



INSTITUTE FOR WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH
1707 L Street NW, Suite 750 ♦ Washington, DC 20036

IWPR Publication # C357

August 2004

**A New Full-Time Norm:
Promoting Work-Life Integration
Through Work-Time Adjustment***

WORKING PAPER

By

Cynthia Negrey
Associate Professor
Sociology Department
University of Louisville
Louisville, KY 40292
clynegr01@louisville.edu

* The author thanks Janice Peterson for articulating the natalist bias underlying the shorter workday as a matter of work-family integration and her encouragement to conceptualize a new full-time norm as a matter of work-life integration. Portions of this paper appeared previously in Negrey 1999 and Sirianni and Negrey 2000. This paper was drafted with the generous financial support of IWPR member Clara Schiffer while the author was on leave at the Institute for Women's Policy Research AY 1999-2001.

Abstract

This paper is an argument for a new, shorter, full-time work norm in the United States. It examines the context of “time famine” as a product of women’s increased labor force participation and an increase in household total employment hours, a caregiving gap, bifurcation of aggregate work hours, and a gap between workers’ actual and ideal work hours. Inadequacies of current alternative work-time arrangements and the Family and Medical Leave Act are addressed and some international comparisons are discussed. Following Appelbaum et al. (2002), the author argues for a “shared work/valued care” model of work-time allocation.

A New Full-Time Norm: Promoting Work-Life Integration Through Work-Time Adjustment

Drawing on the work of scholars in numerous disciplines, particularly sociology and economics, this article provides a summary of data showing changes in working time in the United States over the past few decades and the difficulties these create, especially in what I will call the realm of care, and the inequities they entail. It is a compendium of the basic situation of working time facing American workers with some international comparisons. I discuss weaknesses of current accommodations--for example, part-time employment and the Family and Medical Leave Act—and explore options for challenging current full-time norms, such as shorter workyears, workweeks, or workdays. Ultimately, sharing the view of other writers (Fraser 1996; Harrington 1999; Williams 2000; and especially Appelbaum et al. 2002), I argue for a more balanced valuing of market work and care to facilitate a transition to a shorter full-time norm.

The “subtle revolution” (Smith 1979) in the twentieth century of increased women’s labor force participation is contributing to a revolution at home in which the conventional household division of labor, whereby men are the sole breadwinners and women are full-time homemakers and caretakers, has been disrupted. Women continue their traditional roles as primary caregivers even when employed outside the home, however, thus creating a stressful “second shift” of unpaid work at home (Hochschild 1989). Combining work and family responsibilities has been difficult for most women and increasing numbers of men who are taking on more family responsibilities. Business practices and government policies have begun to respond to these challenges, but for a variety of reasons they remain inadequate. In the absence of adequate public and private

responses to the growing need to better integrate work and family, a crisis in parenting and caregiving is emerging (Harrington 1999). This paper explores a new, shorter, full-time norm as a possible solution to the problem of work-family integration specifically and work-life integration more generally. It also examines growing inequity in work-time distribution across the American population wherein certain groups are overworked and others underemployed.

My argument for a new, shorter, full-time norm in the United States begins with an examination of the context within which many Americans experience a sense of time famine. This context includes the increased labor force participation of women, particularly married women with children, over the last 50 years, and a caregiving gap that has emerged as a result of women's absence from the home.

Women's Labor Force Participation

The labor force participation rates of women in the United States, especially married women and mothers, have increased dramatically during the past 50 years. The expanding role of women in the paid labor force can be attributed to higher educational attainment by women in the post-World War Two era, expansion of certain economic sectors that rely disproportionately on women's labor, economic stresses created by a prolonged stagnation of wages, and women's own desire to participate in the paid labor force.

Trends in women's labor force participation in the United States have been steadily upward for virtually every female socioeconomic and demographic group. In 1940, 86 percent of married women were full-time homemakers, but, by 1994, 61 percent

were in the paid labor force (Blau and Ehrenberg 1997: 1). The percentage of women in the paid labor force has steadily increased since the 1950s. Today, women are less likely to step out of the labor force while bearing and raising children, a fairly common practice as recently as 30 years ago. Between 1940 and 1995, women workers increased from one quarter to nearly one half of the labor force. Before World War Two, labor force participation was highest among working class, poor, and minority women. Middle class and affluent women remained outside the paid labor force as beneficiaries of relatively high family wages paid to their employed husbands. Today, large numbers of middle class and affluent women hold paying jobs. Comparing the labor force participation rates of different birth cohorts of women, Hartmann (2001:130) notes that each new cohort of women has worked more than the one before; each has generally worked more as they aged; and each has worked more steadily during the child rearing years, spending less time out of the labor force when they have children. While labor force participation rates declined between ages 20-29 among women born before the 1950s, they do not among women born in later years.

Women's labor force participation rates continue to be lower than men's, but their rates appear to be gradually converging. By the year 2006, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics projects that 61.4 percent of U.S. women will participate in the paid labor force compared to 73.6 percent of men. While the labor force participation rates of women are expected to increase, men's rates are expected to decline. Though fewer women than men participate in the labor force, across every age group the distribution of the labor force by gender has become nearly identical. By 1996, for example, 24.9 percent of the civilian labor force ages 25 to 34 were female compared to 25.6 percent that were male.

In 1960, only 17.8 percent of the labor force in this age group was female compared to 22.1 percent male (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1997: 400).

Some of the most dramatic increases in labor force participation nationally have been among women with children. The labor force participation rate of women with children under age 6 increased from 38.8 percent in 1975 to 62.3 percent in 1996. For women with children ages 6 to 17 the rate increased from 54.8 percent to 77.2 percent (Hayghe 1997: 42).

Issues in Family Care

Increases in their workforce participation rates and other demographic factors have resulted in significant changes for women and their families over the last several decades. Dual-earner couples, in which both parents work for wages, have grown from about one-third of families with children in 1975 to nearly half in 1999 (Hartmann 2001:145). About 20 percent of families with children are still the “traditional” type, i.e., an employed father and stay-at-home mother without wage work obligations, down from nearly half of all families in 1975 and 67 percent in 1940 (Hartmann 2001:145; Reskin and Padavic 1994:144). Moreover, increases in divorce and the number of unmarried mothers have increased the number of families maintained solely by employed women. The proportion of women who are single heads of household in the workforce grew from about 5 percent in 1965 to a little over 11 percent in 1992 (Reskin and Padavic 1994:145). Very few of the 19 percent of families with working mothers (in single-earner families) today include a husband at home. And only about 4.5 percent of all families with children are headed by a non-married, working father, so that men are much

less likely than women to experience the difficulties of being the custodial single parent (Hartmann 2001:145).

The dramatic changes in women's labor force participation and family structure have altered the dynamics of family life in the home. A recent profile of the U.S. workforce (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1997) shows that:

- 85 percent of wage and salaried workers live with family members and have day-to-day family responsibilities;

- 46 percent of wage and salaried workers are parents; that is, they have children under age 18 who live with them at least half of the time;

- Nearly one in five employed parents is single; among employed single parents, 27 percent are men;

- More than three out of four married employees have spouses or partners who are also employed; among full-time employees living in dual-earner households, 75 percent have partners who are also employed full time;

- Only 49 percent of married male employees with children under age 18 had employed partners in 1977--67 percent do today;

- Around 25 percent of wage and salaried workers have provided elder care during the preceding year;
- One in five employed parents has been part of the so-called sandwich generation who provide care to both children and elderly relatives;
- The proportions of employed men and women with elder care responsibilities are virtually the same.

Time management can be difficult for anyone—female or male, married or not—who is juggling the responsibilities of employment and family care. Because women continue to be the primary caretakers of children and other dependents, a major problem for women is finding time for paid work, caregiving, and housework. Consequently, research suggests that women bear more of the stress associated with integrating the two arenas of work and family.

Housework. Research consistently shows that employed women do as much as twice the amount of housework as men. A study by Shelton (1992 as cited in Reskin and Padavic 1994:150), for example, found that women who were employed full time spent an estimated 33 hours a week on housework compared with men's 20. Schor (1991) estimates that women average 65 hours a week in paid and unpaid work. Despite variations in estimates of housework hours across a number of studies reviewed by Robinson and Godbey (1997:100), the ratio of women's estimates to men's is virtually

constant. Not controlling for employment status, women estimate about twice as many hours as men devoted to household work. Robinson and Godbey's (1997) own 1985 time diaries bear this out. Work in the paid labor force has also reduced the amount of time available to do housework, possibly intensifying the pace of work at home as well as increasing the stresses associated with it.

According to one study, for each hour a woman puts into her paid job, her housework efforts are reduced by a half hour (Schor 1991 as cited in Reskin and Padavic 1994:149). Wives' employment status—that is, whether they are employed full time, part time, or not at all—has little effect on how much housework men do, however. Men who are better educated or have a young child at home do slightly more than other men (Shelton 1992; Thompson and Walker 1991; both as cited in Reskin and Padavic 1994:151), as do African-American and Hispanic men (Shelton and John 1993 as cited in Reskin and Padavic 1994:151). Some evidence indicates that men are doing more housework than they did 20 years ago. Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg. (1997) report that over the past 20 years mothers' workday time on chores has decreased by 36 minutes per day while men's time has increased by one hour. Despite this narrowing of the gap, employed women still spend more time on chores than employed married men on both workdays and days off, whether or not they have children.

Dependent Care. In the absence of plentiful, high-quality, affordable child care, employed parents struggle to meet the demands of their jobs without neglecting their children. When a child is ill, mothers usually take time off from their jobs. In a recent study, 83 percent of employed mothers said they are more likely than their partners to

take time off compared with 22 percent of fathers who make this claim (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1997:7).

Elder care poses another potential difficulty for employees given that 87 percent of workers surveyed by the Families and Work Institute said they currently have elder care responsibilities (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1997:152). In American society, female relatives provide most of the care of aging persons, and they do so informally. As more women are employed, they are less available to care for aging relatives.

The factors underlying women's disadvantaged economic position are complex, encompassing historical effects, occupational segregation, women's socialization, and women's education (Reskin and Padavic 1994 and others). Some recent research efforts have focused in particular on the marginalization of mothers because of their caregiving responsibilities. This occurs because market work is a system set up according to an "Ideal Worker Norm" (Williams 2000) that assumes employees work full time (currently standardized at 40 hours per week), uninterrupted, i.e., free of the necessity to bear children and without caregiving responsibilities that might interfere with full-time wage work. Because mothers' lives are at variance from the ideal worker norm, they are disproportionately relegated to marginal jobs—often at low wages—but with work routines that mesh relatively well with caregiving. The marginalization of mothers in market work results in a wage penalty, although the estimates of this penalty vary somewhat—6 percent for mothers with one child and 13 percent for mothers with two or more children according to Waldfogel's research (1997) and 7 percent per child according to Budig and England's recent study (2001).

Workplace and Public Policy Initiatives

While recent data indicate that employers have become more responsive to employees' needs, the vast majority of American workers still struggle to integrate employment and family responsibilities. In the last couple of decades, a variety of alternative work arrangements have emerged at workplaces to alleviate work-family conflict experienced by employees, and in 1993 the federal government took a significant step by enacting the Family and Medical Leave Act. These initiatives are explored below. Generally, alternative work arrangements offer individual workers increased flexibility, but they are band-aid solutions to a much larger structural problem. Relatively few workers use them, and women use them more often than men--thus ratifying gender inequity (Negrey 1993; Rapoport et al. 2002). Flexible arrangements may deviate from the rigid 40-hour norm, but they do not challenge the norm per se; and the inability to work a standard schedule is assumed to be an individual problem, not a societal problem. The FMLA is more broad-based, but, because it provides for only unpaid leave and pertains only to episodic circumstances, it is inadequate as well.

Alternative Work Arrangements. Several forms of alternative work arrangements have emerged at workplaces throughout the United States. Conventional part-time employment is by far the most prevalent "option" through which employees gain flexibility because employers in growing sectors, such as services and retail trade, make it widely available to fulfill their own needs for flexible staffing. Flextime, compressed workweeks, job sharing, and home-based work are other increasingly popular alternatives.

The Families and Work Institute (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1997:10) found that 45 percent of employees are able to choose—within limits—when they begin and end their workdays, but only one in four can change daily schedules as needed. Two-thirds of employees find it relatively easy to take time off during the workday to address family or personal matters. However, only 50 percent of employed parents are able to take a few days off from work to care for sick children without losing pay, forfeiting vacation time, or having to fabricate some excuse for missing work. Another 19 percent of employees spend at least part of their regular workweek working at home, while 7 percent say they would be permitted to do so if they wished. Arlie Hochschild's (1997) popular book, The Time Bind, showed how factors in company culture militate against workers' use of family-friendly policies, despite their availability and eligibility.

A recent study by the U.S. Department of Labor found that flextime practices in America's workplaces are more informal than formal. The study reports that nearly 29 percent of full-time workers in the U.S. have schedules that allow them to vary the times they begin and end their work day, but only about one-third of those employees work for companies with official flextime policies. Flexible schedules were most common among executives, administrators, managers, and sales workers. Men and whites were also somewhat more likely to have flexible schedules (Strope 2003).

Some business groups are advocating greater availability of compensatory time for overtime work instead of overtime pay, but labor leaders and other critics are skeptical that such proposals are just a ploy to permit companies to avoid paying overtime wages while lengthening working time. Critics also fear that workers would be pressured to take compensatory time rather than overtime pay or might not be able to

actually take the compensatory time they have accumulated or that employers would restrict when compensatory time could be taken or cut back on sick leave and vacation time (Eisenbrey 2003; Golden 2003; Strobe 2003). New overtime rules imposed under the Bush administration could cause up to 117,000 workers earning more than \$100,000 annually to lose overtime pay while 1.3 million low-wage workers currently denied overtime would become eligible, according to Bush administration estimates. The Economic Policy Institute, on the other hand, argues that 6 million workers would lose overtime eligibility (Crutsinger 2004).

The Family and Medical Leave Act of 1993. The FMLA requires businesses with 50 or more employees to provide 12 weeks a year of unpaid leave for birth, adoption, foster care, or personal or family illness. Employers must also continue to provide health care coverage during leaves and restore employees to their jobs or equivalent positions on their return. Employers must post notices of the law's requirements and keep records regarding their compliance with its provisions.

While FMLA's enactment was momentous for workers in the United States, its mandate is modest compared with similar legislation in a number of other nations, and its passage lagged behind theirs as well. Until passage of the FMLA, the United States was the only country out of 118 surveyed by the International Labor Organization that had no national laws mandating parental leave. Most other major industrialized countries mandate paid maternity leave, offer more than the 12 weeks accorded U.S. parents, and do not exclude small businesses.¹

The enactment of new public policy in the form of the FMLA indicates recognition of a social problem, but the law is intended to respond to episodic circumstances of parenting and illness. The daily challenge of integrating work with the rest of life, however, is a chronic problem that the FMLA does not address. Paid family leave, more recently instituted in California, does not address this problem either.

Work-Time Trends and Attitudes

Recent surveys have found growing interest among Americans in making paid work time more flexible and reducing work time. Results of a recent national poll reported by Hewlett and West (1998) indicate that parents desire policies that deal directly with the “parental time famine.” They would like government and employers to be much more imaginative in creating flexible work arrangements. The survey findings included:

90 percent of the parents polled—both fathers and mothers—want access to compressed workweeks, flextime, job sharing, and benefits for part-time work

87 percent favor a law guaranteeing three days of paid leave annually for child-related responsibilities such as attending a parent-teacher conference or taking a child to the dentist

79 percent favor legislation allowing workers to take time off instead of extra pay for overtime

76 percent favor legislation requiring companies to offer up to 12 weeks of paid, job-protected parenting leave following childbirth or adoption

71 percent favor the option of trading two weeks' pay for an extra two weeks of vacation time per year

Sixty-three percent of respondents in the 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce (Bond, Galinsky, and Swanberg 1997: 8) reported that they would like to work less. There was no difference in the proportions of men and women who would like to work fewer hours—both would reduce their current total workweek by eleven hours on average if they could. The proportion of employees who would like to work fewer hours increased 17 percent in the five years that elapsed between the 1992 and 1997 surveys. Even America's children want their parents to spend less time at work! A poll of 746 children commissioned by the Center for a New American Dream in Takoma Park, Maryland, found that 63 percent want their parents to spend less time at work. This compares, for example, to only 13 percent who want their parents to have larger paychecks.

To understand Americans' attitudes toward and experience of their work hours, it is worthwhile to locate them within the context of recent work-time trends in the United States and abroad. While the average sentiment of Americans is for fewer hours of paid work, an important segment of the population—the underemployed—desires to increase earnings through more hours of paid work. The bifurcation of work hours in the United

States is distinctive compared to recent trends of shorter work hours in Europe, for example.

Work-Time Bifurcation in the United States. Using data from the Current Population Survey, Jacobs and Gerson (1998) found that the average length of the workweek does not appear to have changed appreciably in recent decades. American workers work on average about the same amount of time as their counterparts 30 years ago. American men work about 42 or 43 hours per week for pay, while American women work at their jobs about 36 or 37 hours per week. The stability in these averages, however, masks some important shifts in the variation around the average. The percentage of men and women working long and short workweeks has increased during the period from 1970 to 1997. In 1997, 25.2 percent of men and 10.8 percent of women worked 50 hours per week or more. At the other extreme, 10 percent of men and 20 percent of women worked 30 hours per week or less. While the 40-hour workweek 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 30 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. Long workweeks are most common among professional and managerial workers.

One contributor to longer hours is the increasing number of workers who are excluded from the overtime protections of the Fair Labor Standards Act. Those exempt from these overtime provisions has risen from about 32 percent of the workforce in 1978 to 40 percent in the late 1990s (Hamermesh 2000). In some industries, such as

transportation, agriculture, communications, and mining, more than a quarter of all workers work more than 40 hours a week; and mandatory involuntary overtime is a problem for an estimated 18 percent of the American workforce (Golden 2003). In a survey conducted by the Heldrich Center for Workforce Development (1999 as cited by Golden 2003), 45 percent of workers reported having to work overtime on little or no notice.

Analysis of data from the 1992 National Study of the Changing Workforce shows that most American workers experience a significant gap between their actual and ideal work hours. While approximately one-third of respondents reported that their actual and ideal hours corresponded precisely, nearly half indicated that their usual workweek was longer than their ideal and an additional one-sixth reported that they would prefer to work more hours. Ninety percent of those who expressed a preference for shorter working hours wished to work at least five hours less per week. While women on average work about six fewer hours per week than men, the gap between women and men's actual and ideal hours is quite similar. It is this gap between actual and ideal hours that goes a long way toward explaining the sense of overwork that many Americans feel (Jacobs and Gerson 1998). Researchers using data from the more recent National Survey of Families and Households also find a gap between actual work hours and preferences, i.e., that people are working more than they would like to work (Clarkberg 2000).

We get a different picture when we consider family work hours instead of individual work hours. Total weeks worked annually by two-income, married couples have increased from 78 in 1979 to 98 in 1999. On average, wives in prime-age, married

couple families with children worked almost 400 hours more per year in 2000 than they did in 1979 (Golden 2003).

Data from the Luxembourg Income Study show that for men, the average workweek in most of nine industrialized countries hovers around 40 hours per week, with only the Netherlands having a particularly short workweek. 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 average length of the paid workweek. Looking at the number of workers working very long hours, however, the United States is distinctive. For men, the United States and Australia have the higher proportions working 50 or more hours per week. American women, like American men, have among the longest workweeks 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 highest. The Netherlands again has the shortest workweek (Jacobs and Gerson 1998).

Work-Time Reduction in Europe. While it is assumed that paid working time has become progressively shorter in the industrialized countries following technological advances, in reality there has been no clear linear trend (Figart and Golden 1998). Working time has varied considerably across countries and within countries by industry, occupation, gender, race, family type, and historical time period (Figart and Golden 1998). In contrast to the twin trends of overwork and underemployment in the United States discussed above, annual and weekly hours in Western Europe have declined in recent decades as a result of statutory and collectively bargained restrictions on standard and overtime hours in the European Union. The trend toward shorter hours in Europe has

slowed since the 1980s as employers and governments have pursued greater flexibility resulting in greater diversity of work patterns as in the United States (Figart and Golden 1998).

The recent efforts in France to reduce the standard workweek to 35 hours have produced a mixed bag of results at the intersection of the struggle of workers to reduce working time and employers to use their workforces more flexibly. To create jobs as a palliative for a historically high 12.5 percent unemployment rate, French trade unions, with two-thirds popular support, successfully advocated legislation to reduce the workweek to 35 hours from 39 with no loss of pay. The legislation, which took effect in January 2000, provided for public subsidies and tax breaks to encourage companies to comply with the 35-hour rule and hire more workers. In its early stages of implementation and with amendment, however, the law seems to have done little to genuinely reduce work time but has permitted employers to make work time more flexible, sometimes longer, and unpredictable. Critics claim the result is an increase in the size and scope of France's contingent workforce (Apter 1997; Ford 1998; Vinocur 1999; Arens and Thull 1999; Thull and Arens 2000). Declines in productivity growth in the 1990s have created pressure to increase work hours not only in France but Germany as well where weekly hours in some sectors had also been reduced. In some instances the workweek has been extended beyond the 40-hour limit, such as in the German state of Bavaria where the workweek currently stands at 42 hours. In Britain more than one-fifth of the labor force works longer than the European Union's mandated maximum of 48 hours a week (Landler 2004).

Work-Time and Gender Equity

Work-Time and Gender. Working time is gendered time. This is true when the unequal distribution of paid employment and unpaid household work is compared across men and women, and it is true when men and women are compared with respect to unequal patterns of alternative work arrangements and reduced work. So far, efforts to reorganize and/or reduce working time in the United States and Europe have not degendered working time. Instead, alternative work-time arrangements have ratified the conventional gender division of labor to the extent that women are more likely than men to avail themselves of reduced and flexible work-time options to better integrate employment and family responsibilities (Negrey 1993; Figart and Mutari 1998, 2000; Sirianni and Negrey 2000; Appelbaum et al. 2002). Increasingly, gender roles are differentiated not by whether individuals have a job but the amount of time spent in paid employment. The expansion of overtime for men and part-time jobs for women reinforces the skewed division of domestic labor and occupational segregation (Figart and Mutari 1998, 2000). This skewed distribution of paid work time, domestic labor, and occupational segregation is at once a product of and reinforced by gender inequity in pay. The rational dual-earner household has less to lose financially—but much to lose in terms of gender equity---when it is the wife who reduces her paid work hours.

Shorter Workyears, Shorter Workweeks, Shorter Workdays. If the solution to the American time famine is a new, shorter, full-time work norm, what form or forms should it take? Proponents of work-time reduction have advocated shorter workyears (via more

generous vacations and sabbaticals), shorter workweeks (which may or may not coincide with shorter workdays), and shorter workdays. I'll examine each in turn.

Escape, a travel magazine, recently formed a committee called Work to Live, whose goal is to increase vacation time in the U.S. to three weeks by law after the first year on the job and four weeks after three years (Robinson 2000). The U.S. has surpassed Japan as the industrialized world's most overworked land; in total hours, Americans work two weeks longer than the Japanese each year, and two months longer than the Germans. According to a recent International Labor Organization (2002) report, the average American worked 1,978 hours in 2001--about 49.5 weeks—an increase of nearly a full week since 1990. Americans worked more hours than workers in other industrialized nations and developing nations except South Korea and the Czech Republic. Europeans and Australians have four to six weeks of paid vacation each year guaranteed by law; Americans average just nine days off after the first year on the job dependent upon individual employers' policies (Robinson 2000). Opponents to longer vacation time in the U.S. claim it would harm productivity, but such opposition is countered by productivity data from, for example, Germany, France, and Sweden where productivity remains high despite long mandated vacations. Proponents of longer vacation time argue that mandated paid vacations level the playing field for companies and eliminates the current penalties against people who change jobs and lose vacation time as a consequence (Robinson 2000).

While longer vacation time is appealing on its face, and certainly matches the interests of the travel industry, it does not address the sense of time famine that derives from the pressures of daily life and the lack of concordance between actual and ideal

work schedules. Such pressures require relief more immediately and regularly than vacations would allow—thus, calls for reductions in the workweek.

A recent argument for a shorter paid workweek (LaJeunesse 1998)², specifically four eight-hour days, claims that a shorter workweek would lead to higher productivity through more efficient use of work time on the part of workers (less fatigue and shirking) and less monitoring of shirking. A four-day workweek would require fewer days of child care per week and, if the length of the school day were increased to coincide with work hours, less need for before- and after-school day care. A four-day week could also reduce commuting.³ Bailyn (1993: 84) also notes productivity improvements with reduced work time; she cites research documenting that part-time work and job sharing increase productivity per hour worked. Further evidence comes from a case study of a small injection-molding plastics plant in southern Indiana that increased labor recruitment and retention, reduced absenteeism, improved product quality through a reduced scrap rate, and increased productivity overall by reducing shifts from eight to six hours (five days/week). The plant did this without reducing pay by tacking on a ten-hour bonus at the end of thirty hours worked per week (Negrey 1998). LaJeunesse (1998: 100) cites historical evidence that major reductions of hours in Britain preceded, rather than followed, peaks of productivity growth. In France in 1983, when legislation to reduce the statutory workweek to 39 hours from 40 took effect, hourly productivity rose 6 percent compared to a 2-percent increase the year before (and less than 4 percent since) (LaJeunesse 1998: 101).

Another way to reduce the workweek is to reduce the standard length of the workday. Beechey and Perkins (1987: 107) have argued that appeals for work-time

reduction that focus on the length of the workweek rather than the length of the workday are often masculine in their orienting assumptions. A feminist approach to work-time would emphasize reduction in the length of the workday (such as five six-hour days, especially to mesh with children's school days), work-time flexibility, and limits on overtime, evening, night, and weekend work. Kellogg's experiment with the six-hour day is an interesting case in this regard. Instituted in the 1930s in response to economic difficulties caused by the Depression, the experiment was terminated in the 1980s when the company claimed it could no longer afford such an arrangement in the face of heightened competitive pressures. The experiment had eroded by the 1980s, however, as increasing numbers of male workers agitated for more hours—and more pay. The departments that retained the six-hour day employed women disproportionately (Hunnicut 1996).

Conclusion

The previous discussion of the shorter workweek vs. workday points to the trenchant problem facing parents today: conflict between paid work routines and children's routines or what Williams (2000) has called the ideal worker norm and the family care norm. One option is to maintain the status quo in working hours and expand children's school days and years. While this option might relieve conflict between parent work routines and child care by extending the time children are in the custody of the schools, it does not necessarily reduce the sense of time famine that many adults experience because they feel they spend too much time on the job relative to time with family, in leisure, in education and/or training, in community with others, and the like.

Nor does it address the difficulties of meshing employment and child care for preschoolers. The solution we choose---longer school days and years to better mesh with parents' long work hours or a new, shorter, full-time work norm to better mesh with children's school hours---is ultimately a statement on our values as a society for life, including its vast array of activities and possibilities, is a moral economy of time (Sirianni 1988). Long work hours and long school routines mean we value market activity over most everything else in life. A new, shorter, full-time work norm means we value more balance between market and non-market activity.

Hewlett and West (1998: 32) have noted an important irony, that conservatives---the staunchest defenders of markets---who lament the decline of "family values" often fail to recognize the ways in which market values destroy family values. But liberals, who are generally less critical of recent changes in family demographics and less sanguine in their support of markets, often don't see the contradictions between the market and families either. As we pursue an economic agenda of unfettered market growth, we stretch family relationships---temporally, emotionally, and geographically---to a breaking point. And as the bonds of family break, we turn to market institutions and relationships, as inadequate as they may be, to fill the void. In the process we undermine ties of community, and we literally trash our environment with the surplus stuff we feel compelled to make and sell. In our exasperation, we throw up our hands. In the absence of easy solutions, we blame individuals for failings that are often benign responses to the market forces and gender imperatives that govern their behavior.

If it is time to check our market impulses, we must do so in ways that do not erode the advances made in recent decades toward gender equity and that improve the

market standing of the underemployed and working poor. Because the underemployed--- as measured by work hours according to the current full-time norm---and the working poor are disproportionately women, both objectives can be pursued by improving the wages, benefits, and working conditions of workers in marginal jobs.

In redistributing our values from market to non-market activities, it is necessary to redistribute working time—good paid work from men to women, unpaid work from women to men, and overwork to the underemployed. The Universal Caregiver model espoused by Fraser (1996) encourages us to think in terms of *everyone* doing primary care work in addition to paid work, not just women predominantly. Our market work might be organized very differently if we begin from an assumption that all workers also (will) have caregiving responsibilities instead of assuming that particular, mostly marginalized women, workers have such responsibilities. Such restructuring of market work necessitates deconstructing the ideal worker norm (Williams 2000).⁴

Figart and Mutari's (2000) account of work time regimes in Europe (and implicitly the United States) indicates that we have yet to step on the high road to flexibilization. As they state, this high road would provide the institutional basis for restructuring gender relations by utilizing a variety of approaches to working hours and the workweek to balance paid and unpaid labor. Such flexibilization would be built upon a foundation of work hours reductions from the current full-time standard, not just more flexibility around the current full-time standard. Their analysis of work time regimes in European countries found that countries with shorter workweeks have a lower gap between men's and women's labor market behavior. High Road Flexibilization lies in combining shorter hours for both men and women with diverse work time schedules,

thereby degendering part-time work and providing more opportunities for employees to control their work routines.

Appelbaum et al. (2002) have proposed a “shared work/valued care” model of organizing market work and unpaid care work that attends to goals of gender equity and more balance between market work and non-market care work. Shared work has multiple meanings: sharing paid work among people through shorter workweeks, reduced hours, flexible schedules, and job sharing; sharing access to good jobs in both the public and private sectors with mothers, including skilled blue collar, professional, and managerial jobs; equal access to paid jobs for women through the recognition that care work, even when it is unpaid, is work; men as well as women must share in the important work of providing care within the family and the broader community; and sharing the work of caring with community and other public institutions. Valued care has many meanings as well: access to a variety of flexible scheduling strategies so employees can have greater control of their time at work and away from work and can negotiate the flexibility they need to meet their individual responsibilities; day care and elder care should be shared public-private responsibilities so that families can have access to high quality services while day care workers, nursing assistants, and others who care for the young, the old, the sick, and the infirm can have access to well-paying jobs.

A public policy strategy to promote the “shared work/valued care” model has six cornerstones (Appelbaum et al. 2002):

- Hours of work legislation to allow for a shorter standard workweek for all, flexibility for workers, longer part-time hours, and limits on mandatory overtime;

- Adjustment of hours legislation to allow workers to request up to a 20 percent reduction in hours and pro-rated reductions in pay and benefits that employers would have to honor unless there was a good business reason not to do so;
- Equal opportunity and non-discrimination provisions to protect workers on part-time schedules from discrimination in pay or benefits, to encourage private sector employers to make good part-time jobs widely available, and to reduce the gender gap in pay;
- Share the cost of care by investing in day care and elder care infrastructure and by providing subsidies for child care and elder care, short-term caregivers' leave, subsidized wages or tax credits for caregivers, universal pre-school, and after- and before-school programs for children;
- Untie benefits from individual employers by making access to health insurance available to everyone without regard to employment status and by establishing funds similar to unemployment insurance for maternity leave, parental leave, and long-term family medical leave; provide a floor under wages by indexing the minimum wage to the median wage;
- Update income security protections such as unemployment insurance and old age pensions so they are no longer geared toward an outdated model of work and care that assumes a full-time breadwinner and full-time homemaker.

These six cornerstones illustrate a way in which a new, shorter, full-time norm could be the centerpiece of a larger social reorganization that could facilitate greater work-life

balance and a more balanced distribution of work---market and non-market---across the population. They are worthy of widespread distribution and public discussion.

References

Appelbaum, Eileen, Thomas Bailey, Peter Berg, and Arne Kalleberg

2002 “Shared work/valued care: New norms for organizing market work and unpaid care work.” In *Labour Markets, Gender, and Institutional Change: Essays in Honour of Gunther Schmid*, ed. Gunther Schmid, Jacqueline O’Reilly, Klaus Schomann, and Hugh Mosley, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.

Apter, Jeff

1997 “France plans 35-hour week by 2000—without pay loss.” *UE News*, December (retrieved from <http://ranknfile-ue.org/uen/1297/france.html>)

Arens, Marianne and Françoise Thull

1999 “The fraud of the 35-hour workweek in France.” *World Socialist Web Site*, November 9 (retrieved from http://www.wsws.org/articles/1999/nov1999/fran-n09_prn.shtml)

Bailyn, Lotte

1993 *Breaking the Mold: Women, Men, and Time in the New Corporate World*. New York: The Free Press.

Beechey, Veronica and Tessa Perkins

1987 *A Matter of Hours*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.

Blau, Francine D. and Ronald G. Ehrenberg

1997 *Gender and Family Issues in the Workplace*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

Bond, James T., Ellen Galinsky, and Jennifer E. Swanberg

1997 *The 1997 National Study of the Changing Workforce*. New York: Families and Work Institute.

Budig, Michelle J. and Paula England

2001 “The wage penalty for motherhood.” *American Sociological Review* 66 (2): 204-225.

Clarkberg, Marin

2000 “The time squeeze in American families: From causes to solutions.” In *Balancing Acts: Easing the Burdens and Improving the Options for Working Families*, ed. Eileen Appelbaum. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Cross, Gary

1988 “Worktime in international discontinuity.” In *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History*, ed. Gary Cross. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

Crutsinger, Martin

2004 “Report: Law to cost 6 million overtime.” *The Courier-Journal* July 15: A2.

Eisenbrey, Ross

2003 “The naked truth about comp time.” EPI Issue Brief. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Figart, Deborah M. and Lonnie Golden

1998 “The social economics of work time.” *Review of Social Economy* LVI (4): 411-424.

Figart, Deborah M. and Ellen Mutari

1998 “Degendering work time in comparative perspective: Alternative policy frameworks.” *Review of Social Economy* LVI (4): 460-480.

Figart, Deborah M. and Ellen Mutari

2000 “Work time regimes in Europe: Can flexibility and gender equity coexist?” *Journal of Economic Issues* XXXIV (4): 847-871.

Ford, Peter

1998 “France cuts hours to make jobs.” *The Christian Science Monitor*, February 11.
(retrieved from <http://csmweb2.emcweb.com/durable/1998/02/11/intl/intl.1>.)

Fraser, Nancy

1996 *Justice Interruptus: Critical Reflections on the “Postsocialist” Condition*.
London and New York: Routledge.

Golden, Lonnie

2003 “Comp time bills off target.” Briefing Paper. Washington, DC: Economic Policy Institute.

Hamermesh, Daniel

2000 “12 million salaried workers are missing.” *Industrial and Labor Relations Review* 55: 649-75.

Harrington, Mona

1999 *Care and Equality: Inventing a New Family Politics*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf.

Hartmann, Heidi

2001 “Economic security for women and children: What will it take?” In *TheNext Agenda*, ed. Robert L. Borosage and Roger Hickey. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Hayghe, Howard V.

1997 “Developments in women’s labor force participation.” *Monthly Labor Review* 120 (9) September: 41-46.

Heldrich Center for Workforce Development

1999 “Work trends: America’s attitudes about work, employers and government.” Heldrich Center, Rutgers University.

Hewlett, Sylvia Ann and Cornel West

1998 *The War Against Parents*. New York: Houghton Mifflin.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell

1997 *The Time Bind: When Work Becomes Home and Home Becomes Work*. New York: Metropolitan Books.

Hochschild, Arlie Russell with Anne Machung

1989 *The Second Shift: Working Parents and the Revolution at Home*. New York: Viking.

Hunnicut, Benjamin

1996 *Kellogg’s Six-Hour Day*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press.

International Labour Organization

2002 *Key Indicators of the Labour Market 2001*. Geneva, Switzerland: International Labour Organization.

Jacobs, Jerry and Kathleen Gerson

1998 "Who are the overworked Americans?" *Review of Social Economy* LVI (4): 442-459.

Lafargue, Paul

1907 *The Right to be Lazy, and Other Studies*. Chicago: C.H. Kerr and Company.

LaJeunesse, Robert

1998 "Toward an efficiency week." *Challenge* January-February: 92-109.

Landler, Mark

2004 "Europeans rethink workweek." *The Courier-Journal* July 19: D5.

Negrey, Cynthia

1993 *Gender, Time, and Reduced Work*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.

Negrey, Cynthia

1998 "The political economy of work-time reduction: Labor shortage and employer queues." Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, San Francisco, CA, August.

Negrey, Cynthia

1999 "Life in the balance: Integrating employment and family." In *The Future Well-Being of Women in Kentucky*, ed. Michal Smith-Mello, Michael T. Childress, Jerry Sollinger, and Billie M. Sebastian. Frankfort, KY: Kentucky Long-Term Policy Research Center.

O'Connor, Julia S., Ann Shola Orloff, and Sheila Shaver

1999 *States, Markets, Families*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Rapoport, Rhona, Lotte Bailyn, Joyce K. Fletcher, and Bettye H. Pruitt

2002 *Beyond Work-Family Balance: Advancing Gender Equity and Workplace Performance*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Reskin, Barbara and Irene Padavic

1994 *Women and Men at Work*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press.

Robinson, Joe

2000 "Four weeks vacation for everyone." *Utne Reader* September-October: 49-54.

Robinson, John and Geoffrey Godbey

1997 *Time for Life*. University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press.

Schor, Juliet

1991 *The Overworked American*. New York: Basic Books.

Shelton, Beth Anne

1992 *Women, Men, and Time: Gender Differences in Paid Work, Housework, and Leisure*. New York: Greenwood.

Shelton, Beth Anne and Daphne John

1993 "Ethnicity, race, and difference: A comparison of white, black, and hispanic men's household labor time." In *Men, Work, and Family*, ed. Jane Hood. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sirianni, Carmen

1988 "Self-management of time: A democratic alternative." *Socialist Review* 18 (October-December): 5-56.

Sirianni, Carmen and Cynthia Negrey

2000 "Working time as gendered time." *Feminist Economics* 6 (1): 59-76.

Smith, Ralph E.

1979. *The Subtle Revolution: Women at Work*. Washington, DC: The Urban Institute.

Strope, Leigh

2003 "Flex time often informal." *The Courier-Journal* January 13: F6.

Thompson, Linda and Alexis J. Walker

1991 "Gender in families." In *Contemporary Families: Looking Forward, Looking b
Back*, ed. Alan Booth. Minneapolis: National Council on Family Relations.

Thull, Françoise and Marianne Arens

2000 "The 35-hour workweek in France: How a progressive idea was distorted
beyond recognition." *World Socialist Web Site*, February 18 (retrieved from
http://www.wsws.org/articles/2000/feb2000/fran-f18_prn.shtml)

U.S. Department of Commerce. Bureau of the Census

1997 *Statistical Abstract of the United States*. Washington, DC: Government
Printing Office.

Vinocur, John

1999 "France's shift to a 35-hour workweek: Is it breeding jobs or higher taxes?"
International Herald Tribune, June 1 (retrieved from
<http://www.iht.com/IHT/JV/99/jv060199.html>)

Waldfogel, Jane

1997 "The effects of children on women's wages." *American Sociological Review* 62
(2): 209-217.

Williams, Joan

2000 *Unbending Gender: Why Family and Work Conflict and What To Do About It.*

New York: Oxford University Press.

¹ For a more complete account of U.S. exceptionalism in family policy and publicly subsidized child care, see States, Markets, Families by O'Connor, Orloff, and Shaver (1999).

² Over the years numerous writers have argued for shorter workweeks, most often during times of high unemployment as a strategy to create jobs. Among my favorites is a small book dating from the turn of the twentieth century by Paul Lafargue, entitled *The right to be lazy, and other studies* (Chicago: C.H. Kerr and Company, 1907). Ironically, perhaps, the historical evidence is that work-time reductions have been instituted during times of labor shortage when worker power is maximized. See Gary Cross, "Worktime in International Discontinuity," in *Worktime and industrialization: An international history*, edited by Gary Cross, Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988, 155-181.

³ This is no small matter in the large U.S. metropolitan areas where commuting may add two hours or more to the length of the workday.

⁴ For an account of organizational experiments along this line, see Rapoport et al., 2002.