

Although debates over the growth of work-family conflict tend to center on the experiences of employed parents and dual-earner couples, analyses of trends in working time typically focus on individual workers. We reexamine the debates regarding the growth of working versus leisure time and then analyze trends in working time by focusing on the combined paid work of family members. We use the 1970 and 1997 Current Population Surveys to investigate the distribution of working hours across dual-earner couples and single parents. Our findings demonstrate that the shift from male-breadwinner to dual-earner couples and single-parent households, rather than changes in the length of the workweek per se, have created growing concern for balancing work and family. This analysis suggests that debates over conflicts between work and family need to focus more on the combined work schedules of family members than on changes in individual work patterns.

Overworked Individuals or Overworked Families?

Explaining Trends in Work, Leisure, and Family Time

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The challenge of balancing work and family has drawn increasing attention in public debate, policy analysis, and academic research. Indeed, this topic has spawned a rapidly growing interdisciplinary field, complete with research and policy discussions (Parcel & Cornfield, 2000; Pitt-Catsouphes & Googins, 1999), academic conferences,¹ journals (e.g., *Community*, *Work and Family*), research centers,² and electronic databases.³ Because time spent at work sets an upper boundary on the time left to spend in other pursuits, working time constitutes a starting point for understanding the shifting balance between work and family in American households.⁴ Working time also sets limits on how much economic support a worker can provide and thus is closely linked to earnings and income. Too much time at work can undermine personal and family welfare, whereas too little time can endanger a family's economic security and lower its standard of living.

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Despite the importance of working time, recent studies have produced sharply divergent views on the question of how much time Americans are devoting to paid work. One perspective, first articulated by Juliet Schor (1991) and since echoed by many others (Bond, Galinsky, & Swanberg, 1997; Hochschild, 1997, pp. 268-269, Endnote 3; Mishel, Bernstein, & Schmitt, 1999), contends that American workers are logging more time at the workplace than their parents or grandparents, thus producing an "unexpected decline of leisure" in American society. Schor argues that time on the job, which declined steadily from the early days of the factory system until 1940, when 40 hours became the standard schedule, has risen in recent decades. For Schor, the decline in union strength has made it difficult for organized labor to counter employers' power to increase work time demands. Yet Schor (1998) also suggests that American workers' preferences have also contributed to the growth of time on the job. From this perspective, workers are trapped in a "squirrel cage" of competitive materialism that causes families to focus unduly on consumer purchases and feeds the need to work long hours.

Extending the focus on cultural shifts, Hochschild (1997) posits a cultural transformation in which "home has become work and work has become home." Rather than stressing the role of employer demands, this perspective contends that a shift in the relative values attached to home and work has led many workers to place more emphasis on the rewards of work and to view the workplace as a respite from the difficulties of contemporary family life.

Accounts that point to a shift in time or loyalty to paid work, whether due to rising employer demands or shifting employee preferences, suggest that work commitments are encroaching on the needs of family life. Yet others have argued that this picture of growing work commitments is misleading. Relying on time-diary studies, Robinson and Godbey (1997) maintain that leisure time, not working time, is increasing. Still others argue that, although leisure may not be increasing, the length of the average workweek has changed very little in recent decades and thus cannot account for the growing perception that families are being squeezed (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998; Rones, Ilg, & Gardner, 1997).

In place of these contradictory arguments, we propose a reformulation of the problem and a synthesis of the opposing views about how workers are balancing paid work and family life. In the debate over the growth of work versus leisure, we offer a perspective that incorporates important aspects of both views. Indeed, we argue that increasing work and increasing leisure are not mutually exclusive propositions. To resolve these apparent contradictions, we focus on diversity and variability among workers and their families.

Focusing on changes in the distribution of time on the job, we have found growth in the proportion of workers concentrated at both the high and low

ends of the spectrum. One segment of the labor market contains workers who are putting in more hours at work than ever before, whereas another segment consists of workers who are unable to find jobs that provide enough hours of work (see also Bluestone & Rose, 1997). We thus maintain that working time is increasingly bifurcated, with one group of workers putting in long hours and another working constricted hours. We contend, moreover, that it is vital to attend to the shape of the distribution among workers rather than to the experience of the “average” worker.

In addition to focusing on variation among workers, we also propose to redirect the analysis of working time from individuals to families. The perception of an increase in working time is part of a larger social shift from male-breadwinner families to dual-earner couples and single-parent households. 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.

THE OVERWORKED-AMERICAN THESIS

According to Schor (1991), an increase in working time can be found by estimating the annual hours worked by the average man and woman in the labor force (see also Leete & Schor, 1994).⁵ Her results suggest that women’s annual hours of paid work increased 305 hours between 1969 and 1987, while men’s annual total increased by 98 hours during this period.

The argument that women and men are working longer today than was typical several decades earlier has touched a resonant chord in the popular imagination.⁶ Despite the appeal of this thesis, there are several problems with this conclusion. First, the changes observed during the period are principally due to changes in the number of weeks worked per year, not the number of hours worked per week. The evidence clearly indicates remarkable stability in the length of the average workweek. Schor’s (1991) own figures indicate an increase of 0.8 hours per week for men and 1.8 hours per week for women.⁷ Indeed, if one compares 1970 with 1997, the length of the average workweek remained virtually unchanged (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998). Thus, during this time span, the only increase in annual hours would have to come from changes in the number of weeks worked per year.

Second, the Current Population Survey (CPS) data are not ideal for measuring annual hours on the job. The CPS questionnaire does not elicit information on vacations and holidays. Respondents are specifically instructed to include paid vacation time when reporting on the number of weeks worked

last year. Thus, one key issue—whether employers are squeezing more days per year out of workers—is difficult to ascertain with this data source.

Third, and most important, Schor makes too much of the changes in weeks worked per year. Greater continuity in labor force attachment on the part of women will inevitably produce increases in the number of weeks worked per year as measured by the CPS. Whereas the CPS focuses on employment in the previous calendar year, it does not attempt to discern whether the respondent intends to work for a short interval or is instead in the middle of a sustained spell in the labor force. Many who are measured as part-year workers were, in fact, beginning a long spell of employment but just happened to start that spell at some point in the middle of the previous calendar year. For the 1997 CPS data (discussed in more detail below), we found that more than 60% of those who worked part-year (less than 50 weeks) in 1996 were still employed in March 1997. Part-year work is thus principally a measure of the extent of churning associated with labor market entries and exits. As women's labor force participation climbs, labor market interruptions decrease, and the number of employment spells that begin in the middle of the calendar year decline as well, thus producing an increase in the number of weeks worked per year.⁸ To verify this assertion, we correlated women's labor force participation over the period 1950 through 1998 with the proportion of employed women who worked full-time, full-year. We found that these two trends moved together over time in lock step (the serial correlation was .965). Because the number of weeks worked per year reflects continuous versus discontinuous employment, combined with occasional or seasonal work, changes in this measure are more closely connected to the demography of the labor force than to the behavior of employers or the structure of work.

AN INCREASE IN LEISURE TIME?

In bold contrast to the overworked-American thesis, Robinson and Godbey (1997) argue that the period between 1965 and 1995 has witnessed a surprising increase in leisure time. In contrast to most national labor force surveys, including the CPS on which Schor's results are based, Robinson and Godbey rely on time-diary data, which asks respondents to record their activities in half-hour intervals that span a 24-hour day.

Time diaries are certainly valuable for assessing the way Americans spend their time while not at work, but Robinson and Godbey (1997) claim that time diaries provide more accurate and less biased measures of working time as well. They argue that people are not likely to know the amount of time they

spend working in a given week and, given only a few seconds to think about the question, many are likely to give a very rough estimate of their workweek. Respondents may overstate their working time by forgetting about non-work-related errands and appointments conducted during the workday, or they may understate their workweek by forgetting about work brought home. If self-reports about the workweek are error prone, they will produce more unexplained variation.

Because random errors do not change the mean or result in biased estimates of the effect of independent variables, they are not the gravest concern for statistical analysis. The question of bias is more troubling. Robinson and Godbey (1997) maintain that those working long hours exaggerate the time they spend working because being busy has some caché, and it is easy for respondents who work long hours to tack another 5 or 10 hours onto their reports. They also argue that this tendency to exaggerate has increased over time. If true, this claim would mean that our estimates of the workweek are overstated. It would also require us to revise our understanding of the wage distribution, because wages are calculated from earnings and hours worked.⁹

In a companion article, Jacobs (1998) has shown that the claims about the superiority of time-diary data have not been substantiated. When error and exaggeration are tested for a wide variety of demographic groups working in a wide variety of job settings, self-reports of working time hold up remarkably well. There is, therefore, little evidence of systematic bias.

Time-diary data are quite useful, but they do not readily offer answers to some important questions about the labor force. For example, a standard daily diary does not provide the length of the workweek for a given individual or a married couple. Instead, the weekdays and weekends of different individuals must be combined to create a synthetic workweek.¹⁰ For many purposes, such as translating weekly earnings into hourly wage rates, a daily time diary will not suffice.

OVERWORK, GROWING LEISURE, OR BOTH?

Setting aside the issue of differences in the quality of data, the most important question remains: Has working time increased or declined? On the surface, the overworked-American thesis and the increase in leisure thesis seem irreconcilable. After all, time is a metric with a fixed upper limit, and changes in work and leisure should involve a zero-sum trade-off: Any increase in work time should decrease leisure time. However, a closer examination reveals that once the diversity among workers is taken into account, there can be a kernel of truth in each account. From this perspective, leisure could increase if the

share of the working population were declining or the share of the population with lower levels of housework were increasing. The first means of reconciling the two arguments fails, whereas the second succeeds.

Although Schor's (1991) arguments apply to the employed population, Robinson and Godbey (1997) point to the growth of certain segments of the nonworking population, including demographic groups that are relatively high in leisure time. Specifically, increasing proportions of men are retiring at younger ages, thus increasing the share of the population that enjoys significant amounts of leisure time. At the other end of the age distribution, a growing group of individuals in their 20s are remaining in school for a longer period of time. Because students and retired men have more apparent leisure than does the average worker, the growth of these groups would point to an increase in leisure time in the general population, even with no change in the average workweek.

The growth in women's labor force participation has more than offset these changes, however. In fact, a larger fraction of the adult population is in the labor force today than at any time since the Second World War. For example, the ratio of employed individuals to the population (age 16 and above) rose from 56.1% in 1950 to 63.8% in 1997. Similarly, the percentage of the population in the civilian labor force rose from 59.2% to 67.1% during the same period (U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census [USDOC-BOC], 1998, Table 644). If we removed the growing fraction of the population aged 65 or above from these calculations, the growth in the employed population would appear even steeper. Thus, any observed changes in working time pertain to a growing, not a shrinking, share of the population.

A decline in time spent in housework provides another, sounder way to reconcile discrepant claims regarding work and leisure. Robinson and Godbey (1997) note that the amount of housework performed by some segments of the population is lower than among others. Single women, for example, spend less time doing housework than do married women, and those without children do less housework than do parents. Over the past 30 years, the average age of marriage has increased, the age at first birth of children has increased, and the number of children per household has declined. All these demographic trends give people more leisure time without reducing their time on the job.¹¹ It is thus possible for the workweek to remain stable (or even grow slightly) while an increase in leisure time in the population also occurs.

A more serious problem with the debate about leisure versus work is that it focuses on the average experience of the average American. Instead of focusing on averages, which depend on the size of various groups and their experience of work or leisure, it is more informative to explore the distribution of

working time. We find that, although the average workweek has not changed significantly, notable shifts in the distribution of working time across groups of workers have occurred.

Furthermore, it is important to focus on the family's workweek rather than on the individual earner's. Because dual-earner couples are becoming more common and male breadwinners less common, husbands and wives may experience a sharp increase in the shared workweek even if the average individual working time shows little change. Single mothers, who also cannot rely on an unpaid worker at home, may undergo a similar time crunch. Again, we will see that single mothers, as a group, are not significantly more pressed for time than they were 30 years ago. Instead, this long-standing problem has diffused to a much larger number of families as the number of single mothers has grown.

WORKING TIME FOR INDIVIDUALS OR FAMILIES?

Although the experiences of individual workers are important, focusing on families provides another way of approaching the question of working hours. Dual-earner couples and single-parent families are the groups most likely to feel squeezed between the demands and rewards of work and the needs of family life. Indeed, single parents, who are predominantly mothers, are likely to experience an even greater time burden than are dual-earner couples. It is not the amount of working time but rather the loss of someone to take care of domestic needs that links single mothers with dual-earner couples. The debate over the causes and consequences of work-family conflict thus pertain most acutely to the experiences of these groups.

Although numerous studies have offered detailed examinations of the time couples allocate to housework and related domestic tasks, relatively few have focused on the amount of time dual-earner couples jointly devote to paid work. In a series of articles, Presser (1994, 1995) examined the distribution of shift work among dual-earner couples but did not explore the length of the workweek per se.¹² Nock and Kingston (1988) found that long workweeks do take away time that parents could otherwise spend with children, but they also found this primarily reduced activities in which children were peripherally involved rather than activities in which children were the center of attention. Moreover, they did not explore historical trends in the length of the workweek for working spouses. Thus, despite the importance of overall trends and variations in how dual-earner couples jointly allocate time between work and other activities, scant attention has been given to these matters. We turn our attention, then, to trends in working time among dual-earner couples

and seek to determine how many hours these couples jointly devote to paid employment.

THE GROWTH OF DUAL-EARNER FAMILIES

Although most analysts argue that the rise of work-family conflict reflects an increase in the amount of time people are working, a focus on the combined hours of employed couples, rather than on changes in the behavior of individual workers, points to a different explanation. If more members of a family are in the labor force, each is more likely to feel squeezed between home and work. A rise in the proportion of households with either two earners or one parent is likely to produce the perception of a growing time squeeze, even if the average amount of time individuals spend working has not increased substantially. Contemporary dual-earner couples may feel time pressures quite similar to those experienced by their predecessors in 1970. It is not the amount of time workers are devoting to work that has increased but rather the proportion of workers who experience the conflicts associated with a dual-earner (or single-parent) situation. Because most married couples now depend on two incomes, this experience has become typical rather than unusual.

DEMOGRAPHIC SHIFTS IN WORKING TIME

Does the growing sense of time pressures stem from changes in working hours or from a basic demographic shift in family structure? Because recent studies have failed to document dramatic changes in the length of the average workweek, the widespread transformation in how households are organized has likely played a larger role than has increased working time for individual workers. Nevertheless, we know little about the relative importance of each of these factors or how they vary across the labor force. Even if the average length of the individual workweek has remained fairly constant, has the combined working time for couples increased? How does the distribution of working time for couples vary, and how has it changed? What are the contours of the shift in family composition, and what does this shift imply for the shape of the labor force?

Although economists, demographers, and sociologists have studied the determinants of labor supply for decades, most have focused only on whether women are employed, with much less concern for how many hours men and women work. Our goal is to account for changes in working time

between 1970 and 1997 by examining the factors most likely to account for shifts over time in the working time of couples. Previous studies have found that demographic factors, such as education, age, and the number of children, help explain working time. For example, studies have shown that those with more education are likely to work longer hours (Coleman & Pencavel, 1993a, 1993b; Jacobs & Gerson, 1998). We thus expect that a general increase in educational levels in the labor force would account for a portion of the increase in working time.

The aging of the workforce may also have spurred a longer workweek. The aging of the baby-boom generation has created a labor force in which a smaller fraction of workers were younger than age 30 in 1997 than in 1970. Because men and women in their 20s tend to work less than those between age 30 and 55, this shift may account for some of the changes occurring in this period.

The number of children in a worker's family also influences a family's working time. The presence of children depresses the number of hours that women work while having relatively little effect on men's working time. The decline in family size may thus also have contributed to an increase in the time that women spend at work. Our analysis estimates the significance of these demographic factors in accounting for changes over time in the joint paid working time of married couples.

DATA AND METHOD

To answer these questions, we analyzed the March Annual Demographic Files of the CPS from 1970 and 1997 (USDOC-BOC, 1970, 1997) and created data files organized by household rather than by individual working time. We sorted individuals by household, and within household, by family type. We then matched married individuals within families. In 99.5% of households, there were no more than two married individuals in the family: the householder and the householder's spouse. In 0.5% of households, however, there were two additional married individuals. In these more problematic cases, we sorted individuals by family within the household and then matched husbands and wives within each. We restricted the sample to married couples in which both spouses were aged 18 to 64. This procedure produced a sample of 32,676 married couples in 1997 and 27,494 married couples in 1970. We weighted the data using the March supplement person-weight so that the weighted sample would reflect the characteristics of married couples in the United States at these two points in time.

Although many studies of working time restrict the focus to wage and salary workers employed in the nonagricultural labor force, we decided to include self-employed individuals.

Because our focus is on working time per se and not on the employer-employee relationship, there was no reason to exclude self-employed workers. We did, however, exclude agriculture workers because the organization of working time on farms differs in fundamental ways from the structure of work in other employment settings. It would be misleading to allow the historical decline in the size of the agricultural sector to overshadow other, more significant trends.

The CPS provides several measures of working time, including a measure of average weekly working time for the job (or jobs) held last week and a measure of average time spent at work last year. To ascertain time commitments based on a worker's current job, we analyzed responses to the question "How many hours did you usually work per week in the job (or jobs) held last week?" To determine if a measure based on all jobs held in a year would yield appreciably different results, we also conducted analyses of the question on time spent at work last year.¹³

Couples were categorized into four exhaustive and mutually exclusive categories: (a) dual-earner couples, (b) male-breadwinner couples, (c) female-breadwinner couples, and (d) couples with neither spouse employed. Couples were apportioned among these four groups according to whether each spouse had worked at least 1 hour in the previous week. For each spouse, we then culled data on his or her education and age. For the household, we obtained several measures of the number and ages of children in the family. We also present results for working parents and single mothers.

The education measures for 1970 and 1997 are not strictly comparable. In 1970, the CPS solicited information on the number of years of schooling completed, but, in 1997, respondents were asked to report the highest degree attained. To make these measures more comparable, we grouped the 1970 measure into four categories: (a) less than high school, (b) high school graduate (i.e., 12 years of schooling completed), (c) some college (13 to 15 years of schooling completed), and (4) college graduate (16 or more years of schooling). To see how much difference resulted from the change in the educational measure, we replicated our analysis with data from the 1990 CPS (USDOC-BOC, 1990), which coded education in the same manner as in 1970. This set of analyses produced results that are entirely consistent with those reported below.

RESULTS

WORKING TIME IN DUAL-EARNER FAMILIES, 1970 AND 1997

Table 1 compares the distribution of couples in 1970 and 1997 by presenting the proportion of couples in each of the four types of families—dual earner, male breadwinner, female breadwinner, and neither employed. These results indicate a marked shift from the male-breadwinner family to the dual-earner couple. In 1970, the male breadwinner remained the modal type among couples, with 51.4% of couples falling into this category. In contrast, husbands and wives were both employed in just greater than one third (35.9%) of married couples younger than age 65. By 1997, however, the dual-earner couple represented a solid majority (59.5%) of married couples. In this context of family transformation, it is not surprising that there has been growing social concern about balancing work and family.

Table 1 also compares the number of hours devoted to paid employment in 1970 and 1997 for each type of couple. Among all couples, working time performed by both husband and wife increased from 52.5 hours per week to 62.8 hours per week. In addition, the proportion working very long hours, that is, 100 hours per week or more, more than doubled from 3.1% to 8.6% of all couples. As a group, married individuals have less time to spend at home, because they devote more joint time to work.

The growth of working time among married couples, however, does not result from significant increases in working time for each household type. Rather, it is principally due to the growth in the overall proportion of couples that fit the dual-earner pattern. The smallest changes occurred among male-breadwinner couples. By 1997, male breadwinners were working 44.7 hours per week on average, a very slight increase from the 44.4 hours these husbands averaged in 1970. Working time for female breadwinners in intact marriages also grew only slightly, rising from an average of 35.5 hours per week in 1970 to a weekly average of 36.9 hours in 1997. More important, over this same period, female breadwinners in married-couple households remained an unusual group. The influx of wives into the labor force has not induced husbands to stay home.

The largest increase in working time occurred among dual-earner couples, who also constitute the fastest growing group. Husbands and wives in these marriages jointly devoted 81.3 hours per week in paid employment, up just more than 3 hours per week from the 78.0 hours per week reported in 1970. In addition, the proportion reporting very long workweeks rose sharply, from 8.7% to 14.4%. Notably, it is wives' working time that provides the major cause of the growth in combined working time for these couples. Whereas

TABLE 1: Trends in Joint Hours of Paid Work by Husbands and Wives, 1970-1997, (nonfarm) Married Couples Aged 18-64

<i>Group (% of overall total)</i>	<i>Mean Hours Last Week All Jobs (SD)</i>	<i>% Working Less Than 70 Hours per Week</i>	<i>% Working 100+ Hours per Week</i>	<i>Husband's Hours</i>	<i>Wife's Hours</i>
1997					
Total, all couples	62.8 (29.6)	51.0	8.6	38.4	24.4
Both work	81.3 (59.5)	20.3	14.4	44.9	36.4
Only husband works	44.7 (25.9)	95.2	0.0	44.7	0.0
Only wife works	36.9 (7.2)	98.4	0.0	0.0	36.9
Neither works	0.0 (7.4)	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0
1970					
Total, all couples	52.5 (25.7)	63.4	3.1	38.9	33.6
Both work	78.0 (35.9)	24.9	8.7	44.1	33.9
Only husband works	44.4 (51.4)	96.0	0.0	44.4	0.0
Only wife works	35.5 (4.6)	99.6	0.0	0.0	35.5
Neither works	0.0 (8.2)	100.0	0.0	0.0	0.0

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1970, 1997).

husbands' mean hours at work rose by only 0.8 hours during this period, wives' time at paid work rose by 2.5 hours. The relative balance in working time between husbands and wives thus also shifted during this period, as wives became more strongly committed to work outside the home.

The changes that occurred between 1970 and 1997 can be divided into two components: (a) changes in the distribution of marriages across various family types and (b) changes in the working time of individuals in the same marriage types. If we hold joint working time constant at 1970 levels for each marriage type and substitute the 1997 distribution of marriage types, the total working time for married individuals would have risen from 52.5 to 60.5 hours. In other words, 8.0 of the 10.3 additional hours worked can be attributed to the shift in the economic arrangements of married couples. In percentage terms, more than three quarters (77.7%) of the growth in working time among married couples is due to the growth of dual-earner households. The remaining quarter (22.3%) results from an increase in working time, particularly among dual-earner couples. Although there has been a slight increase in the total amount of time dual-earner couples devote to work, the principal source of change has been the rise in the proportion of couples who fit the dual-earner pattern. Changes in working time have been modest compared to the sharp growth in the size of this group.

A growing segment of the population appears to be working extremely long hours. Whereas couples working 100 hours or more per week are likely to feel squeezed for time, this group of "overworked" couples does not represent the average. Some dual-earner couples may be working longer hours than their historical predecessors, but dual-earner couples have always been stretched thin in balancing work and family time.

The major change of the last generation has not been a fundamental shift in the working time of individuals but rather a dramatic growth in the number of people whose families depend on two incomes. Moreover, there is scant evidence of a general shift in the relative importance of work and family among couples in which both partners work. Instead, the rise of family time deficits has a more straightforward explanation: the rise of women's employment and the demographic transformation of family life, with little in the way of a countervailing shift in men's nonworking time.

THE DISTRIBUTION OF WORKING TIME ACROSS COUPLES

Despite the small increase in the average working time of dual-earner couples as a group, we have found growth in the number of couples whose joint work hours are quite high. Who are the couples putting in these very long hours, and how do they compare to others? Are members of this "overworked"

group attracting disproportionate attention because their numbers are growing or because they occupy socially prominent positions in society? Moreover, do they face acutely more difficult circumstances because they are juggling child rearing with very long work hours, or are they more likely to be working long hours because children are less likely to be present in the home? To answer these questions, we examine the distribution of couples' combined working time across important social dimensions, such as education, occupation, and child situation.

Table 2 presents trends in working hours, with couples classified by the educational level of the wife. This table makes it clear that the growth in working time has been concentrated among couples with the most education. Couples in which the husband had completed 4 years of college were working 2.1 hours more than in 1970, whereas couples in which the husband had not completed high school were working 0.6 hours less than in 1970.¹⁴ A 3.4-hour difference in favor of the most educated couples in 1970 grew to become a 6.1-hour differential by 1997.¹⁵

These changes principally reflect the growing hours on the job of working women: Working wives with at least some college education increased their working time by more than 2 hours per week during this period.

To examine the importance of education for both marital partners more directly, we considered trends in paid working time among couples where both the husband and wife were college graduates (results available from authors). Among this group, a 3.8-hour-per-week increase in working time occurred between 1970 and 1997. Significantly, this increase results almost entirely from an increase in working time among wives. These wives worked 3.5 hours per week more than they did in 1970, whereas the husbands worked only 0.3 more hours per week.

Although some working families are putting in more time at work than did their counterparts several decades ago, this trend appears to be modest. It is sharpest among one group: couples in which the combined working time of both workers adds up to very long workweeks. Because these couples are more likely to be highly educated, they occupy a disproportionate share of high-profile occupational positions in the professional and managerial sector. The high visibility of this segment of the labor force has probably enhanced the national attention given to the problem of overwork.

The underlying reason for observed changes in the working time of married couples appears to be the rise of employment among married women. The growing work commitment of wives is the major cause of change in married couples' working time, whether measured as a rise in the proportion of couples who have two earners or a rise in the amount of time such couples are devoting to paid work. Because married men's working time has remained

TABLE 2: Trends in Joint Hours of Paid Work by Husbands and Wives, 1970-1997, by Wife's Educational Level, Nonfarm Dual-Earner Couples

<i>Wife's Educational Level (% of overall total)</i>	<i>Mean Hours Last Week All Jobs (SD)</i>	<i>% Working Less Than 70 Hours per Week</i>	<i>% Working 100+ Hours per Week</i>	<i>Husband's Hours</i>	<i>Wife's Hours</i>
1997					
College graduate (29.4)	83.3 (19.8)	18.9	16.3	45.7	37.7
Some college (29.6)	80.0 (17.7)	22.3	10.6	44.4	35.5
High school graduate (33.8)	79.5 (17.8)	22.7	9.2	43.9	35.6
Less than high school (7.2)	77.2 (17.0)	25.9	8.2	42.4	34.8
1970					
College graduate (27.6)	81.2 (20.2)	23.2	18.4	45.8	35.4
Some college (49.5)	77.0 (18.1)	27.3	8.2	44.5	32.6
High school graduate (12.0)	77.6 (16.4)	24.9	7.5	44.0	33.6
Less than high school (11.0)	77.8 (15.9)	24.6	7.1	43.5	34.3

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1970, 1997).

fairly stable or grown modestly, women's movement out of the home has not been offset by a comparable shift toward greater family time among men. In this context, it is easy to understand why families feel squeezed.

EXPLAINING TRENDS AMONG DUAL-EARNER COUPLES

Although there has been an increase of roughly 3 hours per week in the paid working time of dual-earner couples, it is unclear to what extent this change is due to changes in workers' attributes or to shifts in the nature of jobs. To untangle these forces, we estimated a series of regression equations predicting the total number of hours in paid employment of husbands and wives in dual-earner couples. Pooling data from 1970 and 1997, we sought to account for the 3-hour increase that occurred during this period. To measure the influence of demographic changes, we included four individual measures—(a) age, (b) age squared, (c) education (three dummy measures of degree attainment, with college graduates serving as the reference group), and (d) occupation (three dummy measures: managerial, professional, sales, and all others as a reference group)—and one family measure: the number of children younger than 18. These individual variables were measured for both husbands and wives.

This very simplified model of working time for dual-earner couples explains two thirds of the increase in working time among this group (results are presented in Table 3). In other words, the growth of 3 hours is due largely to the fact that dual-earner couples in 1997 were slightly older than their counterparts in 1970, were more likely to have a college degree, were more likely to be in managerial occupations, and had fewer children younger than age 18. Once these factors were taken into account, the growth in time on the job was reduced to just more than 1 hour per week. This simple model does not account for a great deal of the variance in time on the job, but it does account for the preponderance of change during this period of time.

DUAL-EARNER PARENTS AND WORKING TIME

Because the greatest concern about increased working time centers on the potentially negative consequences for children, it is important to ascertain to what extent working couples with very long workweeks are juggling these work demands with child rearing. Have couples with children at home increased their combined working time, or are they more likely to be cutting back from work to meet their child rearing obligations?

To answer this question, Table 4 presents trends in the hours of paid employment for working couples with and without children. In 1997, working parents

TABLE 3: Pooled Regression Analysis of Joint Paid Working Time of Couples, 1970 and 1997

Variable	Model 1		Model 2	
	Parameter Estimate	SE	Parameter Estimate	SE
Intercept	78.30***	0.19	63.23***	1.84
Year (1997)	2.97***	0.25	1.20***	0.28
Number of children younger than 18			-1.28***	0.11
Husband				
Age			0.55***	0.15
Age squared*10			-0.06***	0.02
Education				
College graduate +			-1.93***	0.51
Some college			-1.55***	0.45
High school graduate			-0.34	0.38
Less than high school			—	—
Occupation				
Managerial			4.73***	0.35
Professional			0.29	0.40
Sales			3.80***	0.44
All others			—	—
Wife				
Age			0.29	0.15
Age squared*10			-0.04*	0.02
Education				
College graduate			2.43***	0.56
Some college			-0.34	0.48
High school graduate			-0.27	0.40
Less than high school			—	—
Occupation				
Managerial			6.36***	0.42
Professional			1.17***	0.37
Sales			0.30	0.43
All other occupations			—	—
R^2		0.01		0.05

*p < .05, ***p < .001

worked for pay 2.1 hours less per week than did couples without children. In addition, working hours declined slightly as the number of children increased. For those with one child younger than 18, couples worked an average of 81.2 hours per week; those with three or more children worked 79.0 hours. The difference principally reflects reduced working time among mothers. For husbands, working hours actually increased slightly with the presence of children and as the number of children rose. Those fathers with

TABLE 4: Trends in Joint Hours of Paid Work by Husbands and Wives, 1970-1997, by Parental Status, Nonfarm Dual-Earner Couples

<i>Parental Status (% of overall total)</i>	<i>Mean Hours Last Week All Jobs (SD)</i>	<i>% Working Less Than 70 Hours per Week</i>	<i>% Working 100+ Hours per Week</i>	<i>Husband's Hours</i>	<i>Wife's Hours</i>
1997					
No children ≤ 18 (41.9)	82.5 (19.4)	18.1	16.5	44.4	38.1
Some children ≤ 18 (58.1)	80.4 (17.6)	21.9	12.8	45.2	35.1
1 child ≤ 18 (23.1)	81.2 (17.4)	19.0	13.2	44.9	36.4
2 children ≤ 18 (24.2)	80.1 (17.6)	22.7	12.5	45.3	34.8
3+ children ≤ 18 (10.7)	79.0 (18.0)	26.6	12.7	45.9	33.1
1970					
No children ≤ 18 (33.4)	79.5 (16.6)	19.5	9.5	43.2	36.4
Some children ≤ 18 (66.6)	76.9 (17.2)	28.7	8.2	44.8	32.1
1 child ≤ 18 (23.6)	78.3 (17.4)	24.4	8.8	44.3	34.0
2 children ≤ 18 (21.0)	76.5 (16.7)	30.6	8.1	45.1	31.4
3+ children ≤ 18 (22.0)	75.9 (17.3)	31.8	7.7	45.1	30.8

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census (1970, 1997).

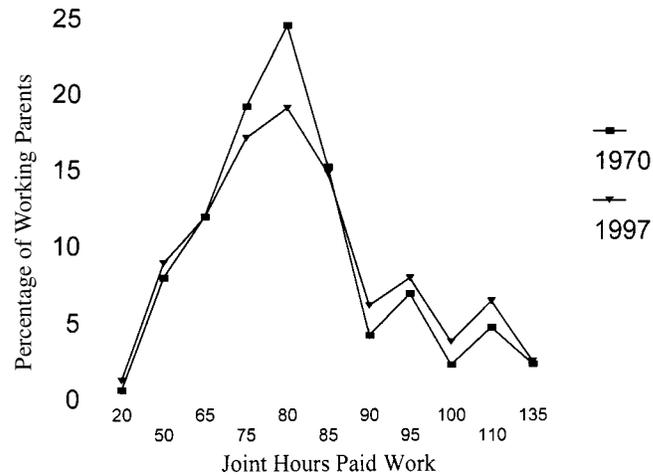


Figure 1: Joint Hours Paid Work, Working Parents

three or more children worked 1.5 hours per week more than did husbands without children. In contrast, mothers with three or more children worked 5 hours less per week than married women without children.

To examine this distribution, Figure 1 presents trends in the hours of paid employment among working parents. The distribution shows increased dispersion in 1997 compared with 1970, with fewer couples concentrated around the 80-hour central tendency and more couples at both the high and low end of the spectrum.

Despite the transformation from male-breadwinner to dual-earner marriages, gender differences in the work consequences of parenthood persist. The arrival of children still tends to push men toward stronger work participation while pulling women toward somewhat less involvement, creating a larger gender gap in their levels of work commitment compared to childless couples. These differences are nonetheless greatly attenuated compared to the once dominant pattern in which women withdrew from paid work altogether when children arrived.

Although the combined working time of dual-earner parents is slightly less than that of childless couples, the degree of change over time is slightly larger. Thus, between 1970 and 1997, the joint hours in paid employment of working couples increased by roughly 3 hours for those without children and by about 3.5 hours for those with children. The percentage of couples putting in very long workweeks (of 100 hours or more) rose for both groups, but the rise was less pronounced for parents in both absolute and percentage terms.

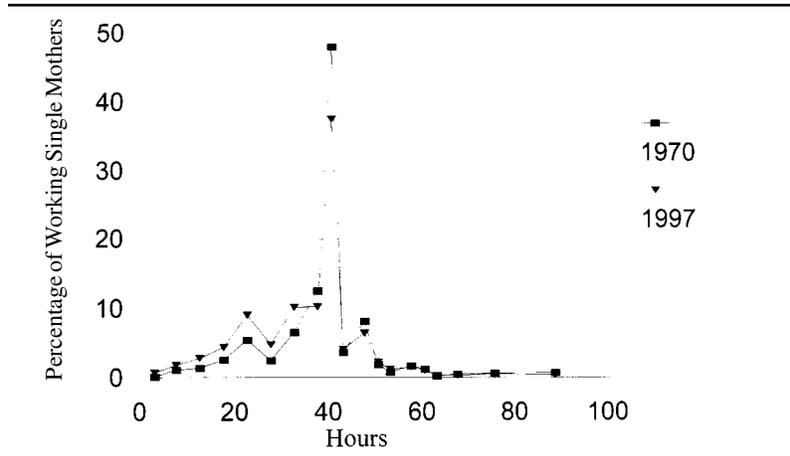


Figure 2: Hours of Paid Work, Single Mothers

The percentage of childless couples working at least 100 hours a week rose from 9.5% to 16.5%, whereas the percentage of working couples with children rose from 8.2% to 12.8%. Again, the trend toward more time at work holds for parents as well as for couples without children at home, but it appears to be less pronounced for those workers with the largest family obligations. Whatever may be fueling these widespread social changes, they are not concentrated among parents and thus do not appear to stem from parents' preferences for work over family time.

Another important group of parents is represented by single mothers. Single parents are truly caught in a time bind, because they need to work as much as possible to support their families, while needing all the free time possible to supervise and care for their children. How do single mothers balance these competing time demands? Figure 2 displays the trends in working time among this growing group. The story here is one of dispersion rather than a shift toward a longer workweek. The fraction working the modal time on the job, 40 hours, has declined by nearly 10% (from 45.3% to 37.4%), with increases observed at both the high and low ends of the distribution. The average workweek for this group actually declined slightly, from 38.5 hours per week in 1970 to 36.0 hours in 1997.

CONCLUSION

We have endeavored to clarify the causes and contours of changes in working time by focusing not on individual workers but rather on the com-

bined work commitments of households, whether headed by couples or single mothers. We have discovered that the bulk of the change is not the result of increased working time within particular types of families but is instead a reflection of changes in family composition, and especially the growth of dual-earner couples. In addition, although overall changes in working time are modest, the past several decades have witnessed the emergence of a segment of employed couples who are putting in very long workweeks of 100 hours or more. These couples are especially likely to be concentrated among highly educated workers, who tend to occupy the most prestigious jobs and occupations. Finally, although parents do not appear to be putting in more time at work than are other groups, a disparity persists between fathers, who tend to work more than their childless counterparts, and mothers, who tend to work less.

These findings have important implications for family welfare and gender equality. First, they show that changes in the working time of individual workers cannot explain the rise of family time deficits. Rather, these changes stem from a transformation in family composition and gender relations. This widespread demographic transformation reflects basic social-structural and economic changes, including the erosion of the single-income "family wage" and the growth of women's commitment to an adulthood not confined to the home. These developments are deeply rooted and apparently irreversible, but they do not indicate that parents prefer work to family life. They suggest, instead, that adults, and especially women, are seeking a balance between home and work that may be increasingly elusive.

The central problem caused by this family transformation can be better understood by comparing the large changes in women's lives with the more intransigent situation for men, whose work commitments have remained comparatively stable and whose domestic involvement has not increased sufficiently to offset women's rising work commitment. This situation has left dual-earning families to cope with persisting family demands in the context of rising work obligations for the couple, and it has left employed, single mothers facing even greater time squeezes.

Our analysis suggests that the future of family and child well-being will depend on developing policies that accept the irreversibility of this demographic transition. Unfortunately, the full incorporation of women, and especially mothers, into the labor force continues to evoke ambivalence. Whereas welfare mothers are criticized for not working enough, middle-class women are castigated for spending too much time in paid employment.

We have focused on time in paid employment, but time is certainly not the whole story.

Highly competitive workplaces may have created rising pressures, even for those workers putting in the same number of hours. Consequently, the amount of flexibility on the job, and not just the total number of hours, needs to be considered (Gerson & Jacobs, in press). The organization of time, and not just the duration of jobs, needs to be taken into account. Presser (1999) reminds us of the disruptive effects of evening, night, and weekend shifts on family life. Despite families' rising work pressures, cultural pressures for "intensive mothering" have intensified (Hays, 1997). Thus, single parents and parents in dual-earner couples face not only a shortage of time but also increasing expectations during that limited time, both on the job and at home.

These crosscutting ideals lend credence to the argument that the problems currently facing American families stem not from too much change but from too little. Despite women's growing need and desire to work outside the home, there remains widespread resistance to providing women with equal opportunities at work and to overcoming the "stalled revolution" that has left men shouldering less than an equal share at home (Hochschild, 1989). Ultimately, however, the problem of family time deficits cannot be solved by chastising parents for working too much. Instead, the time has come to create a more flexible and family-supportive workplace, including more options for reducing working time (Jacobs & Gerson, 1998), commensurate with the family transformation that has already taken place.

NOTES

1. Recent conferences include "Work and Family: Today's Realities, Tomorrow's Visions," Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, Business and Professional Women's Foundation, and The Wellesley College Center for Research On Women, November 6 and 7, 1998, Boston; "A Time of Transition: Work, Family and Community After 2001," Families and Work Institute Forum, February 25 and 26, Tarrytown, New York; "No Time to Care—Whose Business Is It Anyway?" Radcliffe Public Policy Institute Conference, May 5, 1999, New York City.

2. These include the Boston College Center for Work and Family, the Cornell Employment and Family Careers Institute, and the Families and Work Institute (New York City).

3. The Sloan E-Network for Work-Family researchers, url address: http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/avp/csom/cwf/wfnetwork.html.

4. Does excessive time on the job cause stress? Many questions on stress are defined in terms of not having enough time to meet all of one's obligations. For example, see Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg (1997, p. 65).

5. This figure is obtained from the March Current Population Survey (CPS) by multiplying the usual number of weeks worked during the previous calendar year by the number of hours usually worked per week during that same period.

6. Schor's (1991) book spent numerous weeks on *The New York Times* Best Sellers list.

7. Because Schor excludes those involuntarily employed part-time from her analysis, this small increase is itself overstated. Because this group of underworked individuals grew in size during her period of study, including it would reduce the growth of time on the job.

8. The same is true for men as well. Labor force participation varies over the life course, with somewhat lower levels of labor force participation among young men (under age 25) and older men (over 55 or 60). In those life stages with lower labor force participation, there are also fewer weeks worked per year. Small changes in weeks worked per year for men and women reflect cyclical changes in the labor market and changes in workers' demographic attributes, such as age and education.

9. Hourly wages are typically computed by dividing earnings by hours worked. If the true working time is less than reported working time, the hourly wage would be higher. The potential concentration of this effect among high earners would inflate estimates of inequality and the returns to education, and would affect analyses of other behavior that is associated with wages.

10. A weekly diary may avoid this problem, but it is even more expensive to collect. Moreover, the accuracy of time-diary data over the period of a week has yet to be determined. It may be that respondents would tire of filling out diaries after a few days and would become increasingly sloppy in their reporting, forgetting activities in which they engaged.

11. It is possible that some families are postponing parenthood because work is so demanding, as Robinson and Godbey (1997, p. 9) note. The extra time available to young adults without children may itself reflect a concession to the voracious demands of paid work.

12. Presser also noted the rise of "nonstandard" work shifts, which take place at night, on weekends, and during other periods formerly considered private time. These shifting work schedules, coupled with the rise of new technologies such as e-mail and cell phones, may also have contributed to the sense that family life is being disrupted by work demands.

13. Jacobs (1998) noted that there is less dispersion in an annual, compared with a weekly, measure of working time. Unfortunately, we were unable to use hours typically worked at the respondent's job in the previous year because this measure was not available in the 1970 CPS. We reestimated the results presented below over the period 1976 to 1997 with data on the longest job held last year and obtained results similar to those reported here.

14. This finding is consistent with that of Coleman and Pencavel (1993a, 1993b) on educational differentials in working time and Jacobs and Gerson (1998) on the growing bifurcation of time spent at work.

15. When changes over time are displayed by husbands' education, the changes are similar (results available from authors).

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