlier generations.

Thus, a high-performance employment system that puts pressure on fewer employees to produce more has emerged alongside the growth of dual-earner couples, many of whom are likely to hold such high-demand positions. The result is a collision between the expectations of employers and the ability of workers to maintain the pace that has come to be expected.

Job Schedules and Evening and Weekend Work

Changes in the way that work is organized, and especially the emergence of “nonstandard” work shifts, add to the growing complexities of balancing work and family time. Work is increasingly taking place at times that were formerly considered private time, such as at night and on weekends. Indeed, Harriet Presser (2003) maintains that we are moving toward a twenty-four-hour, seven-day-a-week economy in which employees are more likely than at any other time since the rise of industrialism to work evenings, nights, rotating shifts, and weekends. Nearly one-fourth of all married couples with at least one earner contain a spouse who works nonstandard hours. That percentage is even higher for those with children, and it rises to 30.6 percent for couples with children under age five. Whether they lack child-care options or the funds to pay for them or simply believe that children should be cared for by their own parents, these couples are crafting a strategy of tag-team parenting to counter the work demands they face. Yet these strategies can exact a toll on relationships and are in fact associated with elevated rates of separation and divorce. Shifting work schedules, along with new technologies such as email and cell phones, contribute to the sense that work increasingly spills over into family life, even as the needs of children become more diffuse and complex.

Flexibility on the Job

Although the debate over work and family change in America has focused largely on the issue of overwork, amount of time spent

working is not the whole story in the workplace, just as it is not the whole story at home. Working time, however important, is only one of several ingredients contributing to both work-family conflict and gender inequality. Workplace structure and culture matter, and workers who enjoy job flexibility and employer support are clearly better off than those who do not.

Thus, flexibility matters. Like actual working time, flexibility also is distributed unequally. Professional jobs tend to make more time demands, but they also offer more flexibility than other jobs, leaving many middle-class and working-class families facing different, if equally perplexing, challenges. Professional workers often put in longer hours, but they have more control and autonomy on the job and more economic resources with which to cope (including hiring help). Working-class families are less likely to put in the longest workweeks, but their jobs are also less likely to afford a flexible weaving of family and work obligations, and they can rely on fewer economic resources to cover the gaps.

Gender is another factor. Even though women and men face many similar personal dilemmas, women also face their own, for inequality persists at the workplace and in the home, leaving women more exposed to the conflicts and pressures of balancing work and family. As women build ever-stronger ties to the workplace and families confront the time squeezes posed by dual-earning arrangements, mothers and fathers must cope with conflicts that are structured not simply by family demands, but more fundamentally by intransigent job constraints. When women and men face similar opportunities, they tend to respond in similar ways. Yet the organization of gender means that, more often than not, the situations confronting women and men present different options and pressures. In the struggle to resolve work-family conflicts, persisting gender inequality continues to place women at a disadvantage. Women not only shoulder more responsibility for domestic work, but also face larger obstacles at the workplace, including less autonomy and flexibility on the job and more pressure to make career sacrifices by cutting back temporarily on time at work in the face of family contingencies.

This pattern also reflects differences in the opportunities and constraints they face. The organization of economic and family life leaves women with both greater pressures and more options to pull back from work. Although the gender gap in earnings has declined and a

rising proportion of wives earn as much as or more than their husbands, most couples do not fit this pattern. In about one dual-earner household in five, the wife earns more than her husband, and some of these cases may represent temporary fluctuations in earnings rather than an enduring role reversal.⁷ The more common context, in which a husband earns more, encourages mothers to reduce their time at work and fathers to maximize their earnings by working more.

The Cumulative Influence of Rising Work Pressures

Other aspects of work in addition to the actual time a job demands are adding to the time pressures experienced by American workers. Some jobs require an intensifying work effort; others are structured around nonstandard schedules; and still others involve both inconvenient hours and intense pressures. Control over the conditions of work, especially in the form of autonomy and flexibility on the job, can alleviate some of these strains, especially for those who must put in very long workdays. But these work advantages are distributed unequally, leaving many—especially women and employed parents—with less opportunity to organize their work and family lives as they would prefer.

BEYOND THE WORKPLACE: INTENSIFYING FAMILY PRESSURES

The other element in the debate as to whether Americans are overworked or in fact have more leisure time than in the past requires looking more closely at basic trends in housework and child care. These family demands and responsibilities pose challenges that are added on to pressures at work.

Housework and Child Care

At first glance, it might be tempting to conclude that domestic pressures have lessened in recent decades, especially since time-diary studies find that the number of hours spent in housework and child care have dropped. Indeed, the purported growth in leisure discovered by Robinson and Godbey (1999) can be understood principally

as a decline in time spent in housework rather than a change in the length of the paid workweek. Thus, it may appear that some groups have experienced a decline in the total amount of paid and unpaid work. A deeper look, however, reveals a more complex picture.

Time-diary studies provide an in-depth picture of the changing contours of housework and thus complement the findings of surveys and census materials.⁸ Their finding of a decline in the time families spend in housework can be partly explained by the rise of smaller families and the later ages of first marriage. Since wives spend more time on housework than do single women, delayed marriage contributes to the growth in the population of single women who spend less time doing household chores.

The size of the housework load also depends on family size, and the average number of children in American households has declined since the 1950s. Between 1955 and 1959, the average woman in the United States could expect to have 3.7 children. Today, this figure, known to demographers as the total fertility rate, is at 2.1 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1979, 2002). Parenting is a time-intensive responsibility, and fewer children means less time spent in child care.

Even so, some offsetting trends have dampened the effect that smaller families might be expected to have on time squeezes. Although people are having fewer children, parents are spending more time with each child (Bianchi 2000). Children are spending less time playing with other children and more time with parents. First, fewer brothers and sisters and fewer children in the neighborhood means less unsupervised play time for groups of children. Concerns about crime also make parents more watchful, even in neighborhoods with relatively low crime rates. More programmed activities for children, especially in the middle class, require more time shuttling them between sports games, music lessons, play dates, and other organized activities, further disrupting a more informal, unstructured flow of family time (Lareau 2002). Alongside these trends there appears to be a growing emphasis on “intensive mothering,” which also is concentrated among middle-class families (Hays 1997).

Rising pressures at work thus combine with increasing expectations for parenting to reinforce the time pressures already confronting American families. These pressures are especially concentrated among employed parents. Middle-class families bear the

brunt of these new time demands and expectations, but they also are more likely to have flexibility at work, as well as more economic resources to ease the burden in various ways. Working-class families are more likely to have jobs with limited, if any, flexibility and limited financial resources to cushion the parental burden.

Paid Help, Immigrants, and Child Care

The time pressures experienced by dual-earner and single-parent families require rethinking the demands of the workplace. Indeed, the gap between the demands of the job and the contours and needs of family life has grown increasingly wide. For example, current labor regulations date back to the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, when the male-breadwinner family predominated, and even this legislation does not cover most professional and managerial workers. The time has come to restructure paid work to create a far better fit with the needs of contemporary families.

Yet work restructuring, however important, cannot provide a complete resolution to the binds facing families. Alongside more genuinely family-friendly and gender-equal workplaces, parents also need to be able to depend on help from other dedicated, qualified, and well-rewarded caretakers. Twenty-first-century parents cannot realistically provide the sole care for their children and must increasingly turn for help to others, whether in the form of day care outside the home or paid child care within it.

Traditionally, conservatives, uneasy with women's march into the workplace, have raised concerns about the propriety of relying on paid caregivers to help rear children. Recently, however, some feminists have joined the chorus of critics who worry about this strategy. This perspective focuses on how the expansion of opportunities for professional women in the United States and other countries has fueled a demand for nannies and other caretakers, especially in the absence of widely available high-quality publicly sponsored child care. Increasingly, these caretakers are drawn from the ranks of immigrants from poorer countries. It is thus not surprising that attention has turned to concern for the perils posed by an expanded market for domestic workers.⁹ From this perspective, immigration is seen more as a new dimension of economic colonialism than as an age-old pursuit of opportunity by poor women

and their families. Rich countries—in particular affluent groups within those countries—that once drained poor countries of natural resources and brainpower now are seen to extract caregiving while the children of the immigrants are left behind. Working parents, especially full-time employed mothers, are seen as accomplices in a new form of international exploitation.¹⁰

In a society that fails to assign appropriate social or economic value to the care of children, all child-care workers, like all involved parents, face disadvantage and discrimination. Indeed, immigrants and other women who work as nannies in private households may be even more vulnerable than those who care for children in public settings, especially if they do not speak English and can count on few friends or relatives for support. Like their American-born counterparts, immigrant domestic workers may be not be paid fairly or regularly and may be physically or emotionally abused. Furthermore—and unlike their American peers—they may also be threatened with deportation if they protest. In addition, the problems facing private domestic workers, whether or not they are immigrants, are especially prone to invisibility because their isolation limits the options for organizing as a group or informing others of their plight.¹¹

Though some may be tempted to do so, the deficiencies and dangers of an inadequate child-care system should not be blamed on employed mothers, who all confront perplexing obstacles. Such an approach pits women against each other, making it seem that the economic independence of middle-class women can only come at the expense of poor immigrant women and their children. By framing paid caretaking as the “commodification” of care, this perspective adds to the critique facing all women who hold paid jobs, whether in public workplaces or private homes.¹²

The focus on private child care obscures the more widespread trend toward greater reliance on child-care centers, where the conditions of work and the rights of workers are more visible. In fact, the rise of the rate of employment among middle-class women does not inevitably create a major infusion of foreign nannies. Indeed, published statistics on the U.S. labor force suggest that the largest increase in child-care employment has occurred among workers in child-care centers, not among domestic workers in private households. (Since an unknown portion of domestic workers are un-

documented, it is difficult to calculate these comparisons precisely.) Most child-care workers are also born in the United States, with immigrants making up a substantial yet minority proportion only among domestic workers in private households.

Moreover, private household workers constitute a small and declining segment of the U.S. labor force. Table 2.3 shows that the number of domestic workers peaked in 1940 at 2.4 million and declined sharply during the 1960s. It fell below one million for the first time in 2000 and now represents less than 1 percent (0.66 percent) of the labor force. It appears, then, that the prevalence of nannies declined just as married women entered the labor force in ever-growing numbers. Furthermore, of those who work in private households, many are not directly providing child care. In 2000, roughly 275,000 were doing child care in private household settings, whereas the rest were performing other forms of domestic service, such as cooking and cleaning. All of these workers deserve good pay and working conditions, but they are not all caring for children.

These recent labor-force statistics probably miss some immigrants, but they are also more complete than those of earlier censuses. The level of underreporting would have had to grow at a

TABLE 2.3 Number of Workers in Private Household Employment, 1900 to 2000

Year	Private Household Workers	Total Labor Force	Percentage of Labor Force Working in Private Households
1900	1,579	29,030	5.44%
1910	1,851	37,291	4.96
1920	1,411	42,206	3.34
1930	1,998	48,686	4.10
1940	2,412	51,742	4.66
1950	1,539	58,999	2.61
1960	1,825	67,990	2.69
1970	1,204	80,603	1.49
1980	1,229	97,279	1.26
1990	1,023	117,914	0.87
2000	894	135,208	0.66

Source: Census and Current Population Survey data.

Note: In thousands.

remarkable rate to offset the marked declines the figures show. These declines can also be found in other studies. Surveys that look at who is taking care of children reinforce the view that nannies represent a small slice of the child-care pie. According to U.S. Census information, 4.8 percent of preschool children in 1991 were cared for in the child's home by a non-family member. The U.S. Census Bureau's 1998 statistics show a downward trend in this arrangement, from 7.0 percent in 1977 to 5.1 percent in 1994 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1998, 2002). Sandra Hofferth and Deborah Phillips (1987) also report a decline in nanny care between 1965, 1977, and 1982. Clearly, the growth of mothers' labor-force participation has not depended on a growing pool of nannies, whether they are from this country or from poorer countries. Child-care centers have absorbed much of the growing demand for child-care services, and these centers principally employ U.S.-born women workers. Our preliminary estimates from the 2000 census suggest that nearly 90 percent of employees in child-care centers were born in the United States, and about 30 percent of nannies are foreign-born.

There are surely many heart-wrenching cases of immigrant women who leave their own families to care for other people's children, but these cases are not the norm and cannot tell the complete, more complex, story of child care. Rather, most child-care workers are not immigrants, and most immigrants come to the United States seeking opportunities they could not find in their native land. They also are likely to be embedded in a process of chain migration, in which they join a spouse or family member who has already established a base and aid in the effort to bring other family members to their newly chosen home. Indeed, many immigrant women are married either to an immigrant husband also residing in the United States or to a native-born American. Many also either bring their children with them or send for them once they feel settled and secure. To be sure, the wages of all domestic workers in the United States are far too low, but even these modest wages typically exceed what immigrant women could have expected to earn in their country of origin. For these reasons, the image of exploitation also needs to be balanced with a parallel story of opportunity for immigrant women.

All child-care workers, native- and foreign-born, should receive a living wage as well as fair and just working conditions. Living

wages for paid caretakers benefit the children as well as the workers. Fair wages reduce turnover, create more satisfied employees, and promote durable relationships that are a key to high-quality care. Unfortunately, American society has yet to provide these conditions in a consistent and egalitarian fashion.

The contours of the child-care quandary are far broader and more complicated than images of disadvantaged foreign workers can capture. American women are coping as best they can within the confines of a system that provides few supports for working mothers, whether they work in an office, a child-care center, or at home. Not a certain subgroup of employed mothers but American society as a whole is responsible for the failure to create child-care supports on a wide scale. Certainly, all care work cannot and need not be done by working parents, and there is nothing inherently wrong with hiring domestic help. If those workers are well paid and respected, they and their families can benefit from the job opportunities afforded by the rise of paid employment for all women.

SOLVING THE TIME-SQUEEZE PUZZLE

The sense that Americans are overworked and time-squeezed is rooted in basic social changes that are placing increasing pressures on workers and their families. Focusing on average changes in working time contributes to misunderstanding the sources and shape of these new time squeezes, since we find that the average workweek for individual workers has changed very little in the last several decades. This apparent stability, however, masks important changes in the ways that jobs and families are structured. An increasingly heterogeneous workforce has been accompanied by a dispersion in working time, with more jobs requiring either very long or short workweeks. This time divide among jobs tends to be reflected in an occupational divide, with long workweeks concentrated among managerial and professional workers and shorter ones more likely to be found among workers with more modest educational and occupational credentials. To some extent, this occupational divide mirrors a sharpening in income inequality and is linked to other broad institutional shifts in the structure of the workplace such as downsizing, the decline in manufacturing, and the rise of service work.¹³

A second factor contributing to increasing time pressures can be found in the transformation of family life. Even though individual workers may not be putting in significantly longer days at the workplace, family time is squeezed because more household members are employed. The rise of dual-earning couples has contributed to a large increase in the combined working time of married couples, and the rise of single-parent homes has created more households in which one worker is solely responsible for both breadwinning and domestic caretaking.

These developments go a long way to explaining why Americans are more pressed for time, and other work and family changes add additional pressures. Beyond the issue of working time, job structure matters. Job intensity may have increased in many occupations, as nonstandard work schedules have expanded for a growing number of workers. For those in high-pressure jobs, flexibility, autonomy, and control over the conditions of work help ease the difficulties posed by long workweeks, but these privileges tend to be reserved for those at the higher levels of bureaucratic hierarchies. Yet gaining access to these jobs is especially hard for the workers who most need these supports, such as mothers and other women as well as involved parents of either sex.

The other factor in the time squeeze is the configuration of non-work time, for domestic life also involves increasing pressures. Parenting norms emphasizing “intensive” caretaking create unattainable standards for employed mothers and fathers. In the absence of widely available high-quality child care, parents must develop private strategies for coping, including hiring others to care for their children. Though necessary, this strategy has triggered criticism across the political spectrum, adding to the pressures facing middle- and working-class parents alike.

The basic forces creating these time pressures are deeply anchored in our social and economic arrangements. Thus, as we argue in *The Time Divide* (2004), finding solutions will depend on developing broad policies geared to the new needs of twenty-first-century families by altering the basic organization of our work and community institutions, including moving toward a shorter workweek norm, developing a wide array of child-care services and supports, and mandating more family-friendly and gender-equal workplaces. These changes will not be easy to achieve, but they are

our best hope for providing genuine resolutions to the time squeezes that confront growing numbers of Americans.

NOTES

1. For a full presentation of our argument, findings, and analysis, see Jacobs and Gerson (2004).
2. The correlation between the unemployment rate and the length of the workweek is -0.6 .
3. These statistics were provided by Randy Ilg of the Bureau of Labor Statistics.
4. Leisure may be a misnomer in this context, since we find that many of these workers would prefer to work more.
5. In *The Time Divide: Work, Family and Gender Inequality*, we show that workers putting in relatively short workweeks (less than thirty-five hours) would generally prefer to work more, while those putting in excessive hours at work (fifty hours or more per week) would generally prefer to work more.
6. The British labor historian Chris Nyland (1989) has suggested, for example, that historical reductions in working time have involved a gradual and concomitant rise in the intensity of work.
7. This figure is based on our estimate using information from the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workplace (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1998).
8. These different methodologies and data sources have offsetting strengths and weaknesses. For an in-depth discussion of the methodological factors in the measurement of time use by time-diaries, surveys, and other methods, see Jacobs and Gerson (2004).
9. See, for example, Barbara Ehrenreich and Arlie R. Hochschild (2002) and Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001).
10. Ehrenreich and Hochschild (2002, 3–4) call this “the female underside of globalization, whereby millions of Josephines from poor countries in the south migrate to do the ‘women’s work’ of the north—work that affluent women are no longer able or willing to do. These migrant workers often leave their own children in the care of grandmothers, sisters and sisters-in-law. . . . The lifestyles of the First World are made possible by a global transfer of the services associated with a wife’s traditional role—child care, homemaking, and sex—from poor countries to rich ones.”
11. See Hondagneu-Sotelo (2001) and Judith Rollins (1985).

12. The commodification of housework is part of a long history of post-industrial development. New ways of producing domestic goods and services may appear controversial at the outset, but ultimately become widely accepted. We no longer expect mothers to sew their children's clothes, for example, yet we do not define the purchase of clothing as a commodification of care. Similarly, in countries where public childcare is widely available and respected, such as France or Denmark, paying for care is not deemed harmful to the well-being of either children or the people who take care of them.
13. For a discussion of the rise in income inequality, see Robert Lerman (1997).

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