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HOURS OF PAID WORK IN DUAL-EARNER COUPLES: THE UNITED STATES IN CROSS-NATIONAL PERSPECTIVE*

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In this paper we examine the hours of paid work of husbands and wives in 10 industrialized countries, using data from the Luxembourg Income Study. We present results on the average hours of paid work put in jointly by couples, on the proportion working very long weekly hours, and on gender equality in working time within families. The United States ranks at or near the top on most indicators of working time for couples, because of (1) a high proportion of dual-earner couples; (2) long average work weeks, especially among women; and (3) a high proportion of individuals who work very long hours. In terms of gender equality, the United States ranks above average in paid working time among dual-earner couples with no children but fares less well among working parents. Finally, we discuss policies and institutions that may help explain the distinctive United States results, namely the long hours and moderate levels of gender equality, including the regulation of maximum hours, the demand for part-time work, and the public provision of child care.

While issues related to working time have been actively debated since the earliest days of the Industrial Revolution (Roediger and Foner 1989), the last 20 years have brought renewed interest in work hours, both in the United States and abroad.¹ Labor unions, policy-makers, and scholars across several disciplines have focused on paid working time from at least three perspectives. First, reducing working hours is often advocated as a tool for lowering unemployment and distributing labor demand more equitably. This perspective has been common in Europe in recent years, where many countries have been plagued by persistently high unemployment since the late 1970s (International Labour Organization 1995; Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 1998; 32 HOURS 2000).

Second, as women's labor force participation has steadily increased across the industrialized countries, especially among mothers of young children, many families

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now grapple with severe time pressures as both women and men struggle to balance time on the job with responsibilities at home. The time demands of employment often affect the quality of life of all family members and raise growing concerns about the well-being of children and other dependent family members in need of care (Schor 1991; Hochschild 1997; Jacobs and Gerson 1998a). Long hours spent in paid work may also crowd out opportunities for community involvement and reduce civic engagement (Putnam 2000).²

Third, feminists continue to wrestle with concerns about gender inequality in the labor market. Recent research indicates that despite the long-term increase in women's labor market attachment, substantial gender differentials persist in both participation rates and hours; gender gaps in time spent working for pay are especially sharp among parents (Gornick 1999). Undoubtedly, a significant portion of these gaps are linked to women's disproportionate responsibilities for caregiving and other work in the home. Gaps in women's and men's time spent in market work have enduring consequences because they contribute to inequalities in cash and non-cash earnings (Blau, Ferber, and Winker 1998; Gornick and Jacobs 1996; Rubery, Smith, and Fagan 1998). Gendered time disparities also reinforce entrenched patterns of gender segregation in jobs and occupations (Reskin and Padavic 1994). For women in couples, marked intra-family differentials in hours spent working for pay raise a host of concerns about power imbalances in the family and about wives' economic vulnerability should they lose access to their husbands' earnings (Bianchi, Caspar, and Peltola 1996; Hobson 1990).

In this paper, we analyze family working time in the middle 1990s in 10 industrialized countries: the United States, Canada, and eight diverse European countries. We address a series of empirical questions about the working time of dual-earner couples: (1) How does the paid working time of dual-earner couples in the United States compare to that of their counterparts in Canada and Europe, considering both average hours and the percentage working very long hours? (2) How does the difference in working time between couples with and without children vary across countries? (3) Which countries report the most gender-egalitarian patterns of working time? We ask how gender equality is affected by the presence of children and if gender equality is most evident in families working short, intermediate, or long hours.

This study is distinctive in several ways. First, while several cross-national studies (OECD 1998; Rubery, Smith, and Fagan 1998) have documented that United States workers spend long hours in the labor market on both an annual and weekly basis, few studies have focused on the joint work hours of dual-earner couples, as we do in this study. Second, we focus on cross-national variation in the dispersion of individuals and couples' hours, in addition to the average length of the workweek. Finally, we integrate concerns about gender equality into our analyses of working time.

CROSS-NATIONAL VARIATION IN INDIVIDUALS' WORKING TIME

Cross-national comparisons generally conclude that average working time in European countries is far shorter than that in the United States. These findings are typically based on annual hours worked, and they include both full-time and part-time workers (see, for example, OECD 2000). However, this is a problematic basis for cross-

national comparison because annual hours among all workers are influenced both by rates of part-time work, an important but distinct feature of working time, and by rates of labor market entry and exit during the course of any given year. Focusing on full-time workers enables a useful comparison of work hours, especially with respect to the United States, where rates of part-time work are relatively low. Lehdorff (2000) reports that the typical full-time European worker logs in the range of 1,700 to 1,800 hours per year; 1,800 hours equals 40 hours per week for 45 weeks. Unfortunately, this indicator is not available for the United States, but the fact remains that the average U.S. worker (part-time and full-time combined) puts in more hours per year on the job than the typical full-time worker in Europe.

A second weakness of work time comparisons is that they often aggregate male and female workers, obscuring systematic gender differences; disaggregating by gender is also necessary. Considering all workers in all of the European countries except the Netherlands, men's average hours fall between 1,700 and 2,000 hours. Women report a wider range of average annual hours, from a remarkable low of 1,233 in the Netherlands to a high of 1,749 in Sweden (ILO 1999). Another way to compare working time across countries is to focus on a single industrial sector, such as manufacturing, to remove the potentially conflating effect of varying industrial mixes across countries. Two reports that compare hours in a single sector, manufacturing, conclude that United States workers report the longest hours (ILO 1995; Tagliabue 1997).

Are the long annual hours in the United States principally a matter of U.S. workers having fewer annual vacation days, or do they work longer weekly hours as well? Using data from the Luxembourg Income Study for 1989–1992, Jacobs and Gerson (1998a) reported on weekly hours for men and women in nine industrialized countries. They found that for men the average workweek in most countries hovers at just over 40 hours per week, with only the Netherlands having a particularly short workweek. While average weekly hours in the United States fall in the high end of the range, the average length of the workweek in the United States is not especially distinctive. The United States does stand out with respect to the dispersion of hours worked, in particular the percentage of workers who report working very long hours. More than one-fifth of men in the United States (22.4 percent) put in more than 50 hours per week on the job, compared with 16.1 percent in Germany, 7.3 percent in Sweden, and 3.5 percent in the Netherlands. The percentage of men working such long hours does not exceed 20 percent in any of the other countries.

Jacobs and Gerson found more dramatic cross-national variation in women's weekly hours. Women in the United States, like their male counterparts, reported among the longest workweeks in the nine countries. Women in the United States worked an average of 36.0 hours per week, compared with 34.0 in Sweden, 33.3 in Germany, and 29.6 in the United Kingdom. The Netherlands again stands out as having the shortest workweek; the average woman in the Netherlands worked 26.3 hours per week, and nearly half (49.7 percent) worked fewer than 30 hours per week. Like U.S. men, women in the United States stand out: 10.8 percent of U.S. women work 50 or more hours per week.

These cross-national comparisons suggest that the United States is more unusual in terms of the percentage of workers reporting very long weeks than with respect to its average workweek. A growing bifurcation in working time for women and men emerges as a major feature in the United States context. In the empirical

analyses in this study, we highlight cross-national variation in the dispersion of hours, rather than restricting our comparisons to national averages.

HYPOTHESES

First, we expect that couples in the United States will put in the longest joint weekly hours in paid work. Prior research indicates that both men and women work slightly longer weekly hours in the United States than in other industrialized countries. The question remains as to how the experience of individuals maps onto those of dual-earner couples. We also expect that the proportion of couples who (jointly) work long work weeks, more than 80, or even 100, hours per week, will be higher in the United States than elsewhere. Again, we are extending earlier findings on the prevalence of very long workweeks in the United States by exploring the relationship between individuals' working time and the experiences of couples.

Second, we will examine the effects of parental status on working time by comparing dual-earner couples without children to working parents. These within-country differentials capture the extent to which parental status shapes the paid work hours of couples. Our central question is whether the effects of parental status on working time are larger in the United States than elsewhere. Because parenting effects on labor market attachment are observed only for women in most countries (Gornick 1999), we will focus on the effects of parenthood on wives. Here, our expectation is that parenting effects, especially for women, will be comparatively large in the United States because key public policies that support parents in combining work and family, such as public provisions for child care and paid family leave, are comparatively limited in the United States.

Third, we are interested in the patterns of working time because of their consequences for gender equality as well as for the quality of family life. With respect to gender equality in working time, our expectation is that United States outcomes will be relatively egalitarian among couples without children, but that gender equality in working time will lag substantially among couples with children. We expect gender equality in working time among parents in the United States to lag that reported in other countries for the same reason that we expect to find relatively large parenting effects for women — that is, supportive work/family policies are lacking in the United States.

Finally, we are interested in knowing whether short, intermediate, or long hours tend to promote more gender-egalitarian contributions to paid employment. Extra-long hours not only are problematic in terms of their impact on family life, but they may also impede egalitarian time allocations within families. This will result in a curvilinear relationship between couples' working time and gender equality. Specifically, dual-earner couples whose combined hours of work are relatively low will probably have small contributions from wives and thus will exhibit a low ratio of wives' to husbands' hours. Among those couples putting in very long hours, say more than 100 hours per week, there will likely be substantial contributions from working wives. But we expect that husbands will be putting in the longest hours among this group as well because fewer domestic expectations impinge on their time allocations. It will be among the couples with an intermediate amount of time devoted to paid employment where the ratio of wives' to husbands' economic contributions will be at a

maximum. There will be a curvilinear relationship between couples' working time and gender equality in paid employment. Those with an intermediate amount of time devoted to paid employment will have the highest ratio of wives' to husbands' economic contributions. Those with low combined hours will reflect a small contribution in hours worked for the wife and those with the longest hours a high contribution from the wife but higher still from the husband.

METHODS

The data on working time are drawn from the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), an archive of micro-datasets gathered and rendered comparable from a large number of industrialized countries. The LIS datasets, based principally on household surveys, contain detailed data at the individual- and household-level on a range of demographic, labor market, and income variables. There are several advantages to using the LIS data to study working time. Their micro-data structure allows a range of flexible analyses that cannot be conducted using aggregate data, such as the hours series regularly published by OECD, Eurostat (for example, see Eurostat 1984), and the ILO. Furthermore, compared to other cross-national micro-datasets, the LIS sample sizes are relatively large.

This study uses nine datasets included in the fourth, and most recent, wave of LIS datasets (1994–1997): Belgium (1997), Canada (1994), France (1994), Germany (1994), Italy (1995), Netherlands (1994), Sweden (1995), the United Kingdom (1995), and the United States (1997). The LIS's fourth wave of data also includes United States data for 1994. Additional analyses (not shown here) indicate that there were no significant changes in the working time patterns in the United States between 1994 and 1997. Because the Finnish data in LIS's fourth wave (from 1995) did not include data on hours worked, we used LIS's third wave Finnish dataset (from 1991), which did report hours worked.

The names of the original surveys, the years to which the data pertain, and the sample sizes used in this study are presented in the Appendix. More detailed information on LIS and on the individual datasets is available on the Luxembourg Income Study web site (<http://www.lis.ceps.lu>).

MEASURES

Our selected sample comprises all civilian nonagricultural workers, including both self-employed and wage and salary workers. Persons are coded as "working" if they report working at least one hour in the survey reference week. We restricted the age range to 25–59 in order to maximize comparability by focusing on prime-aged workers. The lower-end cutoff of age 25 allows us to avoid most of the variation across countries in educational enrollments that might affect the working hours of younger workers. The upper-end cutoff of age 59 enables us to avoid the potentially confounding issue of early retirement that varies markedly across countries. Because results are presented for married couples, we include couples where both the husband and wife are between the ages 25 and 59. It should be noted that the definition of marriage varies somewhat across datasets, with cohabiting couples included in six of the countries but not in Belgium, France, the Netherlands, and the United States.

ANALYTIC STRATEGY

In this study, we focus on the working time of married couples rather than of individuals for several reasons. First, we maintain that time pressures experienced by individuals and by families are affected by the employment status and the working hours of all of the adult members in a family. As Jacobs and Gerson (2001) argue, the increased time pressures experienced by families are part of a larger social shift from male-breadwinner families (with a second adult in the home full-time) toward a mix of dual-earner couples and single-parent families. We suggest that a decline in support at home, rather than an increase in the working time of individuals, underlies the growing sense that families are squeezed for time and that work and family life are in conflict. In other words, dual-earner families and single-parent families are likely to face time pressures because there is no one at home to take care of children and household tasks. Thus, it may be the changing demographics of families rather than the changing structure of employment that is driving the increase in the time pressures experienced by families.

Married couples are also an interesting unit of analysis in comparative research because the conditions faced by dual-earner couples vary from country to country. As we will show, the availability of part-time employment, often taken up by wives, varies cross-nationally, as does the extent of public provisions for child care, as well as other factors that are likely to affect families. A focus on couples in cross-national perspective can reveal whether families in some countries are especially pressed for time relative to their counterparts elsewhere.

A third reason to focus on couples stems from our concerns about gender equality. While most studies of gender equality in the labor market focus on hourly wages, differentials in working time between husbands and wives, especially in families with children, are a major source of gender disparities in earnings and career opportunities. The question that ultimately interests us is whether there are countries that have made progress toward reducing time pressures on couples in a way that is consistent with promoting gender equality. Considering couples' joint working time in conjunction with the gender breakdown in couples' hours also provides a valuable starting point for identifying labor market and social policy provisions that are consistent with both goals, namely alleviating families' time squeeze and facilitating gender equality.

A key analytic decision concerns the focus on weekly hours, rather than annual hours. We focus on the workweek for both substantive and technical reasons. Substantively, the workweek is the unit of analysis that corresponds most closely to families' needs to supervise and care for their children. While annual vacation time is also helpful with respect to caregiving pressures, extending vacation time will not diffuse much of the time pressure that families experience on a regular basis. It should be noted that our perspective differs from that of Robinson and Godbey (1997). They suggest that additional vacation time is the best way to provide for additional leisure, on the grounds that small increments of free time during normal weeks will simply be diverted to additional television viewing. In addition, weekly hours can be measured more reliably than can annual hours. Accurately comparing annual hours across countries is difficult because vacation time is included in some labor force surveys but not in others (including the Current Population Survey for the United

States). The lack of comparable data on vacation time makes it problematic to focus on annual hours.

A more fundamental problem with comparing annual hours is that measures of annual hours are sensitive to variations in the number of weeks worked, which in turn reflect labor market entrances and exits, as Jacobs and Gerson (2001) document in their analysis of trends in United States annual hours data. This point has important implications for comparing annual hours worked across countries. In countries with relatively low women’s labor force participation and high rates of part-time work, substantial percentages of women will be entering and exiting the labor force. This will produce relatively short work years and have the effect of reducing the measure of annual hours worked. Similarly, high or growing levels of unemployment would cut into annual hours worked because those losing their jobs (or just regaining employment) would work less than a full year. These factors make it difficult to compare the experiences of full-year workers across countries. Thus, our solution to this problem is to focus on the workweek and reserve cross-national variation in annual weeks of work and vacations for a separate analysis.

Our final analytic strategy calls for assessing cross-national variation in the dispersion of individuals’ and couples’ weekly hours, in addition to variation in average weekly hours. As noted above, there is substantial variation at the upper end of the working-time distribution, and this may be particularly informative when comparing working time in United States families to that of their counterparts in other countries.

RESULTS

In all of the tables, we rank the countries in descending order with respect to one key indicator. This approach has the advantage of highlighting the relative position of the United States, our core interest, and it allows us to see how the United States’ position, in cross-national perspective, varies across outcomes.

TABLE 1
JOINT HOURS OF PAID WORK OF MARRIED COUPLES, AGED 25-59

| | All Couples | % Dual- Earner | Dual-Earner Couples | | |
|---------------|---------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------|
| | Mean Hours Per Week | | Mean Hours Per Week | % 80 Hours or More | % 100 Hours or More |
| United States | 72.3 | 75.5 | 81.2 | 68.2 | 12.0 |
| Belgium | 63.8 | 57.5 | 79.0 | 35.0 | 11.7 |
| Italy | 59.4 | 45.7 | 78.2 | 47.6 | 9.6 |
| Finland | 69.8 | 80.6 | 77.4 | 25.1 | 4.0 |
| Canada | 65.0 | 65.6 | 77.0 | 46.5 | 9.0 |
| France | 62.1 | 61.3 | 76.3 | 32.9 | 4.0 |
| Germany | 60.4 | 55.9 | 75.1 | 42.7 | 8.3 |
| U.K. | 57.4 | 54.6 | 74.3 | 34.4 | 5.8 |
| Sweden | 64.0 | 85.1 | 69.3 | 6.6 | 0.7 |
| Netherlands | 51.9 | 52.3 | 64.0 | 15.8 | 2.7 |

Source: Authors’ analysis of fourth wave LIS data.
Note: Countries are ranked in relation to the third column.

Table 1 presents the joint hours of paid work of husbands and wives among couples aged 25–59 in which at least one partner was employed. (The countries are rank-ordered by the third column, the mean hours of paid employment among dual-earner couples.) As reported in the first column, among the 10 countries included in this analysis, United States couples report the longest joint hours. In the United States, the typical married couple with at least one employed spouse puts in just over 70 (72.3) hours per week.

The length of the paid workweek reported in the first column reflects two components: the percentage of couples in which both are in the labor market and the length of the workweek among those dual-earner couples. As reported in the second column, the United States trails only Finland and Sweden in the percentage of couples in which both partners work for pay. In these two Nordic countries special efforts have been made to facilitate women's labor force participation. The United States ranks first in the first column because dual-earner couples in the United States put in the longest workweeks (see the third column), combined with the fact that the United States ranks third in the proportion of dual-earner couples.

In half of the included countries (Belgium, Canada, France, Germany, and Sweden), the average married couple spends between 60 and 65 hours a week in paid employment. This reflects the fact that the majority of couples in these countries have two earners, and most employed couples work just less than 80 hours per week. However, countries vary in how they achieve this result. For example, while Sweden has large numbers of married women working relatively short hours, Belgium has fewer married women working, but those who do work put in longer workweeks.

The shortest average workweeks for couples are reported in the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The typical couple in the United Kingdom puts in 57.4 hours per week; that is 14.9 fewer hours per week than in the United States. That is because the United Kingdom has the third lowest rate of married women's labor force participation (54.6 percent) and the second shortest workweek among dual-earner couples (74.3 hours per week). The truly exceptional case for working time, however, is found in the Netherlands, where only a bare majority of married women work for pay (52.3 percent), and the average workweek among dual-earner couples is 64.0 hours, more than 17 fewer hours per week than in the United States.

While the first column of Table 1 focuses on the average paid workweek among all couples, the balance of the table focuses on the distribution of working hours among dual-earner couples. Among dual-earner couples, the average workweek in the United States is relatively long, slightly longer than any of the other countries included in this analysis. It is notable that dual-earner couples in the United Kingdom put in nearly one fewer person-day per week on the job (6.9 fewer hours) than do their United States counterparts, while a typical Swedish working couple works for pay 11.9 fewer hours per week. Thus, the time demands associated with being part of a dual-earner family vary across countries, with the time pressures being the greatest in the United States

Furthermore, the United States ranks first with respect to the percentage of couples working more than 80 hours per week (68.2 percent) by a very large margin and also in the percentage of couples working 100 or more hours per week (12.0 percent). Only Belgium, at 11.7 percent, and Finland, at 9.6 percent, come close with respect to couples working in excess of 100 hours per week. Thus, the high end of the

distribution distinguishes the United States more sharply than does the average workweek.

The case of Finland presents an interesting comparison to the United States. The average Finnish couple logs nearly as many hours per week as in the United States (77.4 for Finland, versus 81.2 in the United States), but the Finnish distribution is more tightly clustered. Far fewer dual-earner couples in Finland put in more than 80 hours per week (25.1 percent), and only 4.0 percent of couples work 100 hours per week or more. Sweden and the Netherlands also stand out as cases in which very long workweeks are quite rare among working couples.

The results presented in Table 1 confirm our expectation that dual-earner couples in the United States put in longer hours on the job than do their counterparts in other countries. The differential is small in comparison to some countries, such as Finland, but it is substantial in comparison to others, such as the United Kingdom and the Netherlands.

In Table 2, we compare the paid work hours of dual-earner couples with and without children. This comparison enables us to see how the United States ranks among working parents and also to see the effect of parental status on working time across this group of countries. In Table 2, the countries are ranked with respect to the size of this parenting effect. Not surprisingly, the United States leads all of the comparison countries in the length of the workweek for working parents (80.1 hours) as well as for childless dual-earner couples (83.0 hours). This is true for the average workweek and for the percentage reporting very long weekly hours. Among childless couples, weekly hours worked in Belgium and Italy approach those reported in the United States, exceeding 80 hours in both cases, but parents in the United States report a substantially longer workweek than do their counterparts in all of the other countries.

The effect of parenting on couples' total working time varies markedly across the countries included in this study. In the United States, working parents put in 2.9 fewer hours per week than do their childless counterparts. In percentage terms, that differential (-3.5 percent) is similar to the pattern found in Canada (-3.3 percent) and Sweden (-3.7 percent). In five of the countries included here (Belgium, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom), working parents put in at least 5 percent fewer hours on the job than do their childless counterparts. In two other countries, Finland and France, there is little difference in the workweek between working parents and other working couples.

Table 2 also reports parenting effects for husbands and wives separately. As expected, the effect of being a parent on hours spent in the labor market is much larger overall for women than for men. For wives, being a parent is associated with a reduction in working hours in all 10 countries; the magnitude of the effect ranges from 3.0 percent or less (in France and Finland), to 8.6 percent (in the United States), to 20 percent or more (in Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands). For husbands, the effects are much smaller and are typically slightly positive; across these 10 countries, men's parenting effects range from -3.8 percent (in Italy) to +1.8 percent (in Germany). Women's reductions, associated with having dependent children in the home, are larger than men's everywhere. Thus, Belgium and Italy excepted, reductions in couples' hours associated with parenthood are entirely accounted for by reductions in working time among wives.

The results in Table 2 also confirm the expectation that there is a relatively large parenting effect on working time among employed wives in the United States. The parenting effect among United States wives is substantially larger than the differential seen among their counterparts in Finland and France; at the same time, parenting reductions are much larger still in the United Kingdom and in three continental European countries (Belgium, Germany, and the Netherlands). As we discuss later, the cross-national variation that we find can be explained, at least in part, by variation in some key labor market institutions and public policies, including the level of demand for part-time work and the extent of public child care provisions.

TABLE 2
JOINT HOURS OF PAID WORK OF DUAL-EARNER COUPLES,
AGED 25–59, BY PARENTAL STATUS

| | A. Dual-Earner Couples No Children ≤ 18 | | B. Dual-Earner Parents Children ≤ 18 | | C. Difference in Means | | |
|---------------|--|-------|---|----------------|------------------------|------------|---------|
| | Mean Hours | % 80+ | Mean | % 80+ Hours | % Couples | % Husbands | % Wives |
| Finland | 77.8 | 25.8 | 77.2 | 24.8 | -0.8 | +0.8 | -2.6 |
| France | 76.7 | 34.9 | 76.1 | 32.0 | -0.8 | -0.3 | -2.3 |
| Canada | 78.5* | 51.4* | 75.9 | 43.0 | -3.3 | +0.7 | -7.8 |
| United States | 83.0* | 73.2* | 80.1 | 65.2 | -3.5 | +0.7 | -8.6 |
| Sweden | 70.9* | 9.0* | 68.3 | 5.1 | -3.7 | +0.5 | -8.2 |
| Italy | 81.4* | 56.2* | 76.7 | 43.6 | -5.8 | -3.8 | -8.1 |
| Belgium | 82.4* | 37.3* | 77.2 | 33.8 | -6.3 | -1.3 | -12.4 |
| Germany | 78.7* | 52.8* | 72.1 | 34.5 | -8.4 | +1.8 | -21.0 |
| U.K. | 77.8* | 41.6* | 71.3 | 28.2 | -8.4 | +1.5 | -21.2 |
| Netherlands | 69.1* | 25.7* | 61.1 | 10.1 | -11.6 | +0.2 | -29.2 |

Source: Authors' analysis of fourth wave LIS data.

Note: Countries are ranked in relation to the fifth column.

* Within-country difference is statistically significant, $p < .05$

We conducted additional analyses (not shown) that compared the working time of parents of younger children (youngest child less than 6 years old) to those with older children (6–18 years old). These differences were small in the United States as well as in most other countries. The biggest difference between parents of younger children and those of older children is the labor force participation, not the working time, of mothers. For example, in the United States, parents of children ages 6–18 work less than one hour more per week than parents with pre-school-age children (80.1 hours per week vs. 79.5 hours per week). Similar small differences are evident in most of the countries included in this analysis. This pattern suggests that working mothers with young children do not increase their working time substantially when their children reach the age of public school attendance.

Table 3 reports the hours worked for pay by employed husbands and wives separately, allowing us to see the contributions of each to dual-earner couples' joint hours. Again, the results highlight the importance of considering the distribution of working time in addition to the central tendency. The paid workweek of married men falls between 41 and 45 hours in all countries except Sweden, which trails at 38.1

hours per week. The United States has the second longest workweek for married men (at 44.8 hours per week, just trailing Belgium at 44.9), but the United States clearly surpasses all of the other included countries in the proportion of married men working 50 hours per week or more. At just under one-third (30.3 percent), the percentage of married men working over 50 hours per week in the United States is nearly triple that in Finland (10.4 percent) and more than 10 times as high as in Sweden (2.8 percent).

Married women in the United States (36.4 hours) rank second only to Finnish women (37.2 hours) in the length of their average paid workweek. The United Kingdom (30.8 hours per week) and especially the Netherlands (22.4 hours per week) stand out as having the shortest average workweeks for married women. But again, the dispersion is higher in the United States than elsewhere. While the United States ties Belgium and Italy in having the highest percentage of married women working over 50 hours per week (10 percent), such long weeks are nearly unknown for married women in Sweden (0.4 percent) and the Netherlands (1.7 percent).

The three right-hand columns on Table 3 report cross-national variation in gender equality in hours, captured in the ratio of wives' to husbands' average weekly hours. Results are presented for all wives in dual-earner couples and then separately for those with and without children (18 years old or younger). As we expected, gender equality in working hours in the United States is high, absolutely and relatively, among women without parenting responsibilities (.86), tying with Sweden for second place. However, among mothers (in dual-earner couples), U.S. women fare less well cross-nationally. The far right column indicates that among parents the ratio of wives' to husbands' hours in the United States falls to .78, and here the United States outcome lags Sweden (.79), Italy (.80), France (.81), and especially Finland (.92).

TABLE 3
HUSBANDS' AND WIVES' HOURS OF PAID WORK AMONG
DUAL-EARNER COUPLES, AGED 25-59

| | Husbands' Hours | | Wives' Hours | | Ratio: | | |
|---------------|-----------------|--------|--------------|--------|--------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------|
| | Mean | % 50 + | Mean | % 50 + | Wives' Mean/Husbands' Mean All | Without children ≤ 18 | With children ≤ 18 |
| Finland | 42.0 | 10.4 | 37.2 | 2.6 | .93 | .95 | .92 |
| Sweden | 38.1 | 2.8 | 31.3 | 0.4 | .82 | .86 | .79 |
| France | 42.0 | 18.1 | 34.3 | 4.7 | .82 | .83 | .81 |
| Italy | 43.1 | 26.7 | 35.1 | 10.0 | .81 | .84 | .80 |
| United States | 44.8 | 30.3 | 36.4 | 10.2 | .81 | .86 | .78 |
| Canada | 43.0 | 23.0 | 34.0 | 7.1 | .79 | .83 | .76 |
| Belgium | 44.9 | 27.2 | 34.1 | 10.1 | .76 | .82 | .73 |
| Germany | 44.0 | 24.7 | 31.1 | 6.3 | .71 | .81 | .63 |
| U.K. | 44.2 | 24.3 | 30.1 | 4.0 | .68 | .77 | .60 |
| Netherlands | 41.7 | 15.8 | 22.3 | 1.7 | .53 | .66 | .46 |

Source: Authors' analysis of fourth wave LIS data.
 Note: Countries are ranked in relation to the fifth column.

In the research questions above, we outlined our expectation that gender equality within families in paid working time would be highest in families that work intermediate numbers of hours. How do the results from our 10 countries conform to

this set of expectations? Our expectations are met in 7 of the 10 countries considered, although there are three exceptions where wives' economic contributions are highest in the busiest families. Results are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4

RATIO OF WIVES' TO HUSBANDS' HOURS OF PAID WORK AMONG DUAL-EARNER COUPLES, AGED 25-59, BY TOTAL HOURS OF JOINT PAID EMPLOYMENT

| | Total | Total Hours of Joint Paid Employment | | | |
|---------------|-------|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|------|
| | | <60 | 60-79 | 80-99 | 100+ |
| Finland | .93 | .54 | .96 | .91 | .83 |
| Sweden | .82 | .58 | .87 | .83 | .65 |
| France | .82 | .50 | .86 | .83 | .86 |
| Italy | .81 | .64 | .79 | .83 | .92 |
| United States | .81 | .37 | .67 | .91 | .84 |
| Canada | .79 | .43 | .78 | .87 | .85 |
| Belgium | .76 | .53 | .81 | .82 | .83 |
| Germany | .71 | .41 | .67 | .87 | .77 |
| U.K. | .68 | .39 | .70 | .79 | .72 |
| Netherlands | .53 | .36 | .60 | .73 | .59 |

Source: Authors' analysis of fourth wave LIS data.

Note: Countries are ranked in relation to the first column.

Let us begin with the United States case. The most gender-balanced contributions to the labor market occur in couples that put in more than 80, but fewer than 100, hours per week. Among couples working fewer than 60 joint hours per week, wives contribute less than half as much time (.37) relative to their husbands. This ratio rises to .67 among couples working between 60-79 hours per week, peaks among these couples working 80-99 hours per week (.91), and falls again among those working 100 or more hours per week (.84).

This is the general pattern we expected, and it holds for Canada, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands, in addition to the United States. A similar pattern is seen in Sweden and Finland. In these two Nordic countries, gender-egalitarianism peaks between 60 and 79 hours per week, but the relationship retains its curvilinear shape. Indeed, Finnish couples working 60-79 hours have the most gender-balanced time contributions reported in Table 4, with wives contributing 96 percent as much time to the labor market as their husbands.

Three cases, Italy, Belgium, and France, do not entirely conform to this pattern. In Italy, the most gender-egalitarian working time is found among the busiest couples; in other words, the gender ratio increases as total working time rises. In Belgium and France, gender egalitarianism essentially plateaus after couples reach 60 joint hours of paid work per week. The results thus provide partial support for the expectation offered regarding the relationship between gender equality in working time, within couples, and the length of the joint workweek.

POLICY AND INSTITUTIONAL FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE U.S. WORKING TIME

Our empirical results reveal several salient features of United States couples' working time, in cross-national perspective. Dual-earner couples in the United States put in the longest hours per week among the countries included in this study. This reflects that in the United States husbands report the second-longest mean hours per week across these countries (44.8 hours), and, even more distinctively, the highest percentage working 50 hours or more (30.3 percent). Wives in dual-earner couples in the United States also work long hours (36.4 hours on average) and are most likely to work 50 or more hours per week (10.2 percent). In addition, while United States dual-earner couples without children rank high with respect to gender equality in hours spent in paid work, the gender ratio among couples with children falls substantially, both absolutely and relatively.

We maintain that three key policy and institutional factors help explain the distinctive working time patterns reported in the United States. First, *the direct control of working time*, through collective agreements and the regulation of maximum hours by statute, influences working hours, primarily husbands' working hours. Second, *the level of demand for part-time work* directly influences the working hours of wives (and, by extension, the joint hours of couples). A third factor, *the availability and hours of public early childhood education and care*, shapes the extent to which mothers and fathers in dual-earner couples establish gender-egalitarian patterns of working time.

Most industrialized countries, the United States excepted, directly regulate maximum as well as standard working hours for large shares of the labor force; controls operate through a combination of collective and statutory regulations. In most European countries, collective agreements covering the majority of employees establish standard working hours (Rubery et al. 1998), and statutory limitations simultaneously regulate maximum hours, usually by setting legal limits on normal weekly hours, weekly overtime hours, and/or total weekly hours (ILO 1995; OECD 1998). These working time controls play a discernable role in shaping the number of hours worked, by men in particular.

Rubery et al. (1998) argue that "national systems of regulation [collective and statutory] can be seen to have a major impact on usual working time" (p. 75), and our own policy analyses (not shown) lend support to that conclusion. The long hours reported by men in the United States are apparently driven upward by the combination of low union density (relatively few United States workers are affected by collective bargaining) and the absence of statutory controls on maximum hours. (The United States Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 regulates overtime pay but does not limit total hours worked, and it does not cover all workers.)

Second, a large literature on part-time work establishes that rates of part-time work vary markedly across the industrialized countries, and that part-time work remains "women's work" everywhere (Gornick 1999; OECD 1994, 1999; Rubery et al. 1998). The literature on part-time work also establishes that sorting out the demand- and supply-side factors that shape levels of part-time work is extremely complex (Bardasi and Gornick forthcoming; Fagan and O'Reilly 1998; Hakim 1997). Nevertheless, much research on part-time employment suggests that while both

demand and supply affect the level and composition of part-time work, demand factors are the stronger influence in shaping overall rates of part-time work. Here, we concur with Addabbo's (1997) view that "[d]emand-side constraints seem to be the overriding determinants of the level of part-time work" (p.129). In turn, levels of demand for part-time work are understood to be shaped by policy and other institutional factors, including the structure of social insurance rules, taxes, and subsidies that reward or penalize the creation of part-time jobs, and the preferences and power of unions.

Many women, especially mothers, do seek part-time hours, especially when their children are young. In some countries, such as Italy and Finland and, to some extent, the United States, a substantial share of these women will be unable to secure acceptable part-time work and will work full-time hours instead. Their high rates of full-time employment contribute to the relatively long weekly hours worked by wives and, in turn, by couples. In contrast, their counterparts in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and especially in the Netherlands, once in the labor market, face much greater demand for part-time workers, contributing to their shorter average weekly hours (again, for both wives and couples).

At the same time, in some countries many women job-seekers are effectively pushed into part-time work. Burchell et al. (1997) note, for example, that in response to labor shortages in the 1960s, the United Kingdom enacted an official policy of developing part-time work and recruiting married women to fill the jobs. The authors conclude that the "ramifications of this are still being experienced today" (p. 211). All told, demand for part-time work is much higher in some countries than in others. As a result, wives in those countries who seek part-time work are more likely to find it, while some share of job seekers who would prefer full-time work find themselves limited to part-time hours. Together, the result is that higher demand for part-time workers in some countries exerts downward pressure on the weekly hours of wives and, in turn, on the joint hours of couples.

Third, a range of public policies that support mothers' employment, most notably the availability and hours of public early childhood education and care, also influence women's time spent in paid work, especially relative to their husbands' (Gornick, Meyers, and Ross 1998).

As we reported in Table 3, when we compare the ratio of married mothers' hours to married fathers' hours, the result for United States parents indicates a fairly moderate level of gender equality. In the United States, women face very limited availability of public care for children below age three; only 5 percent of infants and toddlers are in publicly-provided or publicly-financed care. Public provisions for preschoolers (children 3 to 5 years old) in the United States are more extensive, with 54 percent of children in some form of public care (including 5 year olds in kindergarten); however, much of that care is available only part-day. Overall, provisions in the United States for children below primary school age lag those in most European countries, either in total public slots or in the hours that care is available. All of the countries with more gender-egalitarian allocations of working time among parents — Finland, France, Italy, and Sweden — have made more extensive public investments in child care for children below school age (Meyers and Gornick forthcoming).

The relatively low levels of child care in the United States, combined with restricted hours of availability, clearly work against gender-egalitarian divisions among parents in their time spent in paid work. In the United States, as everywhere,

women perform the majority of caregiving work; the lack of child care, and its part-day nature, drives a wedge between husbands' and wives' hours. It is important to note, however, that we cannot easily sort out the impact of the level of demand for part-time work from the effects of child care because there is considerable covariation. In Italy, for example, the long weekly hours of employed wives are likely shaped by both the very restricted part-time work options and the availability of nearly universal, full-day, preschool coverage for children, starting at the third birthday.

CONCLUSIONS

The twin goals of work-family balance and gender equality have not been achieved in any of the countries examined in this study. Indeed, in the search for a model country, tradeoffs become immediately apparent. The Netherlands has gone furthest among these countries in lessening work-family conflict (by reducing couples' working time) but at the price of dramatic gender inequality in working time. Dutch women typically work part-time and put in shorter weeks than in any of the comparison countries. While progress towards work-family balance in the Netherlands might be substantial, in the end, Dutch wives are highly economically dependent on their husbands. The result in Sweden is parallel although less extreme. Relatively short hours for Swedish men and plentiful part-time work for women have helped to reduce work-family conflict, but the gender disparity in working time, especially among working parents, remains substantial.

Finland has gone the furthest in achieving gender equality in paid working time. Finnish married women work 93 percent as many hours as their husbands, and even working mothers put in 92 percent as many hours on the job as do their husbands. But the typical Finnish couple works nearly 80 hours per week (77.4 hours); thus, the price of gender equality appears to be substantial time pressures in dual-earner families. Recent efforts to reduce the workweek in Finland and elsewhere deserve attention.

The United States stands out in terms of the percentage of husbands and wives working very long hours, in addition to having long average workweeks. Very long joint hours are associated with time pressures as well as gender inequality. In the United States, as in most countries, the gender gap in working time peaks among those couples working 100 or more hours per week. More moderate work schedules promote gender equality while reducing work-family conflict.

These cross-national comparisons illuminate why time pressures faced by working families in the United States have become a focal point for so much research and public debate. Reducing the long workweeks in the United States might begin with extending existing labor legislation to professionals and managers. They are the workers who put in the longest hours (Jacobs and Gerson 1998a; U.S. Department of Labor Statistics 2000), and they are generally exempt from the Fair Labor Standards Act and its amendments. At the same time, steps should be taken to improve the remuneration, job security, and advancement opportunities of part-time and other reduced-hour workers, most of whom are women. Strengthening protections for part-time workers would reduce the costs to workers of working part-time and would make

engagement in part-time work a more viable option for many working parents (Bardasi and Gornick forthcoming; Jacobs and Gerson 1998b).

Future research should track the ongoing efforts to reduce working time throughout Europe. Sustained and highly publicized efforts have been undertaken in several countries to reduce working time. Over the last 20 years, many European labor and other advocates have fought to reduce working time, for all of the reasons discussed earlier, i.e., as a strategy for reducing unemployment, for increasing family time, and for shoring up gender equality in the market and at home (ILO 1995; OECD 1998; 32 HOURS 2000). Efforts to reduce working time have invoked a wide variety of approaches, including collective bargaining, at the industry, branch, or enterprise level and diverse public policy approaches.

Calls for reducing working time are particularly active in the countries of Northern Europe. In Denmark, which currently has among the lowest average annual work hours in Europe, work time reduction is nevertheless an active issue. The Danish movement is focused on restructuring working time to meet the needs of families; in June 1998, the government announced the initiation of talks with business and labor to make working time more "family friendly." In Sweden, which also has low annual work hours, further work time reduction remains at the top of the public policy and collective bargaining agendas. As in Denmark, the theme is not job creation but instead "shorter work time is seen mainly as a way to improve the well-being of workers and increase equality between men and women" (32 HOURS 1998). In Finland, two major labor federations recently called on the government to cut the workweek to 35 hours, largely as a job growth effort.

Active efforts to reduce the workweek are gaining strength throughout continental Europe as well. In France in 2000, the 35-hour workweek became law for firms with more than 20 employees; smaller firms will be covered by the law in 2002. The focus of the French effort was the reduction of unemployment rather than the promotion of gender equality. In 1997, prominent labor and academic leaders in Belgium called for a shift to a 35-hour workweek; the main trade unions and the Socialist Party endorsed a four-day, 32-hour week. In Germany, while the legislated standard week has remained at 48 hours since the 1930s, collective bargaining has reduced the average workweek in the western Lander to 37.5 hours. In Italy, the workweek was to be reduced from 40 to 35 hours by the end of 2001 through legislation and financial incentives to guide collective bargaining. And in the Netherlands, as part of a long government-business-labor negotiation dating to the early 1980s, the workweek has been reduced to 36 hours for half of the workforce (32 HOURS 2000). Understanding the impact of these efforts on labor productivity, wages, employment levels, and gender equality, both on the job and in the household, will help to inform policy choices in the United States.

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NOTES

1. In this paper, when we use the word "work" without modification, we refer to paid market work. Although we certainly recognize that much unpaid activity is also "work," maintaining the distinction between paid work and unpaid work throughout the paper seemed unnecessarily cumbersome.
2. We refer here to one of Putnam's specific findings, namely that the increase in working time among women has contributed to a decline in volunteer activity. The debate about Putnam's thesis hinges on whether civic participation has declined or instead has changed in form. (For informative discussions, see Skocpol 1999 and Ladd 1999.)

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APPENDIX

LUXEMBOURG INCOME STUDY DATASETS BY COUNTRY

| Country | Year | Survey Name | Sample Size |
|----------------|------|---|-------------|
| Belgium | 1997 | Socioeconomische panelstudie van Belgische huishoudens (CSB – panel) (Belgian Household Panel Study CSP – panel) | 1,522 |
| Canada | 1994 | Survey of Consumer Finances | 14,605 |
| Finland | 1991 | Income Distribution Survey | 5,397 |
| France | 1994 | Family Budget Survey | 3,668 |
| Germany | 1994 | SOEP (Socio-Economic Panel) | 2,812 |
| Italy | 1995 | L'Indagine Campionaria sui Bilanci delle Famiglie Italiane. (The Bank of Italy Income Survey) | 3,299 |
| Netherlands | 1994 | Aanvullend Voorzieningengebruik Onderzoek (AVO) Additional Enquiry on the Use of (Public) Services | 2,017 |
| Sweden | 1995 | Inkomstfördelningsundersökningen (HINK) (Income distribution Survey) | 4,718 |
| United Kingdom | 1995 | Family Expenditure Survey (FES) | 2,194 |
| United States | 1997 | Current Population Survey | 17,900 |

Note: Sample size refers to the total number of couples aged 25–59 included in the analysis.