

Who Are the Overworked Americans?

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Abstract This paper analyzes three trends in working time in the United States over the last thirty years. First, we document an increasing bifurcation of working time, with growth evident among those working both long and short hours. An international comparison also shows that the United States stands out as having among the highest percentage of workers putting in 50 hours per week or more. Second, we argue that there is a mismatch between working time and the preferences of American workers. On average, those working very long hours express a desire to work less, while those working short hours prefer to work more. Third, we maintain that the sense of being overworked stems primarily from demographic shifts in the labor force rather than from changes in average working time *per se*. Even in the absence of a dramatic rise in time spent on the job, the growth in the proportion of American households consisting of dual-earner couples and single parents has created a growing percentage of workers who face heightened time pressures and increased conflicts between work and their private lives.

Keywords: working time, work-family conflict, over work, under work, dual earners, time famine

In recent years, and especially since the publication of Juliet Schor's *The Overworked American* (1991), scholars and ordinary citizens have become increasingly concerned about the issue of working time. Schor's claim that the century-long decline in working time has been reversed in recent years touched a social and cultural nerve. This growing concern about the state of American workers and their families has gained renewed attention with the publication of Arlie Hochschild's *The Time Bind* (1997), which explores the hectic schedules of dual-earner couples who work in one ostensibly family-friendly company.

There is little doubt that workers are facing new and unprecedented challenges in meeting the demands of work and family. The rise of employed mothers and the transformation of family structure and household composition in the closing decades of the twentieth century have clearly created a significant time bind for many workers. We argue, however, that this time squeeze is less general and more varied than recent research, and especially the works of Schor and Hochschild, have implied. To understand the dynamics of change and its diverse consequences, we need to move beyond a focus on the average worker to examine the entire distribution of working time among a varied group of workers.

In addition, we believe it is essential to distinguish between workers' behavior and their desires. We thus supplement standard data on the length of the work week with information on workers' preferences. Such subjective orientations may be difficult to measure and interpret, but it is surely more misleading simply to accept people's behavior as a reflection of their preferences—the alternative approach taken by many economists. Indeed, our data show that there is a notable mismatch between the hours many Americans put in on the job and the work schedules they would like to have.

Finally, we argue that the demographic dimensions of social change are crucial to understanding the emergence and shape of current time binds. The rise of dual-earner and single-parent families, both of which rely on employed women, has reduced the amount of unpaid familial support at home and thus increased the pressure on many American workers. As a result, employed women and men are experiencing increased time binds even though, as individuals, they may not be putting in longer hours at the workplace than did workers in earlier generations.

THE OVERWORKED AMERICAN? TRENDS IN THE WORK WEEK SINCE 1970

Despite the image of the overworked American, the average length of the work week does not appear to have changed appreciably in recent decades. To the contrary, the American worker is putting in about the same amount of time on the job, on average, as did his or her counterpart thirty years ago. American men are working about 42 or 43 hours per week for pay, while American women are working about 36 or 37 hours per week on the job. The stability in these averages, however, masks some important shifts in the variation around the average. While the average has remained largely unchanged since 1970, both long and short work weeks have become increasingly prevalent.

Schor (1991) and Bluestone and Rose (1997) have noted the trend toward a bifurcation in working time. Yet both of these studies focused on the average worker rather than on the trends at the extremes of the distribution and on annual

hours rather than on the average work week. These studies thus document the increasing number of weeks worked per year by American women as their labor force participation has become increasingly steady. Nevertheless, from the perspective of daily life, a shift among women from 39 to 44 weeks per year does not provide compelling support for the notion of a vast increase in overwork.¹

Using data from the Current Population Survey (CPS), Table 1 compares working time in 1970 and 1997.² A large and reliable data series, the CPS has been quite consistent in design and administration since the 1960s and thus is arguably the best source for examining historical trends in the length of the work week.³

TABLE 1. Trends in Hours Worked Last Week, 1970–1997, By Sex, Non-Farm Wage and Salary Workers

	Mean Hours Last Week All Jobs (s.d.)	Percent Working Less Than 30 Hours Per Week	Percent Working 50+ Hours Per Week
Men			
1997	42.5 (14.1)	9.6	25.2
1970	43.5 (10.6)	4.5	21.0
Women			
1997	36.7 (12.2)	20.5	10.8
1970	37.0 (9.6)	15.5	5.2

Source: Authors' estimates based on Current Population Survey data.

1 We believe that the increase in the number of weeks worked per year reported by Schor is not primarily an independent development but rather a by-product of the increased labor force participation and the increased continuity of work among women.

2 Robinson and Bostrom (1994) raised questions about the validity of self-reports on the length of the work week in data sets such as the Current Population Survey. However, Jacobs (1998) finds that the standard self-report question about the length of the work week is remarkably reliable and free of systematic bias. A more conservative measure of the dispersion of working time relies on data pertaining to how many hours per week the respondent typically worked last year. Unfortunately, that question was not included in the 1970 CPS and thus cannot be used in this study.

3 There were small changes in the wording of labor force questions in 1993, but these had little effect on the issues explored here. Trends over the period 1970–1990 display much the same pattern as those documented here between 1970 and 1997. The wording of the questions has thus had little effect on this time series.

The data pertain to non-farm wage and salary workers employed for at least one hour in the survey week.

The findings in Table 1 suggest stability in the average work week, but they also demonstrate that the percentage of men and women working long and short work weeks has increased during this period. In 1997, one quarter of men (25.2 percent) worked 50 hours per week or more, as did one in ten women (10.8 percent). At the other extreme, one in ten men in the labor force worked 30 hours per week or less, as did one fifth of working women.

Figures 1 and 2 present the full distribution of working time in 1970 and 1997 for men and women. While the 40 hour work week remains the modal pattern, with nearly 40 percent of men and women reporting working this standard time in 1997, it has become less typical than it was thirty years ago. For men and women, the 40 hour standard has declined by about 10 percentage points, with increases at both the high and low ends of the spectrum. These results are consistent with those of Rones *et al.* (1997), who also report a growing dispersion in working time.

These data do not make a compelling case for arguing that the length of the work week has increased sharply. Choosing different years can produce a small increase or a small decline, but there is little evidence of a general and marked upward trend in the average length of the work week.⁴ More support can be found instead for a modest increase in the bifurcation of working time among workers.

Long work weeks are most common among professionals and managers (see Table 2). Over one in three men (34.5 percent) who work in professional, technical, or managerial occupations work 50 hours or more per week, compared to one in five (20.0 percent) of men in other occupations. For women, the comparable figures are one in six for the professional and managerial positions versus less than one in fourteen for other occupations.

These occupational differences manifest themselves in sharply graded educational differentials. Nearly two in five American men with four or more years of college education work 50 hours per week or more, compared to less than one in eight men with less than a high school degree. Among women, nearly one in five college-educated American women work 50 or more hours per week, compared to less than one in twenty with less than a high school degree. While these educated workers are more likely to pay attention to and become involved in national discussions about the contours of working time, they actually represent

4 Robinson and Godbey (1997) present a time series of weekly hours worked by gender stretching from the late 1950s until the early 1990s. There are year-to-year fluctuations but the entire series varies within a remarkably tight range, from 41 to 43 hours for men and 34 to 36 hours for women. The averages may change slightly if one restricts the analysis, as we do here, to non-farm wage and salaried employees, but again for this group there have been no sharp changes in the length of the work week.

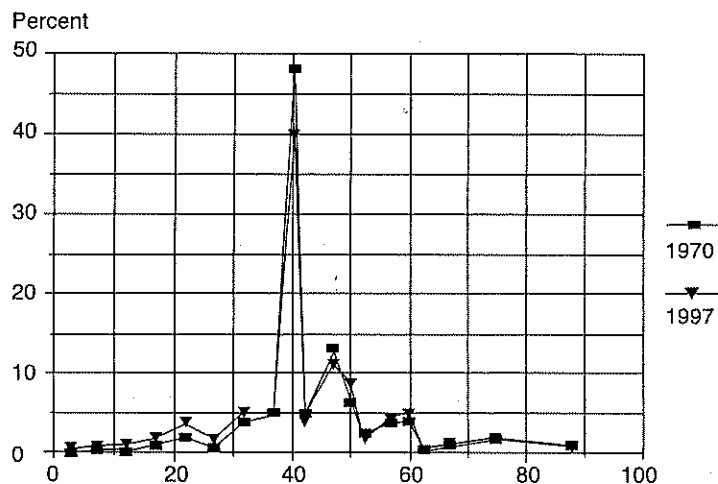


FIGURE 1: Working Hours per Week, Men, 1970 and 1997
Source: Current Population Survey

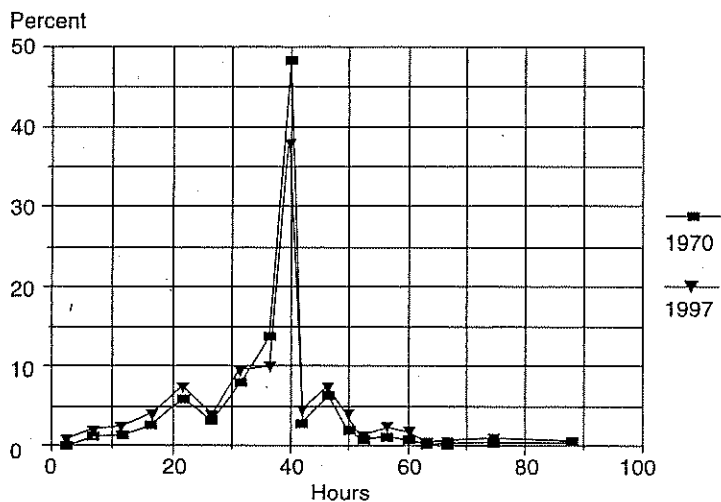


FIGURE 2: Working Hours per Week, Women, 1970 and 1997
Source: Current Population Survey

TABLE 2: Hours Worked Last Week By Professional and Managerial Status, 1997, By Sex, Non-Farm Wage and Salary Workers

	Mean Hours Last Week All jobs (s.d.)	Percent Working Less Than 30 Hours Per Week	Percent Working 50+ Hours Per Week
Men			
Professional, Managerial and Technical Employees	44.6 (13.1)	7.7	34.5
Workers in Other Occupations	40.6 (12.9)	13.5	20.0
Women			
Professional, Managerial and Technical Employees	39.1 (12.4)	15.1	17.0
Workers in Other Occupations	34.4 (12.1)	26.7	6.8

Source: Authors' estimates based on Current Population Survey data.

only one part of a larger and more complex puzzle of transformations in work commitment. Their experiences are better understood as one aspect of a growing segmentation of the labor force rather than as representing a general increase among all workers in time spent on the job (Coleman and Pencavel 1993a, 1993b).

While a complete analysis of the forces that are promoting a bifurcation of working time into too-long and too-short work weeks is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note that both benefits and costs create incentives for employers to move in this direction. Firms can lower their total compensation costs by hiring part-time workers with no benefits, thus increasing the proportion of workers at the low end of the hours distribution. Firms can also lower their total compensation costs by pressuring a fixed number of full-time employees to work as many hours as possible. This is especially true of those who are salaried and in many cases also applies to hourly workers entitled to overtime pay.

INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS

Are Americans merely replicating worldwide trends, or is the emergence of a sizeable group of workers who are devoting very long hours to their jobs peculiar

to the American context? By comparing work patterns in the United States to those in other countries, we can shed additional light on the question of overwork in America. In the international context, as in the United States, the distribution of working time rather than the length of the average work week emerges as the interesting story.

For this analysis, we rely on the Luxembourg Income Study (LIS), an internationally comparable archive of micro-level data sets gathered from a large number of industrialized countries. These data sets, based principally on household surveys, contain detailed information at both the individual and household level on a range of demographic, labor market, and income variables. The LIS data provide more comparability than many other cross-national comparative sources. They include much larger samples and consequently are more reliable than Wright's Comparative Class Structure survey data (Wright *et al.* 1995). They also make micro-level analyses possible, unlike the official data published by OECD. We use eight data sets from the third, and most recent, wave (1989-1992) of LIS data sets and one (Luxembourg) from the second wave (1985).⁵

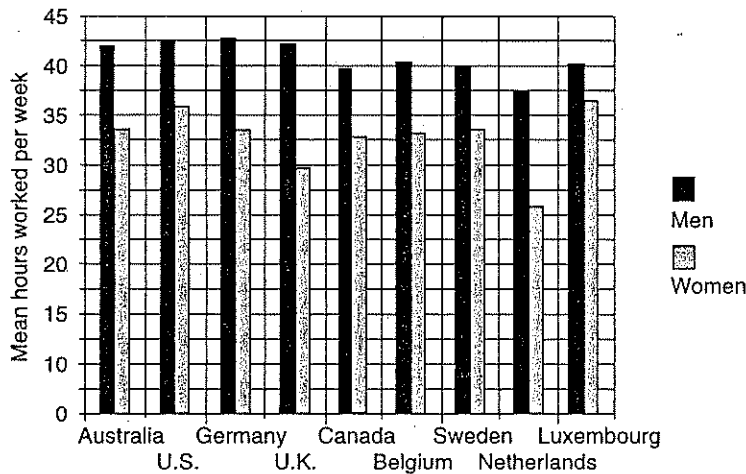


FIGURE 3: Average Weekly Hours, by Country
Source: Luxembourg Income Study

⁵ The years to which the data pertain, the names of the original surveys, and the sample sizes are presented in Gornick and Jacobs (1998). More detailed information on LIS and on the individual data sets is available in LIS Working Paper #7, The LIS/LES Information Guide (de Tombeur 1995).

Figure 3 compares the average length of the work week for nine industrial countries. For men, the average work week in most countries hovers around 40 hours per week, with only the Netherlands having a particularly short work week. The United States is at the higher end of the sample countries, but it does not stand out markedly from the others in terms of the average length of the week. When it comes to the number of workers putting in very long hours, however, the United States does stand out (see Figure 4).

For men, the United States and Australia have the highest proportion working 50 or more hours per week. The proportion of men working such long hours does not exceed 20 percent in any of the other countries. The variation between countries, moreover, is remarkable. The rates of men working long hours fall between 10 and 20 percent in Germany (16.1 percent), Canada (14.3 percent) and Belgium (12.4 percent). Even more noteworthy are three other countries where fewer than one in ten men works 50 hours per week or more: Sweden (7.3 percent), the Netherlands (3.5 percent), and Luxembourg (3.3 percent).

Variation in women's working hours across countries is also quite dramatic. American women, like American men, have among the longest work weeks in the nine countries. The proportion of women working part-time is also among the lowest, and the proportion working 50 hours or more per week is among the

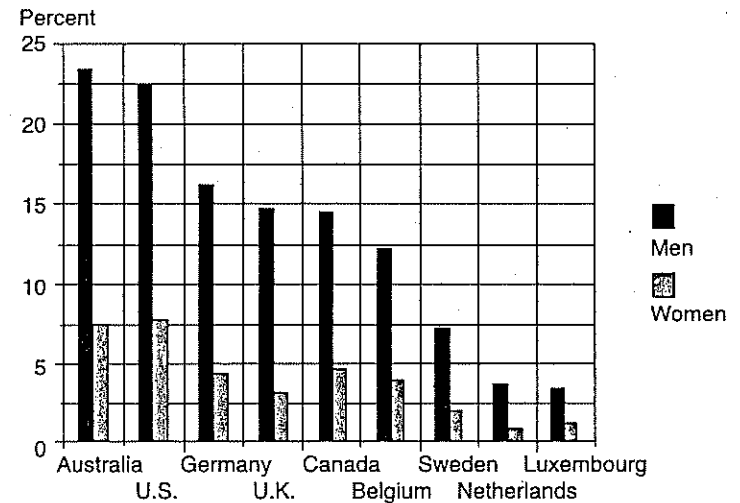


FIGURE 4: Proportion Working 50+ Hours per Week
Source: Luxembourg Income Study

highest. The Netherlands again stands out as having the shortest work week. The average woman in the Netherlands works 26.3 hours per week, and nearly half (49.7 percent) work under 30 hours per week (Plantenga 1996).⁶

These international comparisons suggest two conclusions. First, they show that it is possible to maintain a high and growing standard of living with a very different work profile than is evident in the United States. The steady improvements in productivity (OECD 1998; Freeman 1994) and the recent surge in the price of stocks in Europe counters the notion that European labor practices are hopelessly inefficient. While European countries have experienced high unemployment and low job growth in recent years, this may be due to tight monetary policies rather than stodgy labor practices. Whatever the ultimate verdict on the efficiency question, these findings clearly demonstrate that our work patterns are neither inevitable nor inherent in post-industrial economic development. The United States model represents just one of many approaches exhibited by other affluent societies.

Second, the United States stands out more in terms of those working very long weeks than in terms of the average work week. Again, we find that a bifurcation in working time for women and men emerges as a major trend in the American context—and one that is not being replicated in most other affluent societies.⁷

COMPARING ACTUAL AND IDEAL WORK TIME

While a notable segment of the American labor force is putting in very long hours at the workplace, average working hours have not increased substantially. Yet there are strong reasons to conclude that more people are *feeling* overworked—even among those who are not working excessively long days or weeks. Most families can no longer rely on the unpaid support of a woman at home, yet the structure of work has not changed sufficiently to accommodate the transitions in workers' private lives. A focus on historical trends in actual time spent at paid

work misses this more fundamental shift in workers' lives, which may lead them to feel overworked, squeezed, and overburdened in new ways. Since most national surveys do not gather information on workers' desired work week, it has been difficult to address the subjective aspect of change.⁸

In this vacuum, economists such as Kneisner (1993) have argued that since most workers are currently working a few minutes less than were their counterparts in 1950, they do not feel overworked. Such a conclusion ignores the widespread changes that have taken place in family structure over this period and disregards the personal experiences and perspectives of contemporary workers. Regardless of the historical trajectory in working hours, we need to understand how Americans feel about their current work commitments in light of their obligations and responsibilities outside the workplace.

To examine the links between workers' actual and ideal working time, we analyze information from the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce, a national probability sample of 3,381 employed men and women aged 18 through 64 based on hour-long telephone interviews.⁹ The data are weighted to reflect the characteristics of the U.S. labor force as estimated by the March 1992 Current Population Survey (Galinsky *et al.* 1993). Conducted by the Families and Work Institute, this survey is distinctive because it asks a wide range of questions about workers' values and preferences and it focuses on the links, tensions, and conflicts between work and family. Since respondents were asked to reveal their ideal as well as their actual working hours, we can examine whether the Americans' overall level of work activity actually reflects the workers' desires. We can thus ascertain whether variation in preferences across groups of workers corresponds to variations in actual work levels.¹⁰

Respondents in the Changing Workforce survey were asked how many hours per week they usually worked on their principal job and on any additional jobs they held. Here we examine hours worked on all jobs together.¹¹ To discover ideal work hours, respondents were also asked: "Ideally, how many hours, in total, would you like to work each week?" Using this information on both actual and ideal hours, we were able to construct a measure of the gap between a worker's usual working time on all jobs and his or her ideal hours.

6 It would be interesting to know if the trend toward bifurcation in working hours is occurring in Europe as well as in the United States, even if the European countries have not reached the levels found in the U.S. Figart and Mutari (1998, this issue) suggest that the move toward flexibility in working time is sharpening the gender gap in working time, perhaps as part of a broader bifurcation in working time. On the other hand, the movement in France and elsewhere toward a shorter work week would point in the opposite direction.

7 New figures from the OECD (1998) also show the U.S. with the fifth largest proportion of workers putting in long hours among the twenty countries included in the analysis, trailing Australia, Japan, Portugal and the United Kingdom. The OECD results show the U.K. ahead of the U.S. on long hours by men, whereas our results show the reverse. The difference between the two may be due to the different cutoff points (45 hours for the OECD report versus 50 hours for our analysis) and to differences in data sources.

8 Although the CPS asks part-time workers whether they would like to work full time it does not ask them how many hours they would like to work. It also does not ask full-time workers whether they would prefer longer or shorter schedules.

9 This topic is explored in greater detail in Jacobs and Gerson (1998a).

10 The first tabulations from the 1997 Families and Work Institute Survey have recently been released (Bond *et al.* 1998). However, the data were not available for secondary analysis at the time this paper was being completed.

11 For an examination of dual job holders, see Jacobs and Gerson (1997).

TABLE 3: Comparison of Total Hours Worked and Ideal Hours, by Sex

	Men (n = 1300)	Women (n = 1539)
Total Hours Usually Worked (All Jobs)	45.77*	39.71
Ideal Hours	40.26*	34.82
Difference (Ideal—Actual)	-5.51	-4.89
Percent Wanting to Work Less	50.06	45.58
Percent Ideal Equals Actual	33.78	37.61
Percent Wanting to Work More	17.16	16.84
Percent Wanting to Work at least 5 Hours Less	45.36	41.25
Percent Wanting to Work at least 10 Hours Less	32.39	32.40
Percent Wanting to Work at least 20 Hours Less	15.30	13.19

* The difference between men and women is statistically significant, $p < .01$. None of the other sex differences in Table 2 are statistically significant at the conventional $p < .05$ level.

Source: Author's analysis of the National Survey of the Changing Workforce.

In Table 3, which compares ideal to total hours worked for employed women and men, it becomes clear that most American workers experience a significant gap between how much they work and how much they would like to work. Many wish to work less than they actually do, while a notable group would like to work more. While approximately one third of respondents reported that their actual and ideal hours corresponded precisely, nearly half indicated that their usual work week was longer than their ideal hours, and an additional one in six reported that they would prefer to work more than they currently do. (The unemployed should also be added to this group of "underworked" Americans, but the Changing Workforce survey only includes information on currently employed individuals.)

The vast majority of those who expressed a preference for shorter working hours wished to work at least five hours less per week than they currently do. Nine in twenty of the total sample (90 percent of those wanting to work less) preferred to work at least 5 fewer hours per week. Nearly one third of the total sample (32 percent of both men and women) expressed the desire to work 10 hours less per week, and about one in seven of the total sample wanted to work at least 20 hours less per week.

While women on average work about 6 fewer hours per week than men, the gap between women's and men's actual and ideal hours is quite similar. Men reported a preference for working 5.51 fewer hours, and women wished to work 5.14 fewer hours—a difference that is not statistically significant. If both groups were able to

enact their preferences, the gender gap in hours worked (which is about 6 hours per week) would thus not change significantly.

These findings suggest that, whether or not they are actually working more than earlier generations, the majority of contemporary employed Americans feel overworked—at least compared to their ideals. There is little indication that those putting in long hours are doing so because they prefer work over family and personal pursuits. Nevertheless, a notable group of workers would like to work more. Most of these workers, however, wish to extend relatively short work weeks rather than to put in excessive hours at the workplace.¹²

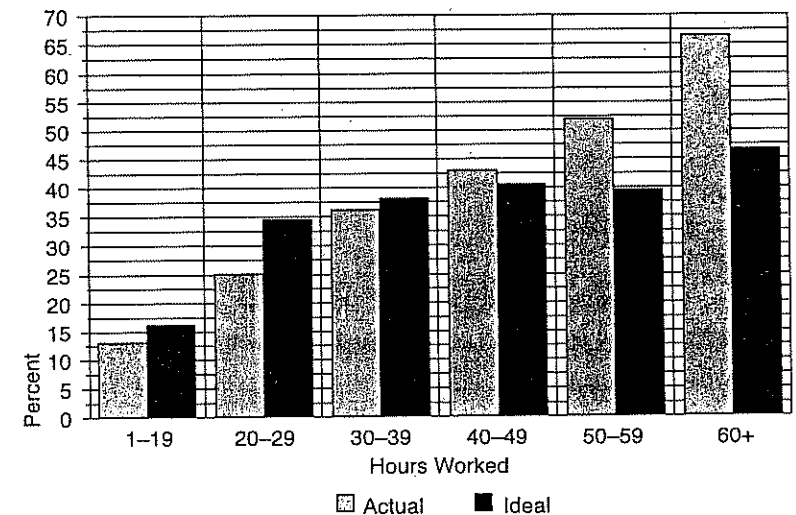


FIGURE 5: Ideal vs. Actual Working Hours, Men 1992

Source: National Survey of the Changing Workforce

¹² This survey also asked workers if they would prefer to work less even if they would have to take a cut in pay. Specifically, the question read "Would you be willing to give up a day's pay each week for an extra day of free time?" Over one quarter (28.8 percent) responded "yes" to this question.

To learn about the value of job flexibility, respondents were also asked, "Would you be willing to sacrifice career advancement to have (more) flexibility in scheduling your starting and ending times?" About one quarter (24.7 percent) of respondents answered "yes" to this question. The fundamental problem with all of these questions is that the *ceteris paribus* conditions are hard to specify, and thus the hypothetical alternative may be hard for workers to imagine. Specifically, substantial cuts in working time are sure to impede career progress. Thus, taking a day off does not simply reduce pay for that one day but, if done on a regular basis, could jeopardize career security and progression for years or even decades to come.

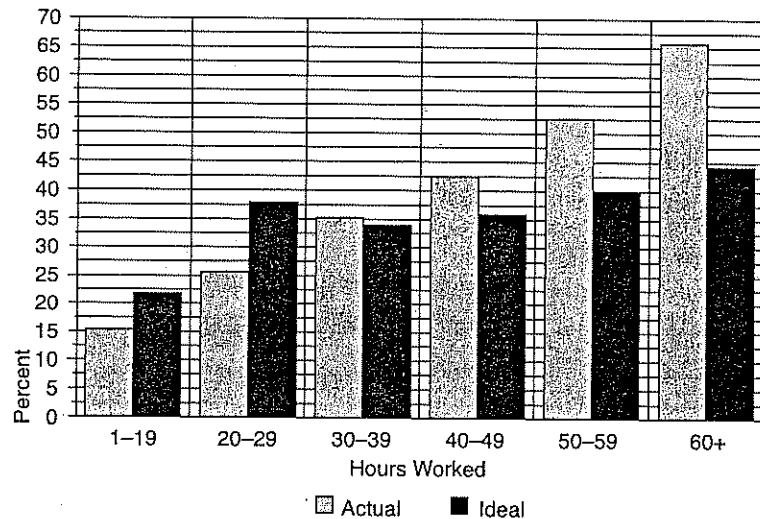


FIGURE 6: Ideal vs. Actual Working Hours, Women 1992
Source: National Survey of the Changing Workforce

In Figures 5 and 6, we gain a clearer picture of how the gap between ideal and total working hours is linked to actual working time. Figures 5 and 6 compare ideal and actual working times for men and women workers. They show that those working few hours on average prefer to work more, while those working very long weeks on average prefer to work less. The great majority of both men and women who work over 50 hours per week would prefer shorter schedules. Indeed, over 80 percent of those working over 50 hours per week indicated a preference for fewer hours. The excess work was substantial: those putting in between 50 and 60 hours per week preferred working 12 hours less, while those working over 60 hours wished to work a full 20 hours less. While the preferences of individuals vary, we found that only 6.4 percent of women and 15.8 percent of men expressed a desire to work more than 50 hours per week. Yet roughly one in four men and one in ten women actually put in that much time at work.

These findings further illustrate the ways in which social change involves an increasingly bifurcated labor market. This growing time divide has implications not only for how working time is distributed across jobs and workers but also for how workers feel about their work arrangements. Those at the top of the occupational hierarchy are more likely to feel overworked, while those in less

attractive and less rewarded occupational positions are more likely to need and desire to work more. These findings also raise questions about how employers are structuring employment options. Since personal "tastes" do not explain why some people are putting in very long work weeks and others very short ones, it appears that employers are organizing work schedules for reasons other than the needs and preferences of employees and their families.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE AND THE EMERGENCE OF TIME BINDS

The growing dispersion in working time is compounded by a second trend—the changing demographics of the labor force. In 1970, the male breadwinner was still the predominant family arrangement. While employed women represented a growing fraction of the labor market, dual-earner couples were still in the minority. By 1997, dual-earner couples had become much more prevalent than the traditional male-breadwinner arrangement.

Since 1970, the proportion of couples with only a male breadwinner in the labor market declined from a bare majority in 1970 (51.4 percent) to just over one quarter in 1997 (25.9 percent). At the same time, the percent of dual-earner couples rose sharply, from just over one third of married couples (35.9 percent in 1970) to nearly three in five (59.5 percent in 1997). The dual-earner couple is more common today than was the male-breadwinner couple in 1970. The percentage of married couples in which only the wife is employed increased sharply from a low base (from 4.6 percent in 1970 to 7.2 percent in 1997).

Table 4 presents the combined time on the job of couples in 1970 and 1997. Married couples are grouped into four mutually exclusive types: 1) "male breadwinners," in which the husband is employed and the wife is not; 2) "dual-earner couples," in which both partners are employed; 3) "female-breadwinner couples," in which only the wife works, and 4) "non-employed couples," in which neither partner works for pay. This analysis of CPS data from 1970 and 1997 includes only married couples in which both partners were aged 18–64.

TABLE 4: Joint Hours of Paid Work by Married Couples, by Employment Type, 1970 and 1997

	1970	1997
Total, All Couples	52.5	62.8
Male Breadwinner	44.4	44.7
Dual Earner	78.0	81.3
Wife Only Works	35.5	36.9
Neither Works	0.0	0.0

Source: Authors' estimates based on Current Population Survey data.

The average couple is working 10 more hours per week for pay than was the case in 1970 (62.8 hours of paid employment, compared with 52.5 hours in 1970). However, this change signals a shift from single-breadwinner to dual-earner couples rather than a change in the experiences within these groups. Male breadwinners are working just about as much as they did thirty years ago, and so are women who are the sole earners in their families. Only a modest increase has occurred in the work week of dual-earner couples (from 78.0 to 81.3 hours per week).¹³ The principal cause of the 10 hour per week increase in time on the job for couples is thus the rise in number of dual-earner couples and the decline of male-breadwinner marriages.

These shifts have had important consequences for the working time of married couples. Even though individual workers are averaging about the same time in the labor market as did their predecessors, most couples' joint work week—the number of hours husbands and wives combine to spend in the labor market—has increased dramatically. These changed circumstances have created a time crunch at home and left American workers feeling more pressed. Put simply, women and men alike feel squeezed because they are less likely to be able to rely on someone at home devoted exclusively to family concerns, not because the work week of individuals has expanded.¹⁴

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Jobs that require very long hours are not family friendly. Parents should be able to spend some time with their children every day, for the emotional and intellectual development of the child as well as for the sake of the parents. Extra-long jobs also inhibit gender equity. These jobs require parents to choose between work and family, with women more likely to give up career prospects in favor of family needs. Extra-long jobs also threaten our civil society. Participation in community clubs and activities is undermined by 50 or 60 hour per week jobs. The nation should see the promotion of a balance between work and the rest of life not as simply a private choice between employers and employees, but as a matter of great importance to the public interest.

¹³ In a more detailed exploration of these data, we found that about half of this increase was due to the fact that couples in 1997 were slightly older than those in 1970, had completed more years of schooling, and had fewer children. Taking these factors into account, dual earner couples in 1997 worked for pay about an hour and a half more than did their counterparts in 1970. (See Jacobs and Gerson 1998b.)

¹⁴ In this paper we do not address whether dual earner couples in 1997 are doing as much housework as their counterparts were in 1990. We expect that analyses underway of the 1995 national time diary data will shed light on this question.

Public policy needs to promote a level playing field with respect to working time, so that firms do not have an incentive to shorten or extend the work week unduly. One way to accomplish this goal is to require firms to provide proportional benefits to part-time workers. Those working part time would then receive protections and support commensurate with their contributions. In addition, employees should be provided with flexible benefits packages so that they can use them in the ways they find most useful. Workers could then cash in the benefits they prefer not to use in other forms.

What should be done about long work weeks? First, there should be a recognition that very long work weeks are a mixed blessing. The praise we tend to heap on hard-working men and women needs to be balanced by a recognition of the costs to families and communities of expecting such long hours in many occupations and professions. Second, since long work weeks are especially prevalent in professional and managerial positions, the Fair Labor Standards Act needs to be extended to cover professionals and managers. In that way, employers would incur additional costs when they require their professional and managerial staffs to work more than 40 hours per week. This would gradually reduce long work weeks and encourage employers to expect long hours only when they are efficient or absolutely necessary.

Finally, we need to recognize that the 40-hour work week was created for the male-breadwinner family. Since the demographics of the workforce have changed dramatically and irreversibly, the time has come to re-examine this standard. We believe that there is a strong case to be made for adopting a 35 hour work week as the more general standard. This would ease the time crunch on working parents, provide more time for nurturing children, create the possibility of more gender equity in parenting, and provide more time for workers in all types of families to participate in their communities. A 35-hour work week would certainly not be required or expected of everyone, just as the 40-hour work week is not now mandatory. It could, however, become a social and cultural standard, just as the 40 hour work week emerged as the standard in the early decades of the twentieth century. As the twenty-first century dawns, widespread transformations in family and domestic life cry out for a shorter rather than a longer standard week for individual workers.

CONCLUSION

Even though the average work week has not changed dramatically in the U.S. over the last several decades, a growing group of Americans are clearly and strongly pressed for time. These workers include employees who are putting in especially long hours, often against their own fondest desires, and people in

dual-earner and single-parent families who cannot rely on a support system anchored by a stay-at-home member. In the context of these dramatic social shifts in Americans' private lives, the lack of change in the structure of work and the rise of highly demanding jobs, especially at the upper levels of the occupational hierarchy, present dilemmas and problems for many workers. Increasingly, women and men alike face challenging work without the "wives" once relied on by upwardly mobile husbands in highly demanding positions.¹⁵ Yet employers have not responded to these changed realities, assuming that devoted workers have or should have unpaid partners able to devote themselves full time to the myriad of domestic tasks on which not only family life but even successful careers depend. In this context, it is little wonder that many workers feel they are working harder than ever.

A "time bind" has clearly emerged in the contemporary United States, but it has different roots and a different profile than analysts such as Hochschild and Schor have suggested. Working parents in dual-earner couples have always faced a time bind, and the principal change over the last thirty years has been a marked growth in the number of these families. Moreover, a time squeeze due to excessive hours in paid employment is not a universal phenomenon, but rather are concentrated among professionals and managers who are especially likely to shape the terms of public discussion and debate. Although there are also less affluent workers who put in substantial overtime or who work at two (or more) jobs, this group actually represents a smaller proportion of blue-collar workers than do the overworked Americans among professionals and managers. These trends suggest that while it is important to address the new challenges and insecurities facing American workers and their families, we should be careful to move beyond generalizations to focus on the variety of dilemmas that workers are facing.

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¹⁵ For the classic analysis of the phenomenon of the "two-person career," in which a husband's corporate success depends on the support of a full-time wife, see Kanter (1977).